

**Report on the virtual meeting of 30 March with the Adviser to the Cabinet of
Cabinet of Mrs METSOLA, President of the European Parliament**

Participants in the meeting :

- **For the Cabinet of Mrs. METSOLA:** Ms. Elisabetta MONTANO, in charge of Women's Rights, LGBTIQ+, Anti-racism, Equality and Diversity and Contact Point for Social Policy
- **For FERPA:** Lajos MAYER, President; Agostino SICILIANO, Secretary General; Angeles BRIALES, Deputy Secretary General; Ana MARTINEZ, Hubert SCHWINDT, Luc JANSEN and Tino FUMAGALLI, for the Executive Committee; Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor to FERPA and Jessica MONTIEL, PA to the Secretary General, for the Secretariat, Moderator of the meeting.

Jessica MONTIEL welcomed the participants. After a brief presentation and thanks to Mrs. MONTANO for having welcomed us, the Secretary General of FERPA, Agostino SICILIANO, indicated that FERPA is the voice of millions of retired people in Europe who are waiting for answers from the European Union on the essential problems they are facing. They have summarised them in a Manifesto. This document, unanimously approved by the 24 countries from which FERPA's member organisations come, presents the issues common to all European pensioners. These are fundamental issues for us. The economic crisis of 2008 has had serious repercussions on retired people who have seen their pensions in particular fall, which has made many people poorer. The pandemic highlighted pre-existing problems and also hit older people hard, especially those in residential care. Finally, the war in Ukraine is certainly a tragedy for the Ukrainian people, but it has consequences throughout Europe that affect everyone, especially the most vulnerable population. Today we are here, above all, to listen to you, to see what we can do together and find answers. In our Manifesto we focused on pensions, which are frozen, which means a loss of purchasing power for retired people. We demand that pensions be regularly revalued and that a European minimum pension be introduced that is higher than the poverty line. Retired people must be allowed to improve their living conditions. We also mentioned health. There must be a will to revive the health systems to ensure better care for citizens, especially the elderly.

FERRPA also demands the right to housing. Most retired people are "owners" but their housing is in deplorable conditions, renovation work is not done. There is no housing policy for the elderly, so that they can live in adequate housing. Finally, the other problem is that of fuel poverty and this problem predates the war. For example, the cost of heating. In our Manifesto, we mentioned the European Social Rights Framework, because it contains many answers to our problems. But they are not implemented. We want an action plan for the implementation of these rights, both at European and national level. We need more solidarity in Europe. It is fundamental that we can work together. We are here representing the Leading Group of our organisation and we come from Hungary, Italy, Spain, Belgium, France. We are asking for answers to the work done for people who are currently marginalised, not to say ignored.

Mrs MONTANO intervened in turn to confirm that Mrs METSOLA, President of the European Parliament, pays great attention to vulnerable populations. She listens to people and takes action. She will try to organise a meeting with the President herself, as she is very motivated. The answers that will be given will be within the framework of the working

methods of the Parliament. As for the questions raised, several committees of the Parliament are dealing with them, as for the work on the minimum wage: there are many difficulties on the side of the Member States. But the President is very sensitive to the situation of the elderly, especially at the moment with the war in Ukraine. She ensures that there are places for them and that they can meet their needs (languages, housing, care, etc.) in the host countries and that they are protected there, just like women and children. As far as she is concerned, she will pass on all our requests to the President and with her, she will identify the specific files on which she can help us. In the area of employment, she is looking at the possibilities for the elderly and disabled. In order to study the demands of citizens for COVID, in a month's time, a special committee of the Parliament will be set up, an "Adhoc" committee on COVID. This has created many difficulties for specific categories. FERPA can play a role in this Commission. As soon as it is set up and has a Secretariat, a meeting will be organised where we will be able to present our demands, so that this Commission can have a complete framework. Ms. MONTANO undertook to follow up on today's meeting, as it was important to be able to organise a meeting with the "Adhoc Commission" in order to know the effects of COVID on the populations that FERPA deals with. As far as minimum pensions are concerned, this is the competence of the Member States, but she will indicate to us the possibilities of interventions that could help us, especially as the Parliament is already dealing with the legislation for the next elections.

Jessica Montiel then gave the floor to the members of the Steering Committee.

The various speakers first thanked Ms MONTANO for her words. Luc Jansen, from the FGTB, who was the first speaker, then wished to share the Belgian experience. If, indeed, as far as minimum pensions are concerned, the competence to set them up belongs to the Member States, the European Union can indicate and take a direction. In Belgium, there is a Consultative Council of the Elderly, of which he is a member, to involve the elderly in decisions that concern them. Hubert SCHWIND, from UCR-CGT, said that COVID was an important issue, but other rights of the elderly, such as the right to a pension or the right to housing and to healthy housing, should not be forgotten. President Lajos MAYER said that the Secretary General had summarised the Manifesto well and that he fully supported it. Concerning the European minimum pension, it had already been supported, in particular by one of the Vice-Presidents of the Parliament, Mrs Klára DOBREV, and she had taken the first steps to introduce it into the agenda of parliamentary debates. She is very much in favour of the pensioners' allowance. And it is this support that we need in the further work of the European Parliament. Henri LOURDELLE, Special Advisor of FERPA, went back to what Mrs. MONTANO had said, indicating that the minimum pension was as difficult to introduce as the debate on the European minimum wage.

He noted that this issue is now on the European agenda. Why can't the same be done for the minimum pension? Given the link between wages and pensions, the logical first step is to introduce a minimum wage and then a minimum pension. But there is also the issue of long-term care, which is particularly expensive and which affects the elderly in particular, although not exclusively. Finally, the COVID episode highlighted the need for a genuine European health policy that could anticipate such pandemics and, by drawing lessons from what had just happened, know how to deal with them.

Ms MONTANO replied by stressing that it was difficult to say anything at European Parliament level, because pensions were, as she had said, a national competence. Moreover, agreeing on the definition of a minimum is complex. Already establishing a minimum throughout Europe is a long story, but what reference (poverty line or other...) is another. Of course, there are other issues, such as housing, but she spoke about the most immediate thing to support FERPA. The reflection on COVID is the most immediate thing to implement. Indeed, we can't do everything right away. There is also the immigration issue with the war in Ukraine, for example, and the defence of the rights of elderly migrants. She fully agreed to support the action of FERRPA and the Vice-President of the European Parliament in favour of the minimum pension. However, it should be remembered that if the Union had moved on the minimum wage, it was because Germany, which had long been opposed to it, had moved on its side. Perhaps there is indeed an opportunity? As far as health is concerned, it is certainly the most difficult subject to tackle, because the Member States are each very attached to their national systems. However, the President was very willing to listen and to take initiatives.

The Secretary General also intervened. The economic consequences of the pandemic lead to address these issues and the possibilities from different angles. FERPA is composed of 44 organisations and is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation. Each one will fight at its own level but also at the level of the European Institutions. We need to be present and FERPA will be present at the Commission on COVID and he thanked Mrs MONTANO for inviting us. We need to establish a new relationship with the European Parliament and its President, underlining in passing that she is the third woman President of the European Parliament, after the two French women, Madame Simone Veil, who was the first President of the European Parliament elected by universal suffrage, and Madame Nicole FONTAINE.

He pointed out that there is a 30% gap between men's and women's pensions, which does not allow women to have sufficient resources. The introduction of a minimum wage at European level will have repercussions on the minimum pension. He noted that we have talked about common values (democracy, dignity, justice, equality, solidarity...), we must see what we can do and find the means to implement them. We want decent wages and pensions and minimum pensions, but not just minimums. We need more than a political declaration: we need to act quickly. Our Manifesto has been sent to every MEP at national level.

Jessica Montiel concluded by indicating that FERPA remains at the disposal of Mrs. MONTANO and she thanked her warmly for having received our organisation, waiting for a next meeting.

Ms. MONTANO concluded the meeting by underlining that Ms. METSOLA is a lawyer specialised in Human Rights and that she was a member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. She reminded the meeting that she was at our disposal and that she would arrange a meeting with the Adhoc Commission on COVID, once its activities had been defined, and that she hoped to be able to hold a next face-to-face meeting. She would contact Jessica Montiel to organise this meeting.

Henri