

Minutes of the 9th FERPA Congress ÖGB Vienna 4-6/4/2023

The 9th FERPA Congress opened with the welcome address by **Werner Thum**, from ÖGB, former President of FERPA. He then invited Congress to vote in favour of the outgoing President of FERPA, Lajos Mayer, to chair the work. The **President Lajos Mayer** then called the General Secretary of FERPA, Agostino Siciliano, to the podium, as well as the members of the Steering Committee and the Secretariat to form the officers of the meeting. The delegates and guests then listened to the European Anthem on video and watched another video presenting FERPA and the logo of the Congress.

President Lajos Mayer gave a few words of welcome to the delegates and guests and invited **Mr Omar Al-Rawi**, member of Vienna City Council, to take the floor.

Then the **ETUC General Secretary, Esther Lynch** addressed the Congress by video.

The floor was then given to **Mr Wolfgang Katzian**, member of the ETUC Steering Committee and President of ÖGB. A video from ÖGB was then shown.

President Mayer called on the Congress to elect the Procedure Committee composed of Jasna Petrovic, SUH (Croatia), Dario Mordasani, UNIA (Switzerland), Monika Kemperle, ÖGB (Austria) and Roberto Treu, SPI-CGIL (Italy). All the members were elected.

He then moved on to the election of the Electoral Committee composed of Benoit Prince, UCR-CFDT (France), Michèle Dehaen, ABVV/FGTB (Belgium), Milos Grabundizja, Nezavisnost (Serbia) and Isabel Lemos, Interreformados CGTP-IN (Portugal). All the members were also elected.

President Lajos Mayer then invited the Congress to decide whether it would like the election of the General Secretary to be carried out by a show of hands (card) or by secret ballot. There was a clear majority for a vote by show of hands (card). The election of the General Secretary will therefore be by show of hands (card), on 6 April at 10.45 a.m., as provided for in the agenda of the Congress.

He then gave the floor to **General Secretary Agostino Siciliano** to present his **Activity Report¹**

The **General Secretary** began his contribution by mentioning the four difficult years that we have gone through with the pandemic, which has caused more than six million deaths worldwide, a quarter of them in Europe alone, particularly among the elderly.

The General Secretary then recalled everything FERPA had done during this 4-year period. First of all, the condemnation, with ETUC and the EPSU, sent to the European Institutions, of what was happening in healthcare facilities for elderly people. Then, its campaign for vaccination against COVID. The condemnation of Russia in its attack against Ukraine and the full support and solidarity expressed with the Ukrainian people, as well as in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iran, where basic human and civil rights are denied to people and their dignity is violated and their lives even called into question, as is the case for women in Iran. The General Secretary recalled that the environment in which FERPA has acted in recent years has been very difficult, but it has continued to demand the protection and rights of all elderly people

¹ The full text of the General Secretary's contribution is attached.

in Europe, without ceasing to reaffirm that, far from being a cost, elderly and retired people are a source of wealth for society, particularly with regard to the fundamental services that they offer to the community, the vital, often economic assistance that they provide within their families and society, by volunteering in communities and care institutions. In recent years, FERPA has worked hard to make the European Institutions aware of its demands regarding the protection of the people it represents (the postcards sent to candidates in the European elections in 2019, the unanimously-adopted Manifesto sent and/or handed in person to EU politicians, etc.). With regard to pension systems, FERPA rejects the neoliberal approach according to which pension expenditure should only be considered from an economic viability perspective. FERPA rejects the idea that to ensure the viability of pension systems, it is sufficient to reduce them and increase the retirement age, as has happened in Italy and as is the case in France. In this regard, FERPA expresses its full solidarity with French colleagues who are contesting this decision. Instead, FERPA is calling for a complete revaluation of pensions based on inflation in each European country and the establishment of a minimum pension above the poverty line in the respective countries. For FERPA, these are fundamental demands to combat the continuous increase in poverty among the elderly. In order to achieve its objectives, FERPA needs its demands to also be supported by ETUC. ETUC took note of the Manifesto and the ETUC General Secretariat shared it with all the members of the ETUC Executive Committee. Even though we have managed to have our demands included in addition to the six points in the current European action promoted by ETUC on the cost-of-living crisis, this is not enough, because too often the ETUC proposals do not sufficiently consider the specificity of the elderly population. We must therefore successfully ensure that there is greater agreement in all of ETUC on our demands. To achieve this, we need the commitment and cooperation of everyone, of all FERPA organisations. The General Secretary reminded the members that they need to involve their Confederations more in our proposals and in the content of the Manifesto, in order to get their support within ETUC. There is a need to promote closer cooperation between FERPA affiliates and ETUC affiliates, he insisted. We have already discussed this with the ETUC General Secretary, Esther Lynch. And we have agreed on an upcoming meeting that will focus specifically on these issues. Regarding the next ETUC Congress, to be held in Berlin in May, the General Secretary acknowledged that we noted unfortunately again that there would not be enough of us to approve the amendment concerning FERPA's voting rights, because, he added, after checking with them, even the Confederations that have their own representatives in FERPA would continue to oppose it. Therefore, together with ETUC General Secretary Esther Lynch, it was decided to find another solution: not to resubmit the amendment, to avoid another defeat and explicit discrimination against FERPA, but to work together to find a political solution. Esther has personally committed to creating an Ad Hoc Constitutional Committee after the Congress to prepare proposals for constitutional amendments for the 2025 Mid-Term Conference and to include the question on FERPA's voting rights in the Executive Committee (including a study) in order to find a positive response to our request which will be presented at the next ETUC Mid-Term Conference. He then stressed that it was important for FERPA to increase the number of alliances within ETUC, in particular with the Youth Committee, with which it was necessary to update the Memorandum of Understanding that currently exists and also with the ETUC Women's Committee. He also mentioned the need to seek new memberships among ETUC organisations and not to forget those with which FERPA no longer has close relations. He added that particular attention should also be paid to our Turkish colleagues given what they are experiencing in their country as a pensioners'

organisation and, in general, the situation of trade union organisations in that country. He mentioned the need also to make its voice heard more strongly, in particular on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October and recalled the important issues in which FERPA has been involved in recent years, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe or the Green Paper on demographic changes in an ageing society or the participation of FERPA, for the past year and a half, in the NGO Liaison Group within the European Economic and Social Committee. He also stressed the important role that the FERPA website can play and took the opportunity to thank UILP for its financial and professional contribution to the creation and updating of the website. In this regard, he pointed out that the updating of the site depends not only on those who add the news, but also on those who provide it. And providing information is not only the responsibility of the FERPA Secretariat, but above all the responsibility of each and every one of us. He therefore renewed his invitation to all FERPA organisations to send news and documentation on their activities. Next, referring to the preparation for this Congress, he thanked his colleagues on the Steering Committee for preparing the draft Congress Resolution, the Constitution Amendment Committee and its Chairman, and all the members of the outgoing Executive for their vital contribution. This preparation was made more difficult by the fact that FERPA, like ETUC, has left its former headquarters and is housed in temporary premises, leading to organisational inconveniences, including for scheduling the next meetings of the Steering Committee and Executive Committee, because suitable premises have not yet been found in which to hold the meetings. Finally, he quickly mentioned the inglorious “Qatargate” story. To conclude, he recalled that this month FERPA celebrated the 30th anniversary of its Constituent Congress held in Madrid on 29 and 30 April 1993. With its 41 member organisations (representing 24 EU and third countries), FERPA is the main organisation representing the elderly in Europe and can count on the many years of trade union experience of its members. We should therefore be proud of our Federation, he added, and the long road that has brought us to this Congress. Finally, the General Secretary thanked the Secretariat, President Lajos, the Deputy General Secretary and the Chairwoman of the Women’s Committee for their availability and the quality of the work carried out. Not forgetting the interpreters, whose professionalism enabled us to communicate with each other, he also thanked ETUC colleagues, Evgenia and Julienne, who were always available and ready to collaborate, who enabled us to hold all our meetings, even by video link. Finally, he had a special word of thanks for Werner Thum, for the years and the passion he has devoted to FERPA, as well as all of ÖGB for their great hospitality and assistance, which were crucial to organise this Congress in the best manner possible.

The President, Lajos Mayer, then opened the floor for discussions.

While a few organisations indicated, first of all, that they would have liked to have received the General Secretary’s Activity Report before the Congress in order to be able to discuss it collectively, all the organisations believed that the Report presented by the General Secretary indicated that FERPA is active and expressed their agreement on the fact that FERPA had changed its position to try to find a solution on voting rights. Several people stressed that decisions had to be taken together and it was therefore important for FERPA to move forward in a united manner. There was a need to make demands at European level based on consensus and men and women needed to work together to be able to build together. A request was made for greater visibility for FERPA and for more effort to be made to enhance our

representativeness. Indeed, several organisations focused on the situation of retired people throughout Europe where their rights are being undermined, as illustrated by the trade union demonstrations in France organised in a unified manner against the pension reform presented by their President. Similarly, the place and role of older people in society is being called into question everywhere. There has been mention of defending “European values”, but certain organisations wondered which ones are being referred to? Those of Ms Von Der Leyen or ours? The Europe we want is a more united and constructive Europe. Health issues were also raised, with it being pointed out that these issues are particularly relevant to retired persons. It is difficult to obtain treatment and the pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses of healthcare systems, even though in a small number of countries they still seem to be resisting and pointed out that care must be taken with regard to the balance between the generations. However, the contributions concerned two main topics. First of all, that of the Manifesto, asking that it be evolutive and in relation to which it was highlighted that it was the result of joint collective work. However, it was noted that it is not always very well-known. We must mobilise at European level and remain consistent, i.e. not change our demands, even if it was noted that the issue of immigration is now a serious issue, just like that of war, and it is hoped that FERPA can also make itself heard in these areas. The other subject widely covered concerned both the poverty of elderly people in connection with the need to obtain a minimum pension that is well above the poverty threshold that does not allow people to live in dignity. A campaign must be actively carried out by FERPA on the theme of a minimum pension – perhaps unthinkable today, as was the case 5 years ago with the introduction of a European minimum wage – in connection with the ETUC campaign on the minimum wage. Everyone must be guaranteed a dignified retirement, but the solutions proposed by governments within Europe run counter to this objective and do not correspond to the content of the provisions of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Poverty and loss of purchasing power are not inevitabilities. A lot of wealth is held by a very small number of people and corporate profits, even if not quantified, are acknowledged. Several people insisted that tangible action is needed. Our solidarity must be in line with the facts and go beyond Resolutions and good intentions.

In his **response**, the **General Secretary** first noted that there have been many interesting proposals on the minimum pension that the next Executive will have to consider. How, asked the General Secretary, can positive progress be made? FERPA has had positive meetings with the European institutions but it also needs the support of ETUC to carry out actions and obtain concrete responses. We need to take another step towards ETUC. For example, in the Berlin Manifesto, for the next ETUC Congress, there was no mention of pensions at all. At the last ETUC Executive Committee meeting, we managed to get a single mention included. It is important to discuss with Esther so that greater consideration is given to retired persons by the organisation. There is agreement between us to say that a minimum pension goes hand in hand with a minimum wage: we must therefore apply pressure in each of our countries. But it is also an economic problem and we need ETUC. We will have to take action after Berlin to find solutions. Both the Resolution and the Manifesto are our guidelines for the coming years, but we must also work at national level. The General Secretary ended his contribution by proposing a vote to Congress on a motion in support of the French trade unions, in their unified struggle in their country to oppose the reform of their pension system.

President Lajos Mayer then submitted the Activity Report presented by the **General Secretary of FERPA, Agostino Siciliano**, to a **vote**. The Report was adopted **unanimously**.

The following organisations took part in the discussion: FUPS-CSdL, UCR-CFDT, UCR-FO, USO, CSC/ACV, ÖGB, FGTB/ABVV, UNIA, UCR-CGT, SPI-CGIL, FNV, UNSA, DIK EMEKLI-SEN, OGB-L, FNP-CISL, Interreformados CGTP-IN, UCR-CFTC, UIL-P

The **President** then gave the floor to **Mireille Paume, Chairwoman of the Women’s Committee**².

Mireille began her speech by mentioning the global health crisis and the war in Ukraine which have marked this 4-year period and which changed the way in which the Women’s Committee worked. She pointed out that FERPA had played an important role in re-establishing the links needed to hold meetings and thus having the opportunity to have Women’s Committees, in particular by getting to grips with new tools such as Visio. During this period, she indicated that it was possible to warn about violence against women. She also emphasised that during armed conflicts or wars, women especially are victims of violence and particularly sexual violence. She added that women are increasingly affected by poverty with lower pensions than men. A letter sent to the President of the European Commission was co-signed after being warned that the Commission was considering freezing the EU directive on wage transparency and the entire gender equality strategy. FERPA was also visible during International Women’s Day on 8 March. Trade unionism must be the way to highlight and achieve women’s demands and we must work with associations and other forces, she added, never forgetting that a Women’s Committee within a trade union, including FERPA, is not about pitting women against men but working together. The Chairwoman concluded her speech by quoting Ambroise Croizat, the founder of Social Security in France: “We will transform retirement. It will no longer be seen as the period before death but rather a new stage of life.”

President Lajos Mayer then opened the floor for **discussions**.

Several contributions highlighted violence against women and their lower pensions. Several emphasised that the FERPA Women’s Committee is essential, but that it must work with the ETUC Committee and make itself heard. Resources must be allocated to the Women’s Committee so that it can fulfil its missions. Women’s rights cannot wait, he added. There is a lack of respect for the social function of maternity. The concept of a patriarchal society must also be challenged. An appeal was also made to think about nurses who, due to a lack of healthcare services, are required to sort patients. It was also noted, in conclusion, that equality between men and women is the foundation of democracy.

The **President** submitted the report presented by **Mireille Paume, Chairwoman of the Women’s Committee**, to a vote, which was **adopted by 64 votes in favour and 4 abstentions**

The following organisations took part in the discussion: UNIA, CC. OO, UCR-FO, CGIL, Interreformados CGTP-IN, FNP-CISL, UIL-P

The floor was then given to **Danilo Toccane, Chairman of the FERPA Financial Committee**³.

Danilo Toccane began by recalling that this Congress marked the end not only of his term of office as Chairman, but also of the Financial Committee, which will not be renewed, since

² The full text of the contribution from the Chairwoman of the Women’s Committee is attached

³ The full text of the speech by the Chairman of the Financial Committee is attached.

FERPA now has a Treasurer. He confirmed that the operations and work of the Committee had been fruitful and carried out in full collaboration with FERPA, which had always provided valuable assistance, which he thanked. He also thanked his own organisation, the SPI-CGIL, which allowed him to perform his role as well as the other members of the Committee for their trust. The Committee's verification and audit work, he recalled, took place during a very complicated phase due to the negative effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, limiting meetings and contacts between members. But IT made it possible to overcome these difficulties. The Committee verified and gave a positive opinion on the 2019 - 2020 - 2021 budgets, and invited the FERPA Executive Committee to do the same and these budgets were adopted. The entries were correct and clear and were filed with the ETUC Finance Department. They were accompanied by the minutes with a favourable opinion from the external auditors who work on the accounts of ETUC but also those of FERPA. The next people in charge will be tasked with reviewing the accounts for 2022 that have not yet been completed. The Chairman was pleased to announce that on the date of this Congress all income from contributions to FERPA had been regularised.

He concluded with two proposals. Firstly, to adjust the contributions to be paid to FERPA by the member federations, also taking into account the increase in mobility costs and expenditure in general. And also, to take action to increase the number of trade union federations and volunteers that are members of FERPA in order to make it more representative and stronger in the interest of millions of European seniors and pensioners. The Financial Report presented by its Chairman, Danilo Toccane, did not give rise to any discussion and was **adopted by 65 votes in favour and 6 abstentions.**

President Lajos Mayer then handed the floor to **Dick De Graaf, Chairman of the Constitution Working Group.**⁴

Dick, using a PowerPoint, first presented the establishment and composition of the Working Group on the Constitution and the Internal Regulations as well as the timetable for the working meetings that were held. He then presented the amendments proposed by the FERPA organisations and the reasons that led the Working Group to adopt or reject them.

A general discussion took place first. All the organisations welcomed the important work carried out by the Chairman and the members of the Working Group and some pointed out that even though all their proposals for amendments have not been adopted (such as the idea for a quorum in the Congress or the question of the criteria for the €300 solidarity payment for certain organisations, etc.), those of the Working Group marked an important step forward. A comment on **gender** was also made in **paragraph IV, 1** of the Constitution where it was necessary in the French language **to add the feminine form “Présidente” next to President** [in English “President” is gender neutral]. There were several exchanges on the preamble which specifies that to be part of FERPA, it is necessary to be a “trade union” organisation, with some contributors indicating that in their country, organisations for retired people are attached to trade unions belonging to large Confederations, but that they are not organised into “trade unions” but “associations”. It was therefore proposed to widen the preamble by supplementing the term “trade unions” with that of “associations”, in order to be able to open up to organisations other than trade unions that represent retired persons.

In **his response, Dick**, after thanking the organisations that had expressed their support for the work carried out, specified, among other things, that in the Constitution of ETUC and other

⁴ The Group Chairman's PPT presentation on the Constitution is attached

international trade union organisations, there is no question of a “quorum”. He also recalled that FERPA is part of the ETUC structure and that it is important that the member organisations have a link with the ETUC members. He added that in Art. I.2 Membership it has already indicated that membership can be requested by “organisations” associated with ETUC member organisations”, which already solves this problem. A show of hands was organised on this proposal to replace in the preamble, or even in the entire text, the word “union” with “associations”. It was rejected by the majority of organisations who wanted to maintain the “trade union” character of FERPA membership.

The Congress then had to vote on each of the 15 proposals for amendments to the Constitution, all of which were unanimously adopted, with the exception of Proposal 9, which specified that there could be no rotation of members of the Steering Committee between organisations between two ordinary Congresses, and which admittedly received a majority of the votes, but with two abstentions. All the new Constitution was then **unanimously adopted**.

Dick thanked the members of the Congress and stated that the amendments to the Internal Regulations, as provided for in the Constitution, would subsequently be discussed and adopted by the Executive Committee

The following organisations took part in the discussion: PASYDY, CFDT, SPI, ÖGB, FGTV/ABVV, FNPR

President Lajos Mayer, then gave the floor to the **General Secretary, Agostino Siciliano** to introduce the discussion on the **Resolution**⁵ received in advance by the Delegates.

In his brief speech, he presented the Resolution and detailed the various points of FERPA’s commitments for the next 4 years. He stressed the importance of having real political determination and investing in social issues.

The **President** then opened the floor for **discussions**.

Many, firstly, felt that it was a good Resolution. However, some contributions were of the view that given the explosion in the price of services in some countries, certain expressions in the Resolution are weak. Furthermore, others would like FERPA to insist more strongly that retired persons are an important component of society, including, but not exclusively, through volunteering. Others also called for an increase in the number of people for care at home. Others pointed out that you can be poor even if you work. The functioning of the energy market therefore needs to be reviewed. Regarding the minimum pension, several contributors indicated that it would be necessary to work to define the amount necessary to live without having to have recourse to one’s family, otherwise what budget should be available to live with dignity. A proposal was therefore made for a working group to take charge of this issue and be able to set the minimum pension amount. Others denounced the timidity of the European Union on taxation and combating tax havens. It was also proposed that as long as there are differences in wages, the number of years of pensionable service that women are required to have in order to receive their pension should be reduced. Finally, FERPA was asked to do its utmost to end the war.

In his **response**, the **General Secretary** stressed that the Resolution should be seen as an ongoing work. A strong concise political message needs to be sent. If we want to change things, he added, we need to work together and he was happy to see that we agreed on the main

⁵ The text of the Resolution, as adopted, is attached

principles. All the points that were highlighted in the discussions are contained in the Resolution, so there was nothing to change.

The **President** then proceeded to a **vote** on the Resolution, which was **adopted** unanimously.

The following organisations participated in the discussion: SUS, FGTB/ABVV, CC. OO, USO, CSC/ACV

The **President** then proceeded to a **vote** to elect the **General Secretary** taken by a show of hands (card). However, beforehand, the representative of the FNV asked for the floor to specify that his organisation would not take part in the vote, because the procedure adopted by Congress for this election was in violation of the Constitution.

The **General Secretary, Agostino Siciliano** was **elected** by a **very large majority, minus 4 abstentions and one refusal to vote.**

Before the conclusion of the Congress, the representative of UCR-FO intervened to reiterate the proposal for Congress to **vote on a motion of support** for the French trade unions in their fight against the reform of their pension system, which the President of the French Republic is forcing through, a proposal made by the representative of the CSC/ACV. The French representative pointed out that it was the 12th day of demonstrations organised in France. He proposed that FERPA adopt the ETUC motion to support the French trade unions. This proposal was **adopted unanimously.**

The **General Secretary, Agostino Siciliano**, thanked the Congress for its renewed trust in him. He acknowledged that not all the initiatives taken by FERPA had always been successful, but this was part of life. However, it was necessary to keep fighting. Our goal is for all generations to enjoy a good life.

In turn, the **President, Lajos Mayer, took the floor** to say that when he reflects on the journey travelled together over the past 4 years, FERPA can be proud of its achievements. He congratulated all those responsible and also welcomed our ability to overcome the difficulties, without underestimating them, and the influence that FERPA has acquired.

After thanking everyone for their participation, as well as the interpreters, he **adjourned the 9th FERPA Congress** and, at the end of the Congress, invited the new members of the Executive Committee to meet to carry out the required elections, as provided for in the Constitution.