

HL 22/11/2023

Minutes of the FERPA Executive Committee meeting 25 and 26 October 2023
(Thon Hotel, Brussels)

Participants: ÖGB (Austria); CSC/ACV and FGVB/ABVV (Belgium); PA.SY.DY (Cyprus); SUH (Croatia); UGT-E, FPJ-CC. OO and USO (Spain); UCR-CFDT, UNAR-CFTC, UCR-CGT, UCR-FO, UNSA-Retraités and UNIR-CFECGC (France); MASZSZ and SZEF (Hungary); FNP-CISL, SPI-CGIL and UIP-UIL (Italy); OGB-L (Luxembourg); FNV (Netherlands); FNPS CDLS (San Marino); GWU (Malta); APTUS (Serbia); SUS (Slovenia); UNIA (Switzerland).

Organisations absent with apologies: ELA (Spain); POPS, OSTOE (Greece); ICTU (Ireland); Interreformados CGTP-IN (Portugal); LCGB (Luxembourg); KSS (Macedonia); FNSPR (Romania); FUPS-CSdL and FNP-CDLS (San Marino); NEZAVISNOT, CATUS (Serbia); Emekli-SEN (Turkey) TUC (United Kingdom)

Also attending the meeting: FERPA Political Secretariat: Henri LOURDELLE, FERPA Special Advisor and Jessica MONTIEL RAMIREZ, ETUC Policy Advisor for FERPA

The President of FERPA, Hubert SCHWIND, opened the Executive Committee meeting by first welcoming the members attending. The agenda was approved unanimously, as were the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings of 15 and 16 February 2023 and 6 April 2023, which were also approved unanimously, with one abstention from UGT-E, which was not present.

The President then gave the floor to FERPA General Secretary Agostino SICILIANO for his remarks.

The General Secretary began by offering his condolences to Jessica on the death of her uncle. He then pointed out that this Executive Committee would have to take important decisions following the mandate received from Congress, but also in the context of preparing for the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament. He then spoke of the dramatic situation in Europe, the war in Ukraine, of course, but also more recently the conflict between Israel and Hamas. The solution can only come from the will to build peace. Indeed, we need to reflect on the dramatic acts that are affecting Europe, but also the world. Pressure must be brought to bear with the ETUC, and what is happening in Israel must not be allowed to make us forget Ukraine. FERPA took part in the ETUC Congress in Berlin last May, and the General Secretary thanked the members of the Executive Committee for their participation. While over one hundred million older people will be voting in June to elect members of the European Parliament, older people and pensioners have not been mentioned. At the ETUC Executive Committee meeting in Madrid last September, the ETUC expressed its concerns about what might happen after the elections. In this context, the ETUC Manifesto stresses the need to strengthen social Europe. FERPA has succeeded in introducing the right to a dignified retirement. FERPA is also mentioned in the ETUC Action Plan. The General Secretary also stressed the importance of FERPA members taking part in the European Demonstration in Brussels on 13 December. We have conquered a small space, but we need to fill it.

The debate on the minimum pension is a political debate. We do not want new studies, FERPA is not a project group. Political tension needs to be generated if the minimum pension is to succeed. It has to be achieved. We need visible action within the European Parliament. We need to publicise our Manifesto and decide to send it to the candidates in the elections. He also indicated that on 15 November, the ETUC would present its Manifesto to the European Parliament, and General Secretary Esther Lynch had asked the General Secretary of FERPA to illustrate it with the situation of elderly and retired people. The European Economic and Social Committee is organising an event in Madrid on 29 November on the "Present and future of European policies for the elderly", and FERPA has been invited. Ana, Deputy Secretary General, will be speaking on behalf of FERPA. He also mentioned FERPA's notable presence at the demonstration in Paris on 13 October and again called for mobilisation on 13 December in Brussels. The General Secretary then turned to organisational matters. Regarding FERPA's new office, he explained that we now had an office big enough for three people, which made it easier for us to work as a team and to talk to each other, and that we had gained in visibility because FERPA's office was close to Esther's office. As far as the next Executive Committee meetings are concerned, if they were to be held at the Thon Hotel, it would mean that we would have fewer working languages. The European Commission is imposing further budget restrictions in 2024. There is also the possibility of meeting on the 6th floor of the ITUH, but again with a limited number of languages. We need to think about what we are going to do in 2024: either we maintain our face-to-face meetings with only 4 working languages, or we hold them online, with 8 languages. We also need to update our website: everyone must indicate in writing whether or not they give permission for their e-mail address to appear on the site. We urgently need to do this so that we can update the site. We will also be taking a photo of the entire Executive Committee at lunchtime. As far as the organisation of FERPA is concerned, we have a political secretariat. He congratulated Jessica, who since last July had been recognised by the ETUC as "ETUC Political Adviser for FERPA". He then gave her the floor for the dates of the next meetings:

- 17 January 2024, Online Steering Committee, 9.30am-1pm
- 27 February 2024 afternoon, face-to-face Executive Committee meeting, ITUH room, in the usual languages
- 28-29 February 2024 ITUH room, 50 seats, 3 interpreting booths, which means it will be possible to work in only 4 languages
- 18 April 2024, face-to-face Executive Committee meeting, 9.30 a.m. - 1 p.m., ITUH room, in the usual languages
- May 2024, extraordinary online Executive Committee meeting to discuss the FERPA budget and possibly the European elections
- October 2024, Management Committee and 2 days of Executive Committee either in person at ITUH with only 4 days, or online with 8 languages

With this information, the Chairman opened the debate, indicating beforehand that he would like us to examine the possibility of holding hybrid meetings.

Several organisations returned to the international context mentioned by the Secretary General in his communications and agreed with what he had said.

As far as the Israeli-Palestinian situation is concerned, this is a very complex issue, which, he insisted, can only be resolved through a political settlement. There is also the Ukrainian conflict, which is about to enter the winter period. Peace must be emphasised, it was also said, and it was recalled that after the Second World War, the trade union organisations were behind the Peace Day, which was then set for 1 September. Next, the organisations stressed the need to put the Manifesto forward and, for the vast majority of them, to stop studying and replace it with concrete things, demands: what are we asking for? what do we want? As far as the distribution of responsibilities is concerned, we need to keep pensions in our sights and focus on the minimum pension linked to the minimum wage. We need pragmatic trade union realism. On the other hand, when we talk about fair pensions, we should not only talk about it during election periods (elections to the European Parliament, for example), but also have a multi-annual plan (who does what? at national and European level?), with concrete objectives that all the organisations can identify with, which should be presented to the next Executive Committee. In this case, it should be possible to receive the documents sufficiently in advance of the meeting. However, one organisation wondered how the Management Committee and then the Executive Committee would work, in other words, how they would work collectively. With regard to the introduction of a minimum pension at European level, it would be good to see how the Directive on the European minimum wage was arrived at. We could draw inspiration from the approach taken by the ETUC. Still on the subject of the minimum pension, it was suggested that work should be undertaken on the poverty threshold, in other words to establish the amount needed for a retired person to live in dignity, without needing outside help. In the same vein, some people went on to ask what was meant by an "adequate" minimum income. Shouldn't we be looking for another term? Others feel that we should not be talking about minimum pensions, or referring to the poverty line, but should be demanding decent pensions that allow people to live with dignity. And where should the "thresholds" be set? When are we poor? Shouldn't we set a standard among ourselves for talking about the same thing? When we talk about poverty, it's not just a question of resources, it's more global. When it comes to pensions, what we are asking for is not just an increase but an adjustment to the cost of living, in other words automatic indexation. It was also pointed out that we often misjudge the lengthening of life, which is considered as a cost and not as the result of welfare in Europe. Governments need to be convinced and retired people need to be made to feel less guilty. A number of people also emphasised that health and healthcare are priority issues. In some countries, the health system is on the verge of collapse. In this context, the work of the European Health Network was mentioned. For the European elections, it would be good to have a standard letter that each organisation could adapt. One organisation would like to have a day of action at European level. There was also agreement to fight against the Extreme Right. One organisation also spoke about the ETUC Congress in Berlin, starting by thanking the Secretariat for the very detailed report that had been given, but deploring the fact that there had been motions of support for Cuba, Iran, Turkey, Ukraine, etc., but nothing on Palestinian workers. Finally, the Belgian organisations are calling for mobilisation for the European demonstration on 13 December 2023 in Brussels.

In his reply, the General Secretary began by thanking the members for their contributions, because with them we can build a roadmap. FERPA is a trade union that the ETUC must recognise as useful. In terms of retirement, the existing pay-as-you-go system establishes a link between salary and pension.

He agreed that "public health services are being thrown into the sea". As far as the Manifesto is concerned, everything applies. If one member has been given responsibility for a theme, everyone should feel concerned. As far as the minimum pension is concerned, we need to draw up a 4-year programme. You don't always have to go back to the ETUC, the right to vote is not a central point. You have to turn to your confederations, which continue to oppose it. Why does the ETUC believe that the elections next June are crucial, because what is at stake is the undermining of rights that have been acquired over the last 50 years. We have to be the protagonists of our own destiny. We need to remain balanced and cautious about what is happening. The union is reformist by nature, which means that it confronts problems in order to find solutions. Finally, he thanked the organisations in advance for their mobilisation on 13 December, which would enable FERPA to be present.

The following organisations took part in the debate: UCR-FO; SUH; USO; UNIA; FGTB/ABVV; UNSA-Retraités; FNP-CISL; UILP-UILUCR-CFDT; ÖGB; SZEF; SUS; GWU; CSC/ACV; OGB L; UNIR-CFECGC; UCR-CGT.

The Executive Committee meeting continued with a meeting of the FERPA Women's Committee. At the end of the meeting, the Chair of the FERPA Women's Committee presented the conclusions, which would be sent to all the organisations.

The Chairman then gave the floor to Dick DE GRAAF, Treasurer of FERPA, for the financial part.

Dick presented the documents he had sent and made a few comments. Firstly, there were two decisions to be taken:

- Adoption of the 2022 balance sheet and 2022 income statement
- The holding of an Extraordinary Executive Committee, not provided for in the budget, for the European elections.

Without going into detail on all the items, the Treasurer pointed out that, in the budget, the largest share of expenditure was accounted for by staff costs. Meeting costs were relatively stable. With regard to the resources generated by subscriptions from affiliated organisations, it was pointed out that these have not been indexed since 2011, unlike the ETUC, and that the ETUC's contribution does not change; it is a fixed amount. The existing reserves are sufficient to deal with crises. 50% of FERPA's resources came from Italian organisations. The Treasurer asked the Committee about the ETUC's practice with regard to subscriptions, which had introduced three classes depending on the resources of the organisations: should FERPA do the same? He then made a number of observations:

- There is always a way of cutting costs by holding online meetings. This is not the best way of exchanging ideas, but it can work, as we saw during the COVID period.
- You can either increase membership fees or increase the number of members. As far as the increase in membership fees is concerned, he has not put forward any proposal for 2024, and we will discuss this again in February 2024.
- Another alternative is to increase the "lump sum" (a lump sum paid according to the number of members) rather than the membership fees.
- If an event is organised at the European Parliament to present FERPA's demands, an exceptional increase of 7,000 euros is proposed under the headings: miscellaneous meetings, mission expenses, translation expenses and communications.

- Finally, the provisional budget for 2024 is proposed with a slight surplus of 55.00 euros and the Executive Committee is asked to adopt it.

The Chairman then opened the floor for discussion.

All the organisations involved began by thanking Dick for his excellent work: in 9 years, he said, we had never had such an accurate and detailed report. As for the increase in contributions, how can it be justified? What is the purpose of the increase? On what criteria? The budget is designed to increase our union action. It must therefore reflect our actions and our decisions at Congress. We have a "meetings" budget. Some lines are missing, such as one entitled "industrial action" and another entitled "development". Some people wondered about the possibility of making targeted use of the reserves, which amounted to two years of FERPA's operations. A question was raised about the increase in the Women's Committee item, while other items were decreasing. Another question raised was whether staff salaries were "loaded". One organisation also questioned the system for controlling and auditing our budget: was it sufficient? Finally, one observation was made: FERPA is present in 18 countries, while ETUC is present in 41 countries. Why is this not the case for FERPA? Should we change our methods to attract these countries? What can be done to convince them to join FERPA? Finally, one organisation questioned the relevance and/or effectiveness of holding an Executive Committee meeting in May to discuss the European elections, when they would be taking place just a few weeks later.

In his reply, the Treasurer first thanked the members for their compliments. He then went on to ask how to recruit members to the ETUC and how to increase the number of members. This, he said, was the responsibility of the national trade union organisations. FERPA's financial administration is carried out by the ETUC's auditors; it is fair and reliable, and there is no reason to doubt it. As far as staff salaries are concerned, FERPA's only employee is concerned, and the salary mentioned is indeed a gross salary according to the ETUC's salary structure. If we undertake a campaign on the minimum pension, we will have to calculate it. Finally, contributions are not increasing and 3 organisations have informed us of a decrease. An extraordinary meeting would have to be held on the subject of FERPA's finances.

The General Secretary then asked what could be done in 2024 to increase subscriptions. The figures would have to be looked at carefully. Both the Congress and the Mid-Term Meeting are important events in the life of the organisation. The budget must be managed as a "prudent man", which means that reserves must be used as a last resort. Of course, we need to talk to the ETUC organisations, but it's difficult to talk to organisations that don't want to hear what we have to say. We will have to think calmly at the next Executive Committee meeting and come up with concrete proposals.

The President then proposed that we proceed to the vote:

The 2022 balance sheet and 2022 income statement were adopted unanimously.

The 2024 budget was also adopted unanimously.

The following organisations took part in the debate: UCR-CFDT; CSC/ACV; UNIA; UGT-FGTB/ABVV.

The President then welcomed Esther Lynch, General Secretary of the ETUC, and the General Secretary of FERPA. He explained that FERPA was determined to protect the rights it had won and to acquire new ones. It is ready to work together with the ETUC on a platform that would unite us.

Esther began by saying that the General Secretary of FERPA was a great advocate of FERPA at the ETUC. FERPA is a trade union organisation that is part of the large ETUC trade union family. She recalls the testimony of the Romanian colleague who, after 37 years of work, received a pension of... 300 euros! The ETUC is committed to a political programme on the issue of pensions and to putting together an initiative on minimum pensions after the European elections, in collaboration with FERPA. And on the subject of how to do this, it recalls the victorious battle waged on the minimum wage. Regarding the FERPA's right to vote, this subject would come up again at the ETUC's Mid-Term Meeting, to try to get a better understanding of what needed to be done, in particular by talking to the organisations that were opposed to it and finding out why they were opposed to it. A support campaign will have to be organised. She assured the members of the FERPA Executive Committee of the support of the ETUC's elected representatives. She went on to talk about the ETUC's current projects, in particular the right to disconnection, the European elections, and the new standards of European economic governance, which would mean that 14 Member States would have to make further budget cuts or raise taxes. We're going to have to take to the streets in Brussels on 13 December. She added that she was pleased to see FERPA at the Paris demonstration. We need to be active at national level. She listed a number of urgent issues: making noise, being heard, and targeted investment. We need green industrial policies that cover all our needs: health, transport, housing, etc. Everything will depend on which politicians head the EU after the June 2024 elections. On 15 November, the ETUC Manifesto will be presented to the European Parliament. It includes 12 commitments, including one on fair pensions. If we work together, we can achieve this. But she is not naive: we need everyone. We need to win the battle against the return of austerity today.

The President of FERPA then opened the debate.

The speakers began by thanking Esther for her speech, which, as one speaker said, gave a good overview and was delivered with a lot of heart. Several speakers returned to the situation of the elderly, who represent 25% of the European population, and stressed the feminisation of the ageing population, and therefore the need for specific services and an agency that focuses on these issues and all their aspects. All our demands are also set out in the FERPA Manifesto, but a Manifesto is not enough, it must be accompanied by concrete measures. Pensions are not a gift from heaven," he points out, "they are the result of our work. Pensions are a right, not a form of "social protection". We must avoid a race to the bottom when it comes to pensions. Our demands are integrated with those of the ETUC when, like it, we call for fair and adequate pensions for today and tomorrow. We need to move forward, as Commissioner Schmidt has done on minimum wages.

As far as minimum pensions are concerned, the poverty threshold does not at all represent what is needed to live decently without recourse to external aid. We want a social Europe, which unfortunately gives more priority to the economy than to social issues.

Today, 17 out of 27 Member States are affected by the ageing of the population. Our demands must be taken into account. We are a source of new jobs. The ecological transition also concerns the elderly, for example in terms of housing or mobility/transport. It bears repeating that the elderly are not a problem, but part of the solution. We want more ESCs and full recognition. We are proud to be part of the ETUC, which includes not only the so-called working population, but also the unemployed and the retired. We remain active, so we need to fight ageism. We are Europe's memory. Others also referred to the joint ETUC and FERPA campaign for minimum pensions and called for a concrete multi-year plan.

If there is a joint conference, it is important to specify who will do what and with what financial coverage? One speaker asked about the cost of financing dependency care. Another pointed out that adequate care and the long-term consequences of exposure to chemicals also needed to be guaranteed. Finally, a participant asked Esther about the organisation of our meetings and what the ETUC's plans were for the future.

In her reply, Esther began by thanking all the participants for their kind words. For her part, she thanked the staff of the ETUC for the 6 months that had elapsed before the move to the new premises. She has taken on board what has been said about the organisation of future meetings. She acknowledged the problems mentioned. She simply asked for a little patience. She then continued her reply, setting out 7 points:

1) The ETUC Manifesto, and in particular the point on pensions, must be publicised in every European party. We need to work with you," she adds, "to ensure that the foundations are well laid. That's why the meeting on 15 November at the European Parliament has been organised, and FERPA has been invited to take part: to tell them everything you've told me. We need to be as visible as possible in person, but also on social media.

2) We need to lobby their electorate, this solution should not be underestimated.

3) The idea of a pensions project/plan is a good one, but we need to take the timetable into account and not be overtaken by the political agenda. Early 2025 seems a good time for elected representatives to defend our proposals, particularly the minimum pension. We need to have a plan, as we did for the minimum wage: organise meetings and events and, internally, meet Giulio Romani, who is the Confederal Secretary responsible for social protection.

4) She also insisted on the recognition that should be due to the elderly: they make a contribution to society, they have a real value.

5) As far as health is concerned, this issue must be taken into account throughout working life. There's a colleague here in the room, Herman FONCK, who is a health expert, and I'd like to invite him to have a coffee with me to talk about these issues. How can we achieve zero accidents in the workplace? Health and safety are important, taking into account the gender dimension.

6) We need to protect the retirement age and defend this right together. We have 4 years ahead of us to do everything, but we need to take the necessary measures now.

7) Finally, as far as the right to vote is concerned, we need to talk openly with affiliates, while seeking to convince those who can be convinced and asking them why they are resisting.

She concluded her reply by thanking the members of the Executive Committee once again. She added that she would be delighted to return, as she was looking forward to continuing the work with FERPA.

The Secretary General of FERPA thanked Esther for giving us all her time. Today, FERPA feels less alone. We are the knowledge of the ETUC," he added.

The following organisations took part in the debate: SPI- CGIL; UNSA-Retraitées; SEK; FNP-CISL; UILP-UIL; OGB L; UCR-CFDT; FGTB/ABVV; UNIA; UNIR-CFECGC; UNAR-CFTC; USO; UCR FO.

The President then gave the floor to Dick DE GRAAF, Chairman of the Working Group on the Statutes, to present the changes that had been made to the Internal Regulations (ROI).

He recalled all the work that had been done. He indicated that we would not be repeating the entire discussion in detail, as the proposed amendments had been extensively discussed at the last Executive Committee meeting before the Congress. Today, as required by the Articles of Association, the amendments must be formally approved. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, he outlined the various articles (7) that had been amended.

The SEK representative asked for the floor. He asked about regional representation on the Executive Committee. He also questioned the fact that there was no quorum for the Congress and the deadlines for submitting candidatures. Finally, he asked for clarification on the "solidarity contribution".

Dick replied that the regions had not yet been identified. As far as the quorum was concerned, there was no provision for it in the Articles of Association. The deadlines for submitting candidatures are clearly specified in article 3.4. Finally, with regard to the "solidarity contribution", while pointing out that this question is more appropriately addressed to the Treasurer, Dick recalled that in 2011 it was noted that some organisations did not have enough money to participate in the Congress. A solidarity allowance of 300 euros was therefore made available to them. There is no specific fund, and this amount is independent of where the Congress takes place. The General Secretary added that one day, we hope to be self-sufficient. The President proceeded to the vote on the ROI, as amended. It was adopted unanimously, with one abstention (SEK).

On the question of the format of the next FERPA Executive Committee meeting in February, either online with all languages, or face-to-face but with only 4 working languages, which means that some organisations will be de facto excluded, two organisations intervened

- One to ask that the question of holding our meetings in hybrid format be examined
- The other said that while it was in favour of holding face-to-face meetings, it supported holding online meetings to avoid effectively excluding members for linguistic reasons.

The vote resulted in a large majority in favour of holding the next meeting in person.

The General Secretary went back on the decision to hold the next Executive Committee meeting in person, which would exclude languages and therefore colleagues, adding that this exclusion was unacceptable.

The following organisations intervened: SPI-CGIL and UCR FO.

Then he moves on to miscellaneous questions. The SEK representative draws the attention of FERPA to a proposed reform of the driving license which goes against the elderly, accompanied by additional insurance premiums. He asks that FERPA look into this issue. The General Secretary replied that he should have spoken about it when the Secretary General of the ETUC was there. Also returning to the with of Kosovo and Macedonia to join FERPA, he undertakes to take these requests into consideration while recalling that there are procedures to respect. Then, he ends, after however the UNIR CFECGC had drawn attention to the dangers, for the elderly, of everything digital, by welcoming the commitments that the ETUC has made in our favor as well as the good work done on the finances it reaffirms our commitment to make our contributions to the ETUC while recalling what we expect from it.

The President closed the meeting by thanking the members for their active participation. He also thanks the interpreters.

Henri