

Minutes of the FERPA Executive Committee meeting held on 21 and 22 February 2024

Participants: Hubert SCHWIND (ICR-CGT, France), President of FERPA; Agostino SICILIANO (UIL-P, Italy), Secretary General of FERPA; Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (FEJP-CC. OO, Spain), Deputy Secretary General; Dick DE GRAAF (FNV, Netherlands), Treasurer of FERPA; Silvana CAPPuccio (SPI-CGIL, Italy), President of the Women's Committee of FERPA; Carmelo BARBAGALLO (UIL-P, Italy); Maria Concetta BALISTRERI (SPI-CGIL, Italy); Jean-Marie BEKHOUCHE (UCR-CGT, France); Nicoletta BIANCARDI (SPI-CGIL, Italy); Marlène BOISSON (UCR-CFDT, France); Marie-Paule CAVRET (UNSA Retraités, France); Jean-Claude CERISIER (CSC-ACV, Belgium); Elio CERRI (SPI-CGIL, Italy); Marie-Josée DAEMS (FGTB/ABVV, Belgium); DEHAEN Michèle (FGTB/ABVV, Belgium); Marino DELAROCHA DE PAZ (USO, Spain) ; DE SANTIS Maria Sole (UIL-P, Italy) ; Emilio DIDONE (FNP-CISL, Italy) ; Anna Luisa Paola FERRO MADER (UNIA, Switzerland) ; Maryvonne FLAHAUT (CSC/ACV, Belgium) ; Herman FONCK (CSC/ACV, Belgium) ; Maud GILOUX (CFE-CGC UNIR, France) ; Giordano GIOVAGNOLI (FNPS-CDLS, San Marino); Francis GRECH (GWU, Malta); Didier HOTTE (UCR-FO, France); Luc JANSEN (FGTB-ABVV, Belgium); Laszlo JUHASZ (MASZSZ, Hungary); Monika KEMPERLE (ÖGB, Austria) ; Ehsan MALIK (FGTB/ABVV, Belgium); Lina MELONI (FNPS-CDLS, San Marino); Jean-Michel MILLER (OGBL, Luxembourg); Dario MORDASINI (UNIA, Switzerland); Laurence NAUDIN (UNAR-CFTC, France); Johann PALKOVICH (ÖGB, Austria) ; Laszlo-Csaba PAP (SZEF, Hungary) ; Katalin PAPP (SZEF, Hungary) ; Ivan PEDRETTI (SPI-CGIL, Italy) ; Ans PELZER (FNV, Netherlands) ; Jasna PETROVIC (SUH, Croatia) ; Livia PIERSANTI (UIL-P, Italy) Benoît PRINCE (UCR-CFDT, France) ; Metka ROKSANDIC (SUS, Slovenia); Michael ROSSIS (PESYS-SEK, Cyprus); Tania SCACCHETTI (SPI-CGIL, Italy); Jean-Marc SCHAEFFER (UNSA Retraités, France); Avgoustis SOTERIS (PA. SY.DY, Cyprus); Ivan TONI (FUPS-CSdL, San Marino); Anna VELLA (GWU, Malta); Patrizia VOLPONI (FNP-CISL, Italy); Nerina ZAFFERANI (FUPS-CSdL, San Marino).

Also taking part: Henri LOURDELLE, FERPA Special Adviser, who also took notes, and Jessica MONTIEL RAMIREZ, CES Adviser for FERPA Policy.

The **Chairman of FERPA, Hubert SCHWIND**, opened the meeting after welcoming the members of the FERPA Executive Committee. He asked for the meeting **agenda** to be **approved**, which was done. He then submitted the minutes of the **last FERPA Executive Committee meeting**, which were also adopted. However, the PA.SY.DY representative made a number of observations. First of all, he asked that the reference to the SEK organisation (which was not present at the meeting) be replaced by that of PA.SY.DY, which was present. This will be taken into account. He asked that the document reporting the Executive Committee's discussions be called "minutes" and that the names of the speakers be explicitly mentioned. He was told that on the one hand, the minutes include the various points that emerged during the debates and not a verbatim account of what was said. The approval that is proposed at the beginning of the meeting is done to ensure that nothing important raised in the debates has been forgotten. Furthermore, if we look at all the previous minutes, we never mention (apart from the rapporteurs for the points discussed) the names of the members who speak, because they do not speak on their own behalf, but on behalf of their organisation.

With this clarification, the **Chairman** asked if there were any **other business**. There were three:

- The health campaign being promoted by a coalition of NGOs
- The driving licence issue, which will be debated in the European Parliament
- The UN Convention on Older Persons, which is being blocked by the European Union.

He then gave the floor to the **Secretary General of FERPA, Agostino SICILIANO**, for his **Communications**.

The General Secretary began by paying tribute to Ivan Pedretti, General Secretary of the SPI-CGIL, who was retiring.

He then outlined the issues that FERPA would be dealing with.

But first he points out that the war in Ukraine has been going on for two years now, and the latest news is not good. The Peace Conference is a big problem that we must continue to tackle. For the moment, the European Union is what has saved us. But there are serious concerns about the Far Right (Italy, Hungary, etc.). He also mentioned the death of Alexei NAVALNY, Vladimir PUTIN's opponent. He reaffirmed FERPA's support for those who suffer because of wars and who suffer the economic consequences, such as what is currently happening in the Red Sea. He mentioned the ETUC's Action Plan, in which we are fully involved, and in particular the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament, the future results of which, if the polls are to be believed, give us cause for concern.

He also recalled FERPA's participation in several ETUC initiatives, such as

- The meeting organised at the European Parliament on 15 November 2023 to present the ETUC Manifesto for the next European Parliament elections. He was given the opportunity to speak, and in particular stressed the fact that the elderly were not a cost to society, but an investment.
- The demonstration in Brussels on 12 December 2023 against the Stability Pact. He took the opportunity to thank the members of FERPA who had carried the FERPA banner right to the end. He pointed out, however, that there were only 10 of us (out of 10 million members) behind the banner, which he felt posed a few problems when certain organisations were talking about organising demonstrations in Brussels: it would be necessary to check that enough of us were taking part!
- The debate with Enrico LETTA at the last ETUC Executive Committee, where he intervened to ask him not to forget the elderly in his Report and to remind him that the lack of investment in the social field risked undermining Social Dialogue.

Returning to FERPA, he informed the Executive Committee that the Secretariat had met Esther Lynch, General Secretary of the ETUC, on the subject of the minimum pension at European level. There had also been a meeting on the subject with Giulio ROMANI, ETUC Confederal Secretary responsible for Social Protection. It was stated that at the next ETUC Executive Committee meeting on 26 and 27 March, a draft ETUC Resolution would deal with pensions and would mention the minimum pension. This Resolution would first be discussed by the Social Protection Committee on 13 March, in which the FERPA Secretariat would take part.

The Hungarian colleagues alerted the Secretariat to the energy poverty in their country. In 2022, 68,000 people died of hypothermia. The fight against energy poverty is an important demand, so it has been included in our letter to the candidates for election to the European Parliament.

Regarding the application for membership of the Macedonian Pensioners' Union (PSM, a member of KSS) to FERPA, as it met the criteria, the General Secretary proposed that the Executive Committee accept it. In 2020, this union had been unanimously admitted as an observer member of FERPA. However, he added, it would be necessary to think about how to obtain a reimbursement so that this organisation could participate in our meetings.

As far as our next meetings are concerned, the norm will be for the November Executive Committee to be held in Visio, as the Commission now only covers one face-to-face meeting with a reimbursement of one member per country. There is a reasoning to be made, because this conditions our trade union life. We also need to find a venue capable of accommodating a sufficient number of booths for our face-to-face meetings, as the room at ETUC headquarters is not large enough and there are not enough booths.

On the subject of other business, the General Secretary reminded the meeting that it was not possible to add subjects to be dealt with at the Executive Committee just a few days beforehand. But that does not mean that they are forgotten.

For example, our colleague from Luxembourg, Jean-Michel Millier, has agreed to follow up the issue of the driving licence currently under discussion in the European Parliament. As far as the UN International Convention on Older Persons is concerned, this subject cannot be presented by a single organisation or a single individual from one country. International organisations must be involved. Our colleague Silvana will be looking into this.

In conclusion, we need to tackle the problems in a sensible way.

The President thanked the Secretary General for his comprehensive speech and opened the debate.

As far as the international situation was concerned, it was a delicate subject that could not leave anyone indifferent, and in particular the trade union movement, especially in view of the situation experienced by the people. As for what is happening in the world, we need to have a clear vision.

Whether in the United States, Taiwan, India, the European Union, Russia, etc., 2024 will be an election year. Nearly 4.1 billion people will vote, more than 30 countries will choose their president, and around twenty others their members of parliament. And all this in an explosive geopolitical context. We need a strong Europe. Returning to the ETUC's December demonstration, many said that they had been present within their organisations, but that they had not seen the FERPA banner, although others, on the contrary, said that they had seen FERPA. One organisation mentioned the demonstration to be organised by the IRBs in Schengen in June to mark the 40th anniversary of the Agreement (14 June 1985), at which FERPA would be represented.

With regard to the minimum pension, it was suggested that the same strategy be followed within the ETUC as for the minimum wage. Something must be done with the ETUC, and even beyond the ETUC. One organisation proposed going further in this area and that FERPA should call for a Directive on minimum pensions above the poverty threshold. However, several organisations, along with the General Secretary, believe that we need to play finely with the ETUC. We have already embarked on a course of action with the ETUC, and we must avoid taking a step backwards. In the end, the proposal for a Directive was withdrawn. One organisation suggested drawing up a questionnaire to find out what a minimum pension was in each country to enable people to live in dignity. But it was also pointed out that several points were under discussion, such as the recognition of healthcare.

Several members expressed their concern about democracy with the rise of the Extreme Right across Europe. This is very serious," they said, "because we are moving towards a Europe that goes against the grain of a social Europe based on solidarity, with the risk of trade union freedom being called into question. We need to show our determination. This risk to democracy can also be seen in Russia's interference in European elections and elsewhere in Europe and the world. Referring to the case of Assange, prosecuted by the United States, and freedom of the press, one organisation invited people to sign the Amnesty International petition.

We need to make our voices heard. 21% of Europe's population is elderly, so how can we represent them? How can we widen our audience? We lack visibility. We need to get back to basics. We need to make ourselves known if we are to be recognised.

It is important to work on themes to make proposals to the EU, but this involves many subjects to work on.

On this subject of "recognition", certain organizations return to the question of FERPA's voting rights and protest against the deafness of the ETUC in hearing the voice of the organization which speaks for 21% of the population. Ube organization should however note that certainly FERPA is important and it is important to be present, but it is wondering how it can contribute to participate fully? For example, she indicates that four

times she sent a work proposal on the minimum pension and she never received a response as to the follow-up to be given to her submissions. Makes the following proposition She makes two propositions:

- Define and present themes to work on for the coming years.
- Regarding the minimum pension plus the women's issue, we need to know who does what and present a proposal before the summer holidays.

As for Video meetings, many emphasize and deplore that this does not facilitate exchanges.

It is also noted that the ETUC will not hold if it does not have negotiating powers

Some also mention the drug problem which is invading Europe. We must also think of gender difference as a value. Several also welcomed the mention of peace and supported the proposed motion which will be discussed later during the meeting.

It is also hoped that the Secretary General can send his Communications in writing before the meeting, as well as regarding the work of the FERPA Women's Committee.

Anticipating the following debate which concerns the finances of FERPA, several organizations highlight the work accomplished by the Treasurer – work saluted by the applause of the members of the Executive Committee. Through this work, it is about recognition of the economic and financial situation of FERPA. But it would be interesting, it is also said, to be able to have the 2023 results, to understand the details of the situation. The reduction in results illustrates the reduction in the representativeness of FERPA in the different countries. Some, however, refuse to use the term “coma” used by the Secretary General. The question that really arises is “how to rebuild an economic base?” “. Should we use a “flat rate contribution” to respond to an emergency situation? But that does not exempt us from working together on a structural solution. Can the mechanism adopted by the CES for its calculation of contributions be “duplicated” at FERPA? Everyone agrees that inflation and rising costs have an impact on the budget. We must therefore find solutions to implement so that FERPA can continue its activities.

The Treasurer then intervened to thank the members of the Executive Committee for the applause and words of gratitude they had towards him. He makes it clear that there are no easy solutions or simple answers. We must find answers for sustainability and future growth for FERPA to continue to live. He wonders about the formation of a working group to discuss the question of increasing contributions. A trade union organization must be independent of external funds. It is important to discuss with the ETUC Secretariat. FERPA’s position within it is not as established as that of worker organizations. Concerning the question of the 2023 assessment, he indicated that as soon as the data was available, he would share it.

He completes his intervention on another subject: how to make the Rights indicated in the European Pillar of Social Rights effective?

During this meeting, a vibrant tribute was paid to the recently deceased Jacques DELORS, supported by several organizations. It had also previously been mentioned that Jacques DELORS was a thinker who made millions of people dream, not of a Europe of States but of a Europe of peoples.

Without repeating everything that has been said about Jacques DELORS, a few extracts from this rich intervention.

Jacques Delors said: “We will need a lot of imagination, technical capacity, strength of conviction, courage, loyalty to ourselves to respond to the challenges of the future.” Europe has lost a Great Man. Do we still have visionaries for a social Europe, of peace and with an economy serving people and not finance?

And what an irony of history. The European elections will be held this year. It is a clash between this convinced European, a permanent architect of the search for peace and consensus, and European countries withdrawn into themselves, turning more and more towards the extreme right and putting forward national preference. Through our vote in the next election in June 2024, we will be able to show the way to a democratic, social and united Europe. This will be the most beautiful tribute we can pay to Jacques Delors who devoted his entire life to a humanist vision of our world.

And the speaker ended his speech by repeating a phrase heard from the platform during the demonstration in Brussels: “Damn, damn, that’s really good, we are all Europeans after all! »

In his response, the Secretary General, returning to the December Demonstration, recalled that Henri was there, at the foot of the Ferris Wheel which was the rallying point with the flags and the ten who were there, including the President, left their confederal organizations to march behind the FERPA banner.

He talks about his 50 years of trade unionism and emphasizes that he participates in the ETUC Steering Committees. FERPA also participates, with two members, without voting rights, in the meetings of the Executive Committee of the ETUC as well as in the groups of the ETUC, according to its possibilities and its centers of interest: Social Protection Committee, Migration Committee and Discrimination , Women's Committee, etc. He insists on the fact that the organizations of the members of the Executive Committee are aware of what FERPA does and its demands and that they can support FERPA in obtaining a minimum pension at European level. Because when we talk about minimum pension this also concerns future retirees. Before talking about autonomy within organizations, we should first talk about the support of organizations. Giulio ROMANI, Confederal Secretary of the ETUC, on the proposal of Esther LYNCH, General Secretary of the ETUC, will draft a political document on pensions. This will be a political journey and not to carry out new studies. How can we involve all organizations on this subject.

On the other hand, he specifies that he is sometimes asked to provide FERPA's support for this or that initiative, but he cannot write a letter of support for something he does not know. Finally, we cannot decide on something if we do not have resources: we must reason based on what is possible.

The organizations: CSC/ACV took part in the debate; FGTB; USO; SUS; UNSA; UNIA; UCR-FO; UCR-CGT; SPI-CGIL; PA.SY.DY; OGBL; SZEF; CFE-CGC UNIR; FNP-CGIL; UIL-P; UCR-CFDT; SUH

The President then proceeds to vote on the membership of the Pensioners' Union of Macedonia (PSM, member of KSS) as a full member of FERPA. This proposal was adopted unanimously.

Then the FERPA Women's Committee is held under the aegis of its President, Silvana CAPPuccio.

At the end of this very rich meeting, the report of which will be published on the FERPA website, the President draws some brief conclusions.

She first emphasizes that the theme of violence against women is a subject on which we must continue to work. Regarding the European elections, we must sound the alarm and support candidates who fight against violence against women. At the United Nations, there is a thematic consensus on women's rights. Regarding poverty, Italian unions have made demands including issues related to age. The President is part of a network working on the drafting of the Convention on Older Persons, a rights-based Convention. We must continue to talk about women's rights, emancipation, gender, the pension gap between women and men, but also the health of women or migrant women. The ideal is that there should no longer be a Women's Committee. The President ends by saying that the Committee agrees on the Group's two proposals: a) a FERPA women's conference within the EESC, partially financed by the EU, and b) an update of the FERPA web page regarding useful reference sites".

The President then gives the floor to the Treasurer of FERPA, Dick DE GRAAF to deal with the finances of FERPA.

He comments on the document that he previously sent to the members and which is projected on a screen. Without going into detail in this report of the projected elements, several points are highlighted by the Treasurer:

- We need to think about the financial future of FERPA.
- He proposes to give the number of contributors for the following year, in the month of September and no longer in the month of December, which will require, if accepted, a small modification of the Internal Regulations which raise this question .
- He suggests that, exceptionally for this year, to fill the deficit by taking from FERPA reserves.

He also points out that there is no real possibility of reducing our expenses, which means that there remains the possibility of increasing contributions by intervening on the FERPA contribution rate. He recalls that this has not been increased since 2011! Should we proceed as the ETUC does, namely calculating the number of members on the average of the 4 previous years and/or establishing differentiated contribution rates depending on the country (rate of 100%, 40%, 25%, etc.)). He says he is ready to make the necessary calculations, if asked.

He ends by indicating that there are two decisions to make:

- The September date to indicate the number of contributors
- Use reserves to cover this year's deficit.

The President then opens the debate.

All the speakers thank Dick once again for the quality of the work provided and as one member said, “this is the first time that the Executive Committee has such a precise document”. Some suggest seeing what the ETUC spends on the Youth Committee in order to have an argument to demand an increase in the ETUC's contribution to FERPA. Several insist that we think about whether FERPA cannot benefit from other external financial aid. Concerning the increase in contributions, several also say that a priori, they are not opposed to it, but that they must first seek the opinion of their authorities. However, the time has come to revisit this issue. However, it is added, if we want to increase contributions, we must clearly define what we want to do in the next two years. Indeed, it is pointed out, the budget presented is not an “action budget”, but a “management budget”. We should therefore take more action as several members are requesting.

Concerning the two decisions on which the Treasurer wishes the Executive Committee to decide, a majority of the interventions are in his direction.

Some also insist that the question of revenue is the most important. An organization is wondering about setting up a small working group to think about these questions.

Jessica also intervenes to provide several clarifications. First of all, the ETUC Youth Committee and Women's Committee do not receive direct subsidies from the ETUC but their two annual meetings are supported by DG Employment. They also recall that the subsidies received from the European Commission through the projects implemented imply a specific contribution from the organization behind the project, of 30% of the overall cost of the operation. Finally, she further specifies, an allusion was made to the activities of AGE-Europe; she points out that this NGO is an instrument of the Commission and that we are not an NGO.

In his response, the Treasurer once again thanks the members of the Executive Committee for their laudatory assessments. He reminds us that there are no easy solutions or simple answers. The question of the sustainability and future growth of FERPA is not new. A trade union organization must be independent of external funds. It is important to discuss with the ETUC Secretariat: the position of FERPA within it is not as established as that of the workers. He recalls that at the CES the number of affiliates is established at the end of August with a possible extension in September. If we want to have a credible forecast budget, he specifies, we must be able to have the figures. Why not, he concludes, a restricted working group?

The Secretary General intervenes to close this debate to say that before taking a decision, there was time and we have until November. We also need to give Dick time to gather the necessary information. He agrees to set up a Select Committee which will consider the question of increasing contributions. We must therefore plan a route between now and November to have suggestions to make.

The organizations: GWU; CSC/LCA; FGTB/ABVV; UCR-FO; UNSA-Retirees; USO; SUS; ÖGB; UNIR-CFE-CGC; UNIA; SUH; UCR-CFDTSPI-CGIL; FNP-CISL; UILP-UIL; PA.SY.DY

The President then votes on the motion prepared by Jean-Michel MILLER of the OGBL, in consultation with Herman FONCK of the CSC/ACV, for the European Parliament, relating to the debate on the driving license. This motion is adopted unanimously.

For the next item on the agenda relating to the examination of the draft letter to be sent to the candidates for the election to the European Parliament next June, the President gives the floor to Henri for his presentation. He first thanks the colleagues who sent amendments and thus contributed to improving the quality of the project. Then he recalls the path followed by this document. After being drafted by the Secretariat, it was first sent to the members of the Steering Committee who proposed five amendments which were accepted except one, because, in reality, it significantly modified the project structure.

Thus amended, it was sent to the members of the Executive Committee who formulated a few amendments, accepted as a whole, except one which also carried out a fairly complete overhaul of the text.

Submitted for approval by the President, the finalized text was unanimously approved.

The Secretary General intervened to indicate the instructions for use of this letter:

- send it first to the parliamentarians concerned accompanied by the logo of the organization, the signature of the person in charge and the Manifesto
- disseminate it in our structures and in our meetings

And Jessica added: in our social networks, specifying that it will be put on the website.

Then the President introduces the Motion for Peace which he drafted with Silvana CAPPUCCIO (SPI-CGIL) and Ana MARTINEZ LOPEZ (CC.OO). It presents the various amendments received, which have improved the text and which have therefore been integrated. The representative of SPI-CGIL salutes the quality of the President's work. The representatives of UNAR-CFTC and UNIR-CFE-CGC recall that their organization is “apolitical” and that therefore they will not vote for this text. However, this was adopted almost unanimously, minus one vote against that of the UNAR-CFTC and one abstention, that of the UNIR-CFE-CGC.

The President then moves on to other matters.

The CSC/ACV representative presents the climate coalition and the health brochure. HE wants FERPA to make its voice heard.

The Secretary General thanks the speaker and indicates that it is appropriate to send - as must be the case for any initiative which seems interesting - the documents to the two members of the Management Committee in charge of the file, a procedure which makes it possible not to disperse us.

As part of the preparation for the June elections, each of the leaders of the organizations present on the Executive Committee was invited to record on video a short message indicating what (not for whom) they were going to vote for next June. This video will be posted on the FERPA website for distribution.

The next FERPA Executive Committee will take place via video on November 27 and 28 and on April 18 the Steering Committee will take place in person.

At the end of the two-day debates, the Secretary General believes that there have been good results from the teamwork that has been done and that the peace motion is a positive signal sent by FERPA.

In turn, the President of FERPA thanks the members for their active participation as well as the interpreters.

Henry