

HL June 5, 2024

Summary report of the FERPA Extraordinary Executive Committee Meeting in Visio
May 7, 2024

FERPA Chairman Hubert SCHWIND opens the meeting by first welcoming members, then moving on to approve the agenda from the previous meeting. The UCR-FO representative points out that in the minutes, after the tribute paid to Jacques DELORS by a speaker, his remark concerns the fact that with the Single Market, “free and undistorted competition” was established. The Greek representative returned to the question of the name of the Macedonian Pensioners' Union and asked that it be clarified as the “Northern” Macedonian Pensioners' Union, as Macedonia is a region of Greece. Henri points out that, in response to the UCR-FO colleague, there is no problem with the addition being made. As for the comments made by our Greek and Cypriot colleagues, it is not up to him to change the name of the union that was sent to FERPA at the time of the application for membership. However, after the name “Syndicat des Pensionnés de Macédoine”, he will add “Republic of North Macedonia”. These observations having been made, the minutes were approved.

Following the request to know if there are any other questions, Jessica wishes to speak at this point about the update of the FERPA website.

The video containing FERPA leaders' messages for the European elections was then shown.

The floor was then given to ETUC General Secretary Esther LYNCH, who began by congratulating FERPA on the video. She called on organizations to vote, and get people to vote, for candidates opposed to austerity and in favour of strengthening social dialogue in the European Parliament elections in a month's time, and declared her support for FERPA's ambitions. She mentions and thanks the FERPA participants in the latest ETUC events. She also insists on the correct implementation of the European Social Rights Socle. She confirms her willingness to work with FERPA, notably on the minimum pension and to reduce the pension gap between men and women. We need to achieve results. There's a lot to be done. We're not going to change everything, but we're going to make gradual progress. She also agreed to join forces with FERPA, and with it the ETUC, to mark the International Day of Older Persons on October 1.

The Chairman, Hubert SCHWIND, then opened the debate.

The organizations taking the floor first thanked Esther LYNCH for her speech, which contained a message full of hope, and the ETUC for adopting the Resolution on pensions. One member, however, questioned the fact that the Directive was not mentioned. The members welcome the fact that the ETUC is concerned about pensions. We must continue to work on minimum pensions and low pensions, and to ensure that there is no gap between employees and pensioners. We also need to strengthen solidarity between generations. In various countries, governments are attacking social budgets, pension levels, hospital financing, health care and unemployment, while at the same time mobilizing 413 billion for rearmament. The ETUC needs to take a firm and determined stance on current conflicts. Returning to the question of health, we are asked to be bolder and learn the lessons of the COVID epidemic. Europe must invest in medicines and in the new chronic diseases that affect retired people.

Returning to the subject of elections, the organizations agreed with the ETUC General Secretary that it was necessary to vote for progressive parties and block the Far Right. It was pointed out that in the most recent parliamentary elections, the Extreme Right won over 20% and even 25% of the vote, making it the leading party in some countries. One member also mentioned a rally to be held in Schengen on June 6 to combat Extreme Right ideas. And several members mentioned the wide distribution of the FERPA Letter to the heads of lists in the June elections. It was also pointed out that women's struggle is a lifelong struggle, a struggle for all generations, including with regard to abuse, and not just in retirement. We need to unite and meet. Lastly, some of the participants spoke of Esther's commitment to and support for October 1st, the International Day of Older Persons, particularly with regard to health policies, but also to combating the difference in pensions between men and women. FERPA's General Secretary also took part in the debate, stressing the importance of the ETUC General Secretary's presence at the FERPA Executive Committee meeting devoted to the forthcoming European Parliament elections. The Letter to Candidates has been sent on behalf of FERPA, but it is also important that it has the support of the ETUC. Social rights are at stake in this election, and he confirms FERPA's support to Esther.

In her reply, Esther thanks the members for their encouragement. The priority is to protect jobs and pensions. We're working together. There is no disagreement between employees and pensioners, between men and women. Next June, the pensioners' vote is essential. This vote is essential: 10% one way or the other can change things. As for October 1, she will be delighted to have a joint intervention in support of FERPA. Among other things, she is asking for a circular to be sent to the ETUC for distribution to its members in order to amplify the mobilization. As regards a directive on the European minimum pension, we must continue in this direction. At its last Executive Committee meeting, the ETUC clearly adopted a Resolution for a dignified pension: it assures FERPA of its commitment. It is also committed to a fair situation for workers. Turning to the forthcoming elections, she reminds us that the Extreme Right cannot be trusted in the long term, because their foundations are wrong. She concluded by thanking the colleagues who work so hard at the Secretariat on behalf of FERPA members.

The following organizations took part in the debate: UNSA-Retraités; FNP-CISL; FNV; SUH; OGBL-L; UCR-CFDT; UILP-UIL; UCR-FO and the President of FERPA.

After Esther's departure, the Chairman gave the floor to FERPA's General Secretary to continue the debate.

He began by stressing the importance of having this discussion today on what we're doing, and of being able to say how we see Europe... We need to defend this Europe. We must defend this Europe. He also points out that the Letter to Candidates, which we wrote together, will be posted today on the FERPA website.

As Esther said, it's a great video, because it delivers a common message. He encourages members to circulate it at home. The campaign needs to be run quickly to be heard. As Esther said, 10% can change the balance. And he asks the question: what are you doing, or what are you thinking of doing?

The Chairman thanked the General Secretary, who had emphasized the role of Europe in bringing about social change. He then opened the debate.

Many thanked him for holding this important discussion, even if some mentioned the complexity of the situation, with new parties springing up out of nowhere, or when in some countries there have been 4 elections in the last 12 months, or the difficulty of convincing people. Others pointed out that non-nationals can vote, and that in a country like Switzerland, which is outside the EU, 25% of the population can vote, with Italian nationals even able to return home to do so. Some organizations have used the FERPA Manifesto and given it to the leaders of the various political parties. The letter was sent to the candidates: some received a reply, not only that they had been heard, but also that they had been received. It was also sent to the unions, asking them to distribute it widely. One organization also indicated that it would be sending the video to all candidates. The organizations indicate that they are doing their utmost to provide as much information as possible. It was also requested that the Letter be sent to the “Spitzenkandidat” and to the various groups in the European Parliament, asking them for their point of view, for example whether they are in favor of a European minimum pension, so that everyone knows their position and can subsequently verify the accuracy of their commitments. Some people mention the possibility of getting messages across to a wider audience, notably by using electronic means. Finally, some regretted that there had been no clear response from the ETUC on a directive in favor of a European minimum pension.

Before giving the floor to the General Secretary for his response, the President stressed that there was a “hell of a lot” of work to be done, and he felt that all unions should have the video on their websites.

The General Secretary notes that a number of positive initiatives have been mentioned, but asks whether all organizations are prepared to put the video on their site, because, with the exception of one organization, he has heard nothing on the subject? The real campaign takes place at national level, by sending the letter to all “your” candidates and confederations,” he insists. You have to go out and talk to people.

The following organizations took part in the debate: FNV; MASZSZ; UNIA; UCR-FO; UILP-UIL; CSC/ACV; FNP-CISL; OGB-L; SUS; SUH.

The Chairman suspended the meeting for lunch, and when it resumed he gave the floor back to the General Secretary. He began by thanking Michel from OGB-L for his motion on the driving license for the elderly, and stressed that work was continuing.

He then indicated that after the elections, there would be a working meeting with the ETUC on the European minimum pension above the poverty threshold.

If the question of the directive was not included in the ETUC Resolution, it's because some large organizations said that poverty was not an ETUC priority and that they could have sought allies to challenge the Resolution. We need to draw inspiration from those who have different minimum pensions. If we look closely at the Resolution, almost all our demands contained in the Manifesto are included. He notes that Mr. DRAGHI has been entrusted with a Report on Economic Governance, in which pensions are explicitly mentioned. We're getting results,” he says. And our demands have been included in an ETUC Resolution. But we need economic resources. If we have any ideas, we should not hesitate to contact our colleagues on the Executive Committee who are in charge of the various dossiers.

The Chairman opened the debate again.

One organization points out that even if there is no mention of a Directive, this does not mean that the Resolution is not important. But the draft Resolution did mention a Directive on minimum pensions. The European Socle of Social Rights clearly states that everyone has the right to a minimum pension. A Directive is an instrument that reinforces measures. What are the arguments for this withdrawal? She says she hasn't really had an answer. Many people point out that this is an important issue. We could take the example of the Minimum Wage Directive, which isn't really binding, but it's a first step. We also insist on the October 1st Day, which was discussed at the Vienna Congress. There should be a general call from FERPA, before the vacations, to mobilize on that day and put something in place, and then it's up to each country to organize. Our Belgian colleague then spoke about the problems of high living costs and minimum pensions, thinking of a 13th month for pensions. He then expressed his dissatisfaction. Indeed, at the last FERPA Executive Committee meeting, he had presented the Great European Campaign "Our health before the market... Change Europe!" He had hoped that FERPA would make its voice heard and mobilize. He sent his document to the Secretariat. But there was no reaction. As a result, the demonstration in Brussels on April 7 and the conference at the European Parliament on April 8 were a failure. In his reply, the General Secretary first addressed his Belgian colleague. He reminds us that the first thing he did when he was elected was to involve the members of the Steering Committee in the smooth running of FERPA, by entrusting them with responsibility for a specific subject. So it's they who should be approached first, and then they give their opinion to the Secretariat on the relevance and consideration, or otherwise, of such and such a proposed initiative. He then returned to the ETUC Resolution on pensions, saying he shared the concerns expressed by members. In addition to the Directive, FERPA wanted to see a minimum pension "above the poverty line". But the Confederal Secretary of the ETUC, in charge of pensions, chose not to mention these elements, as there was a risk that the text would be rejected. It was the ETUC that chose the compromise, not FERPA. As for the Resolution, we need to work on it: we won't give up.

The following organizations took part in the debate: FNV; PA.SY.DY; UCR-CFDT; OGB-L; CSC/ACV.

At the request of the Chairman, Dick DE GRAAF, the Treasurer presented the composition of the Membership Fees Working Group, the principle of which had been agreed at the FERPA Executive Committee meeting last February. On the proposal of the Executive Committee of April 18, 2024, it would be composed of

- Dick DE GRAAF, (FNV), Chairman of the Working Group (NL)
- Anna Maria FORESI of FNP-CISL (Italy)
- Benoît PRINCE, CFDT (France)
- Laszlo Csaba PAP of SZEFE (Hungary)
- Jasna PETROVIC of SUH (Croatia)
- And the Secretariat

The Treasurer points out that the majority understand English, so there will be no translation costs.

The Executive Committee unanimously approves this proposal.

The Treasurer thanks the Executive Committee.

The Chairman then gave the floor to the General Secretary to talk about FERPA's Mid-Term Assembly.

He points out that it will be particularly important, as the last one took place on video, due to the pandemic. What's more, it will coincide with FERPA's 1st meeting, held 30 years ago in Madrid. He reminds us that for the time being, he has not received a national proposal from the Greeks, but only a regional one. On the other hand, the French organizations have unanimously proposed to hold the General Assembly in Paris. A new call for bids will therefore be launched, with a response due by September 1. Jessica reminds us that the bid must be united, with a letter signed by the SGs of the organizations involved. The date would be between May 12 and 25, 2025, with arrival on Wednesday morning and departure on Friday afternoon. Our Greek colleague will make a proposal to hold this GA in Thessaloniki.

Other business:

- Jessica indicates that the FERPA website will be updated to include the video, the Letter and the corrected minutes of meetings. The list of member organizations will also be updated, with the names of the countries and confederal organizations to which they belong and which are affiliated to the ETUC.
- The colleague from PA.SY.DY proposed that two items be added to the agenda for the next meeting: increasing car insurance for pensioners and offering loans to pensioners.
- The Greek colleague suggested adding a point on demographic change and how to protect pensions, as well as on mental problems: do something to study this problem.

The Chairman replied that the two colleagues' proposals would be submitted to the Steering Committee, which adopts the Executive Committee agendas.

The General Secretary thanked the members for their active participation in this virtual meeting. He wished everyone a successful election campaign and reminded everyone that the video was on the website. He thanks Julianne and the interpreters.

With these words, the Chairman closes the meeting.

Henri