

Ferpa mid-term conference

Ferpa's 30th anniversary

Dear Colleagues,

30 years have passed since FERPA was established and today, here in Paris, during the work of our Mid-Term Conference, we are celebrating this important anniversary.

Congratulations to all of us and to those who have gone before us for giving birth to this great European Federation of Retired and Elderly People, which today represents 40 organisations from 23 European countries.

I thank Luigina De Santis, Bruno Costantini and Carla Cantone, former General Secretaries of FERPA, for their presence and great commitment to our organisation. I would also like to thank Esther Lynch for her contribution with her video message. The ETUC General Secretary was keen to be present, but next week the ETUC Mid-Term Conference will be held in Belgrade and some last-minute unforeseen circumstances prevented her from attending.

The ETUC - European Trade Union Confederation - was founded in February 1973 to represent workers throughout Europe. In 1985, during the ETUC Congress held in Milan, on the initiative of the Italian trade unions, a proposal was made to create a European trade union structure for pensioners. The ETUC instructs its Executive Committee to look into the problems of pensioners and the elderly and to consider the possibility of improving coordination in this area.

Georges Debunne, a Belgian trade unionist, former president of the FGTB and former president of the ETUC, was asked to look into the subject, helping the organisations affiliated to the ETUC to contribute to the best choices in the field of social protection and representation of pensioners. The ETUC, in fact, did not want to delegate the representation of the elderly to external organisations, but to become itself the main interlocutor of the European institutions on social protection issues as well. Thus the Coordination Committee of Retired Workers (CCTR) was born at the beginning of October 1988 in Madrid, with a European Bureau made up of Georges Debunne and vice-presidents Jack Jones (TUC) and Peppe De Blasio (SPI-CGIL). The Committee met twice a year to analyse the problems of pensioners and bring proposals to the ETUC.

At the end of 1991, the Committee changed its name to the European Federation of Retired and Elderly People (FERPA), open to all cross-industry or sectoral pensioners' organisations belonging to an ETUC member union. Among the first members were: SPI-CGIL, FNP-CISL, UILP-UIL, UGT (Spain), MODERP-UGT (Portugal) and TUC (United Kingdom). Five French unions, other Spanish unions, two Belgians, two from San Marino, one Finnish, two Hungarians, the Polish Solidarnosc, two Dutch, another Portuguese (CGTP-IN), one Greek, one Turkish, the Swedish association PRO and Ver.Di (Germany) joined.

With IG Metall, an agreement seemed to have been reached with the agreement of the DGB, but membership did not follow. Since then, many other organisations have joined, making FERPA the largest European federation of pensioners.

In June 1992, the ETUC Executive Committee meeting in Geneva recognised FERPA as the European trade union organisation representing retired workers and older people in all European institutions.

In 1993, the General Secretary of the ETUC, Emilio Gabaglio, asked Jessica - who worked in his department and had already worked with Debunne - to support FERPA's activities. In 1997, at the request of Emilio and Georges, Jessica joined full-time. Even today, after 32 years, she continues to be an irreplaceable reference point for the smooth running of our organisation.

At FERPA's Constitutive Congress, held in Madrid on 29 and 30 April 1993, the Statutes, the Claims Programme and a Political Resolution recalling the Federation's founding values were adopted. In the mid-1990s, the Women's Coordination was set up, and in 1996 the first FERPA Women's Conference was held in Rome. Henri Lourdelle, an expert advisor to the ETUC on social policies, joined FERPA in 2012 and still today brings us his extensive experience.

The founding president of FERPA was Georges Debunne (FGTB, 1993-1999). The General Secretaries were: Luigina De Santis (CGIL, 1999-2007), Bruno Costantini (CISL, 2007-2015), Carla Cantone (SPI-CGIL, 2015-2018) and, since 2018, thanks to the united candidacy of the SPI, FNP and UILP and your trust, I have the honour of holding this office.

The presidents have been: Josette Neumez (CSC, 1999-2003), Jacques Sense (UCR-CFDT, 2003-2007), Werner Thum (ÖGB, 2007-2011), Robert Racke (OGB-L, 2011-2015), Michel Devacht (UCR-CFDT, 2015-2018), Lajos Mayer (SZEFG, 2018-2023) and since 2023 our own Hubert Schwind.

In recent years there has been intense activity, including through publications and the creation of the website, to strengthen social progress and the role of the European trade union, in particular our Federation.

In recent years, FERPA has adopted a more collegial organisation of work: each member of the Management Committee follows a theme, we have a Treasurer, a functional Secretariat and a Manifesto - unanimously approved - which brings together all our demands.

However, nothing has changed within the ETUC: we are still considered a specific group, as we were 30 years ago, without voting rights in the Executive Committee and the Management Committee.

They have been intense years and we can say we have come a long way, always putting the rights and dignity of ex-workers, pensioners and elderly people at the centre, both within the ETUC and in the confrontation with the European institutions.

Dear colleagues, dear friends, comrades, all this has been possible thanks to your organisations that have supported FERPA financially in these 30 years, and especially thanks to you for your active, continuous and full participation. This has allowed our Federation to grow, to look to the future, to fight for our rights and for a more solidary, inclusive Europe, without age or gender discrimination and with more social protection to fight poverty.

Happy 30th anniversary to FERPA and to all of us.