

Ferpa Mid-Term General Assembly

Paris May 2025

Introduction

Dear colleagues, dear friends, dear comrades, it has been two years since our Congress in Vienna, held in April 2023, and we are now at the halfway point of our congress term.

The last Ferpa Mid-Term General Assembly was unfortunately held virtually, due to the pandemic, but, as our generation is used to doing, we did not lose the will and tenacity to resist and look forward. Willpower and tenacity that stem from our long union experience, which has taught us how to manage and overcome even the most difficult moments.

And so, thanks to our will, our tenacity and our uninterrupted trade union commitment, we are here today in Paris, in this wonderful city and at such a prestigious venue as the EESC, the European Economic and Social Committee, to hold our mid-term conference.

This was made possible above all thanks to the great organisational, economic and welcoming willingness of all the French pensioners' trade unions, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart, on my own behalf and on behalf of Ferpa as a whole.

We have days of intense work ahead of us, with important appointments, but also with convivial moments in which we will spend time together, in friendship, because Ferpa is also this, relationships and exchange of ideas and experiences.

I think it is right to start our work by briefly mentioning the events affecting our Europe and the entire planet. Events that involve and disturb us deeply. And it is right to be involved and disturbed, because the situation is indeed serious and worrying.

I recall that the European Union was born in the early 1950s from the dream of a few who believed, firmly, in a united Europe, with no more wars. Among these few was Robert Schuman, who on 9 May, Europe Day, marked the 75th anniversary of his historic declaration, here in Paris, that laid the foundations for European cooperation. Schuman's proposal is considered to be the birth certificate of what is now the European Union. A dream that over the years came true and gave birth to an area of peace and stability that has lasted until today and that we have perhaps taken for granted.

But now, some 80 years later, with Russia's aggression against Ukraine, we find ourselves facing a war at home.

A war that, together with the conflict in the Middle East and the other conflicts and wars around the world that cause tens of thousands of casualties, is a threat to world peace.

The election of the new American president is part of this difficult international context for the European Union, which is having to deal with profoundly changed relations with the United States compared to those to which we were accustomed and which had been consolidated for so many years.

It is hard to remember, in the last eighty years, a period in history like this one, in which the differences between the US and the EU are so many and so substantial, with unprovoked attacks by the US on Europe, mocked and called a leech.

Today, there are countless issues on which the US and EU have different visions. On the war in Ukraine, Trump has entered into bilateral negotiations with Putin without directly involving the attacked country and completely skipping consultations with his European allies. Just as the positions towards Israel and the Palestinian state are different. On the day of the funeral of Pope Francis, a Pope who has always loudly preached peace in the world, a glimmer of hope opened up with the meeting between the American and Ukrainian Presidents in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, but no positive results have yet been seen.

When world peace is threatened, it is necessary for all political forces in Europe to make a common effort to find a shared course of action, putting aside nationalism, to urgently build a peace that respects democratic values, international law, human rights, social cohesion and develops peaceful cooperation.

This is what we also wrote in our FERPA motion: 'there can be no social progress without peace and no lasting peace without democracy, justice and respect for rights.

With regard to the White Paper on European defence and the ReArm Europe Plan, which after much criticism has changed its name and is now called Readiness 2030, it is clear to FERPA and the ETUC that common defence cannot and must not be built at the expense of social protection.

In addition to the wars that have been fought, there has also been the trade war that the new US administration has started with tariffs against the European Union, China and other nations, in a particularly alarming and chaotic manner, with decisions announced, then postponed, then cancelled, then re-proposed. To some countries yes, to others no, to others maybe... with

the inevitable retaliation and dramatic consequences on the world economy and finance. A trade war that is also exploding the many contradictions of globalisation.

Tariffs and trade wars are dangerous. They affect not only businesses, but also millions of workers and pensioners, create price growth and inflation, and thus a further reduction in the purchasing power of wages and pensions. It is citizens, workers, young people, the elderly and pensioners who suffer, not those who have accumulated great wealth.

In this complicated context, in order to face the explosive decisionism of Trump and his government, the European Union, with its approximately 500 million inhabitants and one of the largest trade markets in the world, with so many states rich in history, but also with a past of fratricidal conflicts and bloody wars, should have more courage and be more cohesive. It should seize the opportunity to strengthen its political entity and finally create the conditions for a stronger and more united, secure, inclusive and social Europe.

As FERPA and as ETUC we ask the European Union above all for a shared political line that can guarantee social cohesion and the rights of people of all ages.

FERPA is a large trade union federation, representing millions of older people who have shared and lived the dream of a united Europe, who were born in the years after the Second World War and still keep the memory of it, who fought for rights in the workplace and in society, who built the European welfare. FERPA is part of a trade union movement that has always been a driving force for peace, justice and social cohesion. It will continue to make its contribution to ensure that these ideals live on and are realised in national and European policies.

I wish you good work and a pleasant stay in Paris.