



Draft Strategic Resolution for the 7th FERPA Congress

A dynamic trade union committed to ensuring the right to live and grow old with dignity

1. A better Europe for retired and older people:

1.1. Ongoing adverse effects of the crisis

1. Since the last Congress in Venice in April 2011, the situation in the European Union has not improved for citizens, and retired people in particular.
2. Today's Europe is divisive. Under the guise of free competition and free movement, it is playing off the eurozone economies against one another. It is increasingly pitting European workers against each other, if not actively orchestrating social decline and deregulation.
3. A hundred million Europeans endure poverty and a poor quality of life.
4. Prompted by the crisis, which continues to adversely affect the men and women of Europe, governments have introduced austerity budgets, ignoring the growing needs of their people – especially those hit by the crisis – in order to satisfy the demands of the financial markets.
5. Meanwhile, many voices have spoken out in protest at high levels of welfare spending, while omitting to mention that this was not only justified spending but a necessary and vital social investment for the long term, which has meant that in Europe – compared with other continents and regions of the world – women and men live better and longer lives.
6. They also forget that retired and older people make an extremely valuable contribution to social, civic, cultural and economic life.
7. Economic policy choices must be reviewed as a matter of urgency in order to promote active ageing and the role of older people in society, by means of a cultural and political shift that sees longevity as an opportunity to address economic and social challenges.

1.2. The dramatic social and health consequences of austerity policies

8. The most serious social problem to have emerged from the crisis and been exacerbated by austerity is and remains youth unemployment, but also unemployment among older workers and the difficulties they face getting back into work.
With the increase in the statutory retirement age, these workers risk ending up with no salary and no income up to retirement age.

9. However, we have also seen cuts to social security spending across Europe. Nursery places have been scaled back (in Greece, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Italy and Poland), families' childcare costs have risen (The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Poland) and hospitals and maternity units have been closed (Greece, Portugal, Romania, France, Poland, etc.).

10. Austerity policies have also had a negative impact on:

➤ Health-care policies

11. We have seen a reduction in spending on medication, an increase in hospital charges and a reduction in the number of beds, hospital staff and carers. In some cases these changes have been dramatic, as a result of which the proportion of people needing care but unable to access it has increased very significantly, particularly among the elderly.

12. More and more older people (especially those living on a minimum income or whose income has been eroded due to the lack of appropriate indexing) can no longer afford to pay for suitable preventive and primary health care. This is having a direct impact on healthy ageing. For example, the effective removal of the right to free or reimbursed medication means that older people suffering from chronic conditions are forced to turn down essential treatment or expensive medication or to rely on voluntary free medication programmes run by charities or humanitarian organisations, thereby reversing 30 years of progress in guaranteeing access to high-quality health care and treatment to all parts of the population.

➤ Pensions

13. This is the tangible consequence of fiscal austerity measures for older people. These measures have resulted in the freezing, and in some cases reduction, of pensions, and cuts in social benefits, together with a hike in prices for health care, public transport, gas, electricity and food. They have therefore led to a deterioration in the living conditions of older people on low incomes, especially those residing in isolated rural areas.

14. The increase in poverty and the reduction in state support are exacerbating feelings of marginalisation within society, impacting on overall social cohesion. Welfare cuts combined with rising inequality are generating social tensions.

15. The crisis and reforms in most European countries are having an impact on the level of pensions and heightening the risk of poverty among older people, particularly women. This is because more time spent out of work and temporary reductions in income will be reflected in future pension benefits, which depend on contributions made throughout a person's working life. This is especially true for women, who still tend to have the most precarious, lowest-skilled and lowest-paid jobs.

1.3. A new Commission, but what changes will it make and what is its political agenda?

16. President Juncker has announced an investment programme of €315 billion. According to the ETUC, "the investment plan is not enough, but it is a start". At the same time, the ETUC is concerned that it will be hard to generate €315 billion investment from just €21 billion public money (mainly guarantees). And what will be the actual economic impact of €315 billion over three years – i.e. €105 billion per year – when the investment shortfall every year since the crisis is estimated to be at least €280 billion a year? FERPA supports the ETUC's proposal to create an investment plan of 2% of GDP, approximately €250 billion per year, for 10 years.

17. The other problem is that in today's European economic governance, the focus remains firstly on fiscal stability, i.e. cutting public deficit and public sector debt, and secondly on production cost competitiveness, which means competing against each other by cutting jobs and wages. Meanwhile, the objectives of economic recovery, namely a strong industrial policy favouring sustainable growth, more and better well-paid jobs, and better social cohesion, are effectively relegated to second place.

18. FERPA wants to see European responses that address the dangers created by austerity: increasing inequality, structural unemployment, the rise of populist movements, and human suffering. In other words, the social dimension must be placed at the heart of European economic governance.

2. FERPA - a strong and effective trade union despite a challenging environment

2.1. An unflagging commitment to retired and older people

19. It is against this difficult backdrop that FERPA, proud and strong after 22 years of existence, has continued its action and engagement in favour of retired and older people within the EU and, first and foremost, its own members.

20. In recent years, FERPA has confirmed its vocation as a trade union, not an association of retired persons. It has therefore taken part in all of the campaigns and mobilisations launched both by the ETUC and at the various national levels.

21. It has developed its own campaigning projects on issues such as poverty and autonomy among older people. It has continued its work to promote gender equality and has sought to better understand the situation of retired women in Europe, which is a direct outcome of their living and working conditions during their active lives. Its Women's Committee has forged a collaboration with the ETUC Women's Committee.

2.2. In partnership with the ETUC

22. Although FERPA has not yet achieved full recognition within the ETUC, in particular the right to vote in its various bodies (a right which remains to be won), it has increased its presence in that organisation by participating actively in its internal bodies, including its Social Protection Working Group. In 2012, FERPA co-organised and co-hosted, with the participation of a large delegation of its members, the Intergenerational Seminar on Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, in Larnaca, Cyprus, with the aim of ensuring continuity between policies targeting young people, people of working age and retirees. In the second half of 2014, FERPA and its organisations were heavily involved and engaged in the decentralised seminars co-organised with the ETUC, the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and the NGO Solidar, on the theme of care for older people ("Who cares?").

23. FERPA will make a further attempt to obtain recognition among ETUC members as a fully-fledged European Trade Union Federation, in particular with the right to vote in ETUC bodies.

2.3. Building on greater recognition by the European Commission and Parliament

24. Work undertaken with the European Commission, in particular on the European Citizens' Initiative, allowed us to strengthen our presence and our already close contacts, especially in DG Employment and Social Affairs, and to gain recognition as credible interlocutors in the area of care for older people, even though the outcome of our first Citizens' Initiative fell short of our expectations.

25. Relations with the European Parliament were also strengthened. At the successful conference organised with the European Socialists and Democrats in May 2013, FERPA greatly impressed the MEPs with its ability to mobilise hundreds of people from across Europe.

2.4. Stepping up to challenges in a difficult environment

26. Despite a difficult environment over the past four years, FERPA has continued to fight and to establish itself as a valued partner in improving the lives of retired and older people in a context of inter- and intra-generational solidarity. This battle to achieve our objectives reflects our commitment for the coming term, despite the significant challenges that lie ahead.

27. One of the main challenges we face is to combat mounting euroscepticism, as evidenced by the results of the latest European Parliament elections. Our citizens feel 'disenchantment' with Europe. Whereas a decade ago, at the time of enlargement, we could dream of 'more Europe', now the risk is of 'less Europe'.

28. FERPA and its organisations want a Europe that brings people together and unites them. They want a Europe that teaches its citizens to better understand each other and to live together, a Europe of solidarity for all ages and all groups. They must take up this challenge and fight alongside the ETUC to establish the conditions and means necessary to win the European battle. This must be done by engaging and mobilising to achieve our specific demands, namely ensuring that all citizens, particularly older and retired people, can live dignified lives in a European Union based on tolerance, in which social matters are once again a central priority.

3. FERPA's demands with a view to restoring the priority given to the social dimension in European integration

3.1. FERPA's number-one priority: taking action to promote inter- and intra-generational solidarity

29. The future of social protection systems and the quality of pension and health systems very much depend on the economic situation in the European Union. Against this backdrop, FERPA endorses the ETUC's demands for "a new start for Europe", involving for example:

- an investment of 2% of GDP;
- the end of the monopoly of the financial markets with their power to decide which Member States have access to funding and under what conditions.

30. Fighting alongside workers' trade unions for more and better jobs by fostering productive and sustainable investments is a way of safeguarding and enhancing the financing of social systems, based on a spirit of solidarity and far removed from stock-market speculation.

31. In addition, it is a way of ensuring a decent income for households across Europe and a standard of living for European retired people that protects their dignity, and of thereby supporting demand.

32. This also involves a right, guaranteed by the public authorities, to high-quality education and training for everyone, throughout their lives, starting with the youngest members of society but also to enable workers to deal with new production requirements or the development of their job and even give them the chance to change jobs; and last but not least, to enable more older people to live in dignity, actively participate in social life and continue to make their contribution.

33. There must be high-quality, affordable public services accessible for everyone, and in particular for the most vulnerable.

34. Fighting for welfare as a driver of development, research, innovation and high-quality employment also involves fighting for fairer tax systems that place less of a burden on labour and instead draw more on capital income. It is also about channelling the proceeds of the tax on financial transactions into the social domain and, finally, combating tax evasion and fraud and tax havens. However, cross-border solutions must be found. In particular, the European Commission should take measures to combat all forms of tax fraud, which means having a clear picture of the situation first. The European Commission should thus impose targets on the Member States and take action against those Member States that fail to meet the targets, as with the annual budget controls. In this way, tax fraud within the European Union can be combated. Fair taxation in the EU will provide the resources to invest in European social reforms.

For funding the welfare state through taxes and contributions is a necessity. It is a matter of national solidarity.

► *A shared objective for FERPA and the ETUC: changing course to prioritise the social dimension*

3.2. An urgent priority: adopting a more ambitious European social policy

35. The unemployment rate in the European Union today has reached a high level, regularly shooting above the symbolic 10% mark in the years since 2012. The successor to the Lisbon Strategy, the Europe 2020 strategy, features among its main objectives creation and improvement of job, and lifting 20 million people out of poverty by the end of the decade.

36. However, Europe 2020 is evidently not on the same footing as the procedures of the European Semester and the Annual Growth Survey. Although the European Commission stresses that the order in which the five priorities for the semester are listed – fiscal consolidation, restoring lending, promoting growth and competitiveness, tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis, and modernising public administration – "does not reflect a hierarchy of priorities", the Europe 2020 goals are clearly subordinate to the economic targets of the European Semester.

37. Furthermore, the priority given to austerity policies to achieve fiscal consolidation has counterproductive and negative effects for innovation, research and development, employment – with 26 million unemployed, including 5 million young people aged under 25 – and poverty reduction (at a time when the risk of poverty is growing, with 120 million Europeans living in or at risk of poverty).

38. Accordingly, FERPA, together with the ETUC, is calling for the Europe 2020 strategy to be abandoned, since its objectives are not considered binding or compulsory, unlike other criteria such as the austerity measures and the deficit reduction criteria. It is therefore demanding a more efficient instrument and an ambitious social policy agenda.

38a. FERPA believes there is an urgent need to raise pension levels across Europe in order to increase the purchasing power of retired people and help drive the recovery of Europe's economies.

► ***For FERPA and the ETUC, a demand and a mobilisation: yes to sustainable and high-quality jobs, no to precarity***

3.3. Combating the privatisation of social security and speculation risks

39. In the face of the budgetary restriction measures imposed by European countries under pressure from the financial markets, social budgets are being squeezed. On the pretext of a necessary fiscal consolidation drive, states are making substantial cuts in their social security spending, in some cases delegating expenditure for which they are responsible to the private sector.

40. Thus, for example, the reduced contribution of social security to medical expenses and the growing share of these costs borne by patients themselves means that patients are induced and encouraged to take out private insurance to cover their expenses.

41. An increasing number of them – especially among older people – are deterred from seeking medical treatment at all. To combat this trend, there must be investment in prevention – a necessary development in view of the ageing population.

42. The same goes for the pensions sector. The anxiety surrounding the future of state pension systems that has been sustained by the financial markets and by government austerity measures means that workers, in particular those younger workers that can afford it, are more likely to be lured by private pension funds, without realising that they are exposing their future pensions to the vagaries of the financial markets and stock-market speculation.

43. This creeping form of social security privatisation is leading to the creation of different levels of social security coverage depending on the beneficiaries' resources, resulting in injustice and exclusion, and compromising the founding principles of social security, namely that everyone contributes on the basis of his or her means but receives benefits on the basis of his or her needs.

► ***In the name of fairness and solidarity, FERPA will combat any attempt to compromise the founding principles of social security.***

3.4. Tackling all forms of poverty to protect the dignity of older people now and in the future

44. Multiple factors are heightening the risk of poverty among older and retired people now and in the future:

- Raising of the statutory pension age despite a precarious labour market
- More stringent pension eligibility criteria
- Growing fragmentation and increasingly incomplete nature of careers with regard to the qualifying conditions for pension rights
- Failure of pensions to take into account career breaks to bring up a child or care for or provide support to a parent who can no longer cope by themselves
- Freezing or even reduction of pensions.

45. Moreover, this risk is even greater for older and retired women with, as one would expect, high poverty rates for retired women in those countries having the lowest living standards: half of retired women in Portugal fall into the poverty bracket and more than 35% on average in the UK, the Republic of Ireland and Greece. Since 2008, the crisis has made the situation even worse. In 10 out of 27 countries, the risk of poverty for those over 65 is higher than for the working population (those aged 18-64). In 8 out of 27 countries, older people are poorer than all the other population groups combined.

46. While women (17%) – and especially single women (25%) – are generally at greater risk of poverty than men (16%), this risk is even higher among older women (22%) than among older men (17%).

47. All this is compounded by rising housing costs and energy bills, meaning that pensioners – whose pensions have deteriorated – are finding it more and more difficult to live in decent conditions, particularly as they face discrimination in access to social housing.

► ***FERPA is committed to combating the social recession caused by austerity measures by stepping up the fight against poverty and mechanisms of impoverishment and by taking action to ensure that older people have the resources they need to live in dignity.***

3.5. A right still to be won for retired and older people now and in the future: guaranteed high-quality care and support for their health condition

48. Although not solely linked to old age, it is a fact that getting older can bring with it increased health problems and a loss of independence.

49. People who have lost their independence should be allowed to stay in their own homes wherever possible. Older people must have a choice between staying in their own homes or being looked after in a care home. Home-care services and the way they are organised and funded must be expanded and greatly improved.

50. Public authorities must ensure the quality of services provided by home-help companies and organisations.

51. In particular, this means improving coordination between care providers and improving their working conditions, pay and, above all, training.

52. It is also important to develop lifelong prevention, both social prevention and preventive health care.

53. The costs associated with loss of independence, whether due to disability or old age, must be covered by national welfare systems.

54. In dealing with this situation, it would appear that in most Member States medical cover can be largely provided within the social security system. However, things are very different when it comes to paying for the support required by older people, whether in an institution or at home.

55. The cost of such care is very high and most often cannot be paid for by the individuals concerned, for example out of the pensions they receive, especially as the amount of such pensions has been reduced or frozen under the fiscal austerity plans introduced within the EU.

56. Moving into a care home is very often seen as a last resort and is a distressing experience for many older people. The transition between living at home and living in a care home must be improved and supported. The quality of care and entertainment provided is key.

57. Moreover, the care provided in nursing homes is being made problematic for the individuals concerned and their families due to the withdrawal of the public sector from such institutions in favour of the private, mainly profit-making, sector. Such 'privatisation' is becoming synonymous with spiralling and prohibitive costs and poorer quality service due to profitability targets and the pressure placed on staff, whose number, pay and training are often reduced to the bare minimum.

58. To pay for their care costs, whether at home or in an institution, older people sometimes have to sell their home, if they own it, rely on relatives, assuming that they have relatives and they can afford the costs, since they too are being squeezed by austerity, or, failing that, rely on support services.

59. These individuals, particularly the elderly and widows/widowers, also suffer from problems of loneliness, abandonment and even abuse. They find themselves socially excluded and at risk of poverty.

60. As a consequence of the social and economic crisis currently affecting the European Union, there has been a considerable increase in all forms of abuse, with older people particularly affected on an emotional, physical, sexual, psychological and economic level. Such abuse takes place in both institutional and administrative settings and within families.

61. This risk of violence and abuse primarily affects older people, and women in particular. Out of respect for older people, steps must be taken to stamp out abuse and bullying. However, there must also be rigorous monitoring of the quality of services provided. It is vital that staff are qualified, properly paid and deployed in sufficient numbers. FERPA must keep up its work on this issue.

62. As for the carers, who are often family members and often elderly themselves, they too face considerable difficulties, whether it be in terms of administrative procedures or support, and lack recognition and social rights. Family carers must therefore be given social security entitlements for the periods they spend looking after a dependent person – periods not already covered – and receive the necessary assistance as well as a right to training and respite.

63. In view of this, FERPA takes action with its organisations, both within individual Member States and at European level, to ensure that every person in the European Union, whatever their age or family situation, who has a disability or a health condition requiring long-term care, can receive the high-quality care and support they require.

64. With this in mind, FERPA will keep close track of initiatives and will work with organisations such as the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) to seek a legal basis for enshrining human dignity in social care in European law.

► ***FERPA believes that acting to ensure that everybody has the conditions they need to grow old well is not a luxury but a necessity.***

3.6. Combating all forms of discrimination

65. The current austerity policies proposed and advocated by the European Commission and adopted by the majority of governments are having a direct negative effect on social cohesion within Member States and are fuelling xenophobia, tensions between and among social classes and anti-European sentiment.

66. At times of crisis, there is a strong tendency (which quickly becomes a reality) to engage in discriminatory behaviour. This reflects an underlying attitude that exists irrespective of the economic situation. The feeling of insecurity vis-à-vis those whose colour, gender, age, health, lifestyle, religion or worldview differs from our own is a constant in society. But when difficulties arise, attitudes and behaviours harden. Women, migrants, older people and/or people with disabilities are the first to feel the effects, becoming scapegoats for the problems experienced by their fellow citizens.

67. Obviously, there are provisions in European law prohibiting any form of discrimination. Two Directives were adopted in 2000, one on racial equality, the other on equal treatment in employment and occupation, which include provisions prohibiting age-based discrimination in the workplace and which require Member States to establish a legal framework outlawing discrimination. Similarly, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights reaffirms the importance of

the principle of non-discrimination, particularly on grounds of language, membership of a national minority or social origin.

68. As for the principle of equal pay for men and women, this has been in the EU Treaty from the outset.

69. However, it is clear that no amount of legislation alone can change people's behaviour. We need to convince people and mobilise to achieve these objectives and to change mentalities and behaviour.

► ***FERPA confirms its determination and the mobilisation of its organisations to combat all forms of discrimination, particularly those affecting women.***

3.7. A stronger FERPA, open to organisations that share and can further its objectives

70. FERPA believes that a stronger organisation for retired people, which carries weight in Europe, is a necessity. The number of union members determines the balance of power needed to develop a response to the social needs of retired and older people. To bolster its influence, FERPA will also continue to engage with other retired persons' organisations in Europe which are not FERPA members.

71. For FERPA, there can be no question of leaving others to act in the areas that concern it. Retired people, via their trade unions, should always be consulted before any decisions are taken. However, it is also aware that it cannot achieve its objectives alone, particularly in the current environment.

72. That is why, over the next four years, it will continue to participate actively in the ETUC, in the various bodies in which it is represented, to ensure that the voices of retired and older people are heard and their demands are taken into account. It will also join any ETUC mobilisations that dovetail with its own demands, in order to further its founding principle of intergenerational solidarity.

73. In addition, FERPA will continue to meet, engage and enter into ad-hoc alliances with European organisations that share its objectives, in order to make those objectives a reality.

74. FERPA will be a strong and dynamic organisation that develops its initiatives in line with its objectives and which actively seeks to cooperate with like-minded partners.

75. As regards the European Commission and Parliament, FERPA, with the agreement of its Executive Committee, will take all necessary and appropriate initiatives to make its voice heard, and those of retired and older people, so that their concerns and problems are properly taken into account by these institutions.

► ***A strong and dynamic FERPA that unites others around its objectives, within the European Union***

Ensuring that people can live and grow old with dignity is what drives FERPA's action and commitment. If this goal is to become a reality, all FERPA member organisations must unite with the ETUC, mobilise and force their respective governments to act in order to secure a future in which everyone can say that Europe is a good place in which to live and grow old well 'together'. Our success in achieving this objective will depend on our mobilisation and determination. Women, men, the people we love are counting on us, on FERPA: we must not let them down.