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ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

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ETUCE Activity Report on

Higher education and research

To BFUG Plenary meeting 27-28 September, 2018 Vienna

The *European Trade Union Committee for Education* (ETUCE) is a recognised European social partner for education and represents 11 million teachers and educators affiliated to 131 education trade unions across 49 European countries. It was established in 1975 and, since 2010, has been the *Regional European Structure of Education International* (EI). It is also a European Trade Union Federation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). ETUCE is composed of national trade unions of teachers and other staff at all levels of general education, including higher education and research.

ETUCE, as a recognised social partner at the European level, is committed to enhancing and strengthening social dialogue at European, national, regional and local level. The European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education (ESSDE) gathers national delegates from ETUCE and the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) member organisations in order to debate, identify and promote common viewpoints at the European level.

ETUCE and its member organisations take actions on the issues and challenges specific to the higher education and research sector. Such particularities include public/private developments in higher education funding, the autonomy of universities and academic freedom, supportive environment and social dialogue on sectoral matters, as well as the mobility of academics and gender equality, pay and working conditions, and social protection for those working in the sector.

The following report is a summary of ETUCE activities **between November 2017 and September 2018**.

Highlights of discussions of the ETUCE Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC)

One key component of ETUCE's overarching action plan regarding higher education and research is the establishment of the *Higher Education and Research Standing Committee* (HERSC). This permanent body of ETUCE represents 45 ETUCE member organisations whose membership covers higher education and research staff. HERSC meets twice a year and discusses education trade unions' reactions to higher education and research policies in Europe.

On 9th-10th April 2018, the Standing Committee met in Brussels to discuss the following issues:

- The key elements for the success of the European Higher Education Area and the future of the Bologna Process;
- Academic staff mobility and the status and recognition of teaching in the representatives' respective countries,
- Gender equality in universities and research centres,
- European Union initiative on graduate tracking,
- The new European Sectoral Social Dialogue for Education work programme.

On 10-11 September 2018, the Standing Committee met in Tallinn to discuss the following issues:

- Higher education in Estonia and the strategy higher education and researchers' trade union in Estonia
- The organisation of higher education and research staff;
- Democratic institutional governance
- The outcomes of the Bologna Process Paris ministerial meeting,
- Highlights of the international work of Education International (UNESCO, ILO, WTO, OECD)
- Recent European policy developments including the Austrian Council Presidency and an update on the Sorbonne process, and.

Strengthening academic freedom in Europe

ETUCE's Higher Education and Research Standing Committee has prepared a Resolution on *Strengthening academic freedom in Europe*. It will be discussed and adopted by the statutory ETUCE Special Conference which will gather the representatives of each education trade unions in Europe for a meeting in Athens on 27-28 November 2018.

The Standing Committee highlights in this resolution that these are serious violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are on the rise throughout the European Higher Education Area, such as dismissal and arrest of higher education staff, disrespect of scientific knowledge, the commodification of education, heavy-handed quality assessment measures, and attacks on job security.

Therefore, in this resolution, ETUCE member organisations call for better constitutional and legislative protection of academic freedom at the European, national and institutional level, meaningful staff and student participation on higher education governing bodies and for secure contracts of employment, and the accountability of governments concerning the implementation and respect of principles and international standards

ETUCE Reflection to European Commission's initiatives

1. ETUCE position on Education in the post-2020 EU Strategy

On 14 November 2017 the European Commission published its Communication entitled [*Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture - The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017*](#). The text focuses on setting up new policy goals on education for the 2018-20 period and beyond.

In response to the European Commission's Communication, ETUCE member organizations discussed and adopted a position, wherein ETUCE calls for

- continuous professional development of teachers,
- effective social dialogue to improve teachers' status,
- more focus on the arts and foreign language learning,
- a more ambitious target for GDP investment in education, an education free from privatisation
- continuous professional development on gender equality in education, equal representation of women in decision-making,
- a clear agenda for Europe to support the integration of refugees and migrants to education.

ETUCE also stresses that the European Education Area should concentrate on building resilience, inclusion and well-being.

As regards qualification recognition, ETUCE acknowledges that the “**Sorbonne Process**” seems like a good idea but stresses that it should be based on ensuring the quality of education at all levels defined and monitored by national quality assurance systems. ETUCE therefore calls for further development of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). The Commission's idea of “**European Universities**”, ETUCE urges that such universities should be publicly-financed institutions and that competition between them should be based on quality research and training.

The statement can be found here:

<https://www.csee-etuce.org/images/attachments/ETUCE-views-on-education-in-post-2020.pdf>

2. ETUCE Position on the European Commission initiative: Building Stronger Europe

In response to the *European Commission's Communication on Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies*, ETUCE calls for more involvement of education sector social partners in:

- defining the European Education Area objectives,
- European Universities which are diverse and inclusive,
- free access to education regardless of socio-economic background,
- support teachers to fight the rise of populism and xenophobia;
- improved status, training and working conditions for teachers;

- more support on how to improve language competences and the requirement of all foreign language teachers to be qualified teachers,
- and increased learning mobility for language learners via Erasmus and Erasmus+.

As regards the promotion of mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, ETUCE underlines that any such recognition will only be possible with well-developed quality assurance systems. ETUCE is against the harmonisation of the structure and content of upper secondary school systems and the creation of a unified quality control system as we consider them to be the responsibility of Members States' governments. ETUCE therefore emphasises better trust and recognition of secondary and vocational education when learners are entering higher education.

ETUCE reiterates the crucial role that national quality assurance plays in trusting qualification and programmes and fails to see how combining non-EU level tools, EU levels tools applicable only to higher education, and tools applicable to VET, will solve the problem of recognition.

Nevertheless, as regards the Directive of Recognition of Professional Qualifications (EC/55/2013), ETUCE agrees with the suggestion to make automatic recognition a bottom-up process without suggesting harmonisation of curricula, diplomas or education systems.

The statement is not available yet.

3. ETUCE Reaction to the Erasmus Proposal 2021-2027

In response to the European Commission's Erasmus Proposal 2021-2027, ETUCE supports the policy being based on the European Pillar for Social Rights and the European Charter's right to equality, the citizens-based approach of the programme, the policy's focus on the future implementation of the Paris Declaration, and the doubling of the budget.

However, ETUCE calls for:

- more emphasis on refugees and migrants who need help having their qualifications recognised and who require further training to enter the European education systems and labour market,
- more awareness of EU values through education,
- more transparency regarding the allocation of European citizens' money to be spent under the new Erasmus programme,
- a higher sum of money to be allocated to adult learning,
- a more supportive environment for teachers who deal with international students,
- increased grant funding to ensure that all students can take part in the new Erasmus programme,
- simplification of project applications, and the assurance that EU-level project outcomes will be broadly disseminated.

As regards higher education, ETUCE stipulates that validation of education and training periods abroad should be high priority. The regulation should therefore link budget

allocation to strict quality assurance procedures, descriptions of learning outcomes, and European tools which contribute to recognising educational experiences abroad and ensuring high quality, namely the European Quality and Effective Framework for Apprenticeship, the Bologna Process, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), and the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET).

ETUCE Representation in the Paris Ministerial Meeting (24-26 May, 2018)

ETUCE Preparation:

- [Press release: The future of the Bologna Process is jeopardised by inadequate working conditions and the low status of employees in the sector](#) (23 May)
- Press conference was organized with the French trade unions on 24 May.
- ETUCE call entitled "*Education Trade Unions' demands from the Paris Ministerial meeting*"¹ and Report "*Academics United for Quality Higher Education*"² were disseminated in the meeting
- [News item: ETUCE successful in supporting higher education and research staff](#)

In the opening ceremony of the event Susan Flocken, European Director underlined the importance to take further steps to reach gender equality in higher education and the role of education trade unions in reaching the Bologna objectives.

In the panel of a workshop on *Teaching and learning*, Andreas Keller, GEW, Vice-president of ETUCE underlined supportive working environment for academic staff and the importance of inclusiveness when European Universities Networks will be established among European universities for joint programmes.

Regarding Paris Ministerial meeting, ETUCE demanded:

- The better protection of academic freedom as one of the fundamental values of the Bologna process;
- The importance of greater core public investment in higher education and research;
- The need to ensure a supportive working environment for staff, including improved job security and working conditions, and
- A call for better recognition of teaching in higher education.

¹ https://www.csee-etu.org/images/attachments/2018-04-ETUCE-Call-to-Paris-Ministerial-meeting_EN.pdf

² <https://www.csee-etu.org/images/attachments/AcademicsUnitedforQualityHE-EN.pdf>

Funding in higher education and research

Ensuring public funding to higher education is a crucial part of ETUCE work at the European level. The economic crisis and the ensuing creation of the European Economic Governance Coordination mechanism (European Semester) and Europe 2020 Framework have led to the increasing influence on the European coordination mechanism on national socio-economic policies, including on public higher education and research.

ETUCE's surveys proved that cuts in national public budget throughout Europe have resulted in negative consequences in quality in the education sector, including public higher education and research.

Therefore, ETUCE closely follows the process and various mechanisms of Economic and Monetary Governance, and more specifically the evolutions of the European Semester both as a system of economic governance and as a process of policy coordination. From ETUCE's perspective the 2018 *Country Specific Recommendations* (CSRs) revealed some visible worrisome patterns. Regarding higher education and research, many CSRs advocated for reforms of higher education, in particular to increase the share of performance-based funding of research institutions and a demand for enhanced cooperation between businesses and universities, building upon a trend that was present in last year's CSRs, which ETUCE highlighted in last year's Activity Report.

The 2018 cycle of the European Semester was kicked off with the unveiling of the Annual Growth Survey in November 2017, and followed by the publication of the 2018 Country Reports. The Country Reports are European Commission-issued assessments of Member States' economic and social policies, and constitute a crucial basis for the CSRs. ETUCE produced a [thematic overview](#)³ on the content of the 2018 Country Reports, which revealed the choice of European policy makers to carry on with the promotion of enhanced private/public partnerships and performance-based funding of higher education and research institutions, thus indicating that such initiatives will be further supported in the [2018 CSRs](#).

Following their publication in May 2018, while welcoming the European Commission's call for enhanced investment in education and research (DE, NL, ES, UK), ETUCE rang an alarm bell for those countries recommended to increase private investment in research, to enhance the cooperation between businesses and universities and performance-based funding (EE, DE, LH, NL ,ES). ETUCE denounces the detrimental effects of an emerging emphasis on the marketable aspects of higher education and on the commercialisation of higher educational outcomes.

Education trade unions have publicly opposed these trends, as they risk enhancing the commercialisation and privatisation of higher education and research, and therefore pose a threat to institutional autonomy, academic freedom, collegial governance and working

³ This document is available at: https://www.csee-etuce.org/images/attachments/Final_ET_Country-reports-2018.pdf

conditions for staff in higher education and research. These trends have also negative consequences in the implementation of the Bologna process.

ETUCE effectively promotes investment, academic freedom, and fair working conditions in higher education and research through a dynamic two-way process: 1, by informing ETUCE member organisations on their opportunities to influence the process of the European Semester, and 2, by raising the awareness of policy-makers at national and European level on education workers' viewpoints on these issues. The two-year research conducted by the University of Nottingham and commissioned by ETUCE concluded with a [research report](#) "Education and Training Policy in the European Semester – Public Investment, Public Policy, Social Dialogue and Privatisation Patterns across Europe" (ETUCE, 2017), available in English, French and German. This report reveals how higher education stands out as that part of education systems most exposed to privatisation pressure. The danger is that universities become increasingly driven by commercial imperatives, with concomitant risks to their public mission and to academic freedom.

Solidarity

[In February 2018](#), ETUCE expressed its indignation regarding the proposal from the employers' representative (Universities UK) to end the defined benefit element of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) pension scheme. According to the University and College Union, [UCU](#), one of the ETUCE member organisations in the United Kingdom, that would leave a typical lecturer approx., 11,270 Euro a year worse off in retirement than under the current set-up.

In mid-April 2018, UCU [won major concessions](#) after a series of strikes to protect the guaranteed pension benefits of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS).

More information:

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