



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
AND RESEARCH



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## UPDATE FROM EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

### ETUCE Activity Report on Higher education and research

#### To BFUG Plenary meeting 9-10 November, 2017 Tartu

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 May 2017 and November 2017**.

### **Highlights of discussions of the ETUCE Higher Education and Research Standing Committee**

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 10-11 September, 2017 HERSC met in Brussels to discuss about the following issues:

#### *1. The role of Higher Education and Research trade unions in implementing the Bologna Process and preparation to the Paris Ministerial Meeting (2018)*

Education trade unions of the higher education sector discussed about a possible report to be presented to the Paris Ministerial meeting on the topics the education unions are the most concerned about: public investment, fundamental values, supportive environment, and recognition of teaching.

## *2. Enhancing the status and recognition of teaching in Higher Education*

The discussion, following guest speaker's presentation from EUA, emphasised the problem of the changing role of university learning and teaching reflected in the EU Modernisation agenda and Bologna process, and what challenges these factors bring to university staff. Discussing the *Principles for Enhancing Teaching and Learning in the European Higher Education* prepared by EFFECT project partners (ETUCE is one of the project partners), Education trade unions of the higher education sector recommended adding a stronger focus on casualisation and precarious work as issues affecting teaching in higher education, the replacement of teaching with technologies, and the importance of social dialogue.

## *3. The role of Higher Education and Research in supporting refugees and migrants, and challenging extremism and promoting democracy*

Education trade unions of the higher education sector underlined several important issues regarding the integration of migrants and refugees in higher education, including the essential benefits of linguistic diversity and the opportunity of migrant students to communicate in their mother tongue; the necessity to foster English programmes in higher education institutions around the EU; and the importance of recognising that in many cases the distinction between migration for economic reasons and fleeing war or persecution is artificial.

## *4. Tackling casualisation and precarious work in Higher Education and Research*

Education trade unions discussed major challenges in tackling casualisation and precarious work in higher education and research. The problem of precarious work is common for all countries, and is more present in private universities where there is less trade union coverage. Unspecified term contracts (from few months to one year) or 1-year contracts usually do not have the same social benefits and security, part-time contracts, which usually lead to academics having more working time that is agreed in the contract. Precarious work has consequences in terms of quality of teaching and membership of the unions: teachers with short-term contracts do not want to join unions as they are afraid of losing their job or cannot afford the membership fee. Young teachers are more prone to have short-term contracts and wages lower than the national minimum wage, while a significant percentage of currently serving professors will soon retire and the research profession is not attractive to young people. There is also a gender aspect to the prevalence of precariousness: women are more prone to short-term contracts in higher education. Another challenge is that researchers are to a large extent funded by grants so they have to spend a lot of time filling in forms and applying for grants. Moreover, precarious employment makes higher education unattractive for researchers from other countries. Education trade unions of the higher education sector highlighted that the main reason for precarity is not the lack of funding, but the convenience of short-term contracts for the employer. It was also noted that there is a lack of accurate data on precarious employment in higher education and the issue is often not addressed at political level.

HERSC members also shared best practices of addressing these issues by the unions and made suggestions for successful strategies.

## **ETUCE Reflection to European Commission's initiatives**

### *1. European Commission's Communication on a Renewed EU agenda for higher education*

In its meeting on 23-24 October, the ETUCE Committee unanimously adopted the [ETUCE views on the European Commission's Communication on a Renewed EU agenda for higher education](#). The aim of the Commission's proposal is to support EU countries in renewing their higher education systems in order to ensure that graduates are highly skilled and socially engaged.

Education trade unions in the higher education sector welcome the emphasis the Communication puts on the need for pedagogical training and systematic investment in continuous professional development of higher education teachers in the proposal.

While additional work-based learning component of higher education can be beneficial for students, education trade unions in the higher education sector are concerned that the document focuses too prominently on preparing students only for the short-term needs of the labour market. The key role of

universities in society is generating and disseminating knowledge and developing and sharing their independent analysis and critiques with the wider society. ETUCE is concerned about the business-centred approach of the proposal towards research expressed in the proposed expansion of 'Higher Education for Smart Specialisation'. Finally, as the European Commission stresses the importance of good institutional leadership and effective internal cooperation and resource management, ETUCE underlines that a successful institutional leadership should be based on effective social dialogue with education trade unions and on collegial governance.

## *2. European Commission's proposals for a Council Recommendation on Tracking Graduates*

[ETUCE views on the European Commission's proposals for a Council Recommendation on Tracking Graduates](#) were discussed with education trade unions represented in the *Higher Education and Research Standing Committee*, then adopted by the ETUCE Committee on 24 October.

Education trade unions in the higher education sector welcomed that the proposal suggests that each Member State should collect the same data about graduates, early drop-out and NEETS (people not in in education, employment or training) which can help with identifying solutions regarding youth unemployment and to provide feedback to vocational education and higher education institutions.

However, ETUCE underlined that the graduates' achievements need to be analysed and used with great sensitivity as the proposal puts emphasis on the role of education without considering companies' job offers for graduates, salary and quality working conditions, recruitment procedures and employers' responsibility to invest in continuous upskilling of employees. We highlighted that graduate tracking should not be used to evaluate individual institutions with a view to linking employability rates to performance-based funding of schools and universities.

## *3. 30th Anniversary of the Erasmus student exchange programme*

Following the year-long celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus exchange programme, announced by the European Commission in 2017, ETUCE prepared a statement suggesting the ways to strengthen Erasmus in the future. The ETUCE Committee unanimously adopted the [ETUCE statement on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Erasmus exchange programme](#) on 23-24 October 2017.

The education trade unions in the higher education sector consider the Erasmus exchange programme to be overall a successful programme that promotes the value of the internationalisation of higher education and has a positive effect on the employability of mobile students in Europe and beyond.

However, the current data shows that majority of mobile students come from privileged socio-economic and academic family backgrounds, while the insufficiency of Erasmus grants provided for studying abroad is mentioned by many students as the main obstacles to participating in Erasmus programme. Therefore, education trade unions in the higher education sector suggest to make the Erasmus programme as inclusive as possible and to increase the financial assistance to Erasmus students in order to provide people from disadvantaged backgrounds with more opportunities to access quality higher education.

Furthermore, the education trade unions in the higher education sector are concerned about the working conditions of the teachers who work with Erasmus students and they urge policy makers to pay more attention to building a supportive environment for teachers and educational personnel and providing additional financial support and sufficient continuous professional development for academic staff and researchers who teach international students.

## **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 2016 *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. The 2017 cycle of the European Semester was kicked off with the unveiling of the Annual Growth Survey in November 2016, and followed by the publication of the 2017 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](#)<sup>1</sup> on the content of the 2017 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 [2017 CSRs](#). Following their publication in May 2017, while welcoming the European Commission's call for enhanced investment in education and research (DE, NL, ES), 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, MT). In September 2017, at the occasion of the social partners' consultation on the Annual Growth Survey 2018, ETUCE issued its [view on the education priorities](#) for the year to come, including by denouncing 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 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. In this respect, an awareness raising conference was organised by ETUCE in Brussels on 30 May 2017 titled "Education in Europe: Public Investment, Privatisation and Reforms: What role do education trade unions play?". The conference was the occasion to unveil the results of a two-year research conducted by the University of Nottingham and commissioned by ETUCE. The [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, reveals how higher education stands out as that part of education systems most exposed to privatisation pressure.

## Solidarity

In some countries involved in the Bologna Process, there have been major violations of academic freedom and collegial governance over the past year. EI/ETUCE have been actively involved in responding to these developments.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt in Turkey, EI/ETUCE together with other international and European institutions and organisations expressed their greatest concerns about the Turkish government's mass dismissals of public employees, especially Turkish education personnel. Higher education teachers and researcher who signed the petition "Academics for Peace" have been concerned as well and even before the coup attempt. ETUCE opposes that the large-scale and undemocratic actions undertaken by the Turkish authorities undermine not only the well-functioning of academic freedom but jeopardise quality education for all in Turkey as a whole. In the last few months, EI/ETUCE have repeatedly called on the Turkish government to respect their international commitments and obligations.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is available at: [https://www.csee-etuice.org/images/Reports/2017\\_ALL\\_Country-Reports-Thematic-Overview.pdf](https://www.csee-etuice.org/images/Reports/2017_ALL_Country-Reports-Thematic-Overview.pdf)

ETUCE participated in a mission organised by the European Trade Union Confederation to Turkey in May 2017 where the delegation had an opportunity to speak to Turkish government representatives on the pressure on the country's public sector.

On 7 September, ETUCE together with one of its member organisations in Belgium, Centrale Générale des Services Publics Enseignement, FGTB-CGSP, expressed their solidarity with Eđitim Sen's members, Nuriye Gülmen (a professor for literature) and Semih Özakça, who have been on hunger strike since 9 March 2017. Also the ETUCE Standing Committee for Higher Education and Research (HERSC) expressed their support.

On 16 May 2017, ETUCE expressed its solidarity with the Educational Institute of Scotland, EIS, in its campaign to ensure "equal pay for equal work" to even out Scotland's college lecturers' pay disparities.

### **High Level Event on SDG4 – Education 2030**

Education International organises a High Level Event on Strengthening accountability in the implementation of SDG4-Education 2030 in cooperation with UNESCO, in Paris, on 1 November 2017.

Two years have passed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

This high-level event aims to review the different countries' experiences in strengthening their governance and accountability systems, and to further the understanding of the opportunities and challenges arising from this effort for the effective realisation of SDG4-Education 2030 commitments. It will explore the different processes, mechanisms or instruments established by governments to promote accountability and transparency, including through more rigorous public monitoring and reporting. It will also explore how greater accountability can improve financing for education, hence contributing to the implementation of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda.

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