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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 4-5 April 2019, Bucharest

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. European Sectoral Social Dialogue (ESSDE) adopted a [Joint ETUCE/EFEE Declaration Towards a Framework of Action on the attractiveness of the teaching profession](#) in the ESSDE Plenary meeting on 19 November 2018.

ETUCE and its member organisations take actions on the issues and challenges specific to the higher education and research sector.

The following report is a summary of ETUCE activities **between October 2018 and February 2019**.

Resolution on Academic Freedom, adopted at the ETUCE Special Conference in November 2018

On 26-28 November 2018, at the occasion of its Special Conference in Athens, Greece, discussed the role of education trade unions in shaping the future of Europe. Empowering education trade unions through capacity building, trade union renewal and strong and effective social dialogue were at the core of the two-day debate among 300 delegates from 132 education trade unions across Europe.

ETUCE member organisations adopted a *Resolution Strengthening academic freedom in Europe*. It reaffirms that:

1. A key purpose of higher education and research should be to serve the public interest through extending knowledge and fostering critical thinking in expression in staff, students and society;
2. Academic freedom is essential in achieving these goals and to the development of democratic life;
3. Institutional autonomy, collegial governance and job security are vital elements in protecting academic freedom; Institutional autonomy, however, should not be used by higher education institutions as a pretext to limit the rights of higher education staff;
4. Academic freedom should apply to all types of higher education staff engaged in teaching and research.

Further information: [here](#)

ETUCE Campaign: “Shape the Future of Europe with Teachers”

ETUCE launched its “*Shape the Future of Europe with Teachers*” campaign at the Special Conference which took place in Athens in November 2018. Due to the many challenges facing Europe and its education systems, namely the privatisation of the education sector, austerity measures, the rise in xenophobia and populism and a teaching profession which fails to attract fresh graduates, ETUCE strongly felt that teachers’ and education trade unionists’ voices needed to be heard. In light of the European parliamentary elections in May 2019, the idea behind this campaign was to make four key demands to election candidates to raise awareness about the issues at stake.

The four key demands are:

- Quality education for all;
- Increased public investment and a more attractive teaching profession;
- Strengthened social dialogue and the involvement of education trade unions in decision-making;
- The promotion of democratic citizenship and inclusion.

Within the framework of this campaign, a public hearing was held in Brussels on 12 March 2019. A key note speech was delivered by the Education Attaché from the Permanent Representation of Romania to the EU on citizenship education and participants engaged in a panel discussion on the role of education, teachers, and academics for the future of Europe.

More information: [here](#)

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 21-22 February 2019, the Standing Committee met in Brussels to discuss the following issues:

- Outcomes of the Higher Education Working Group meetings of European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education: focus on impact of digitalisation and internationalisation on staff and institutions, ensuring supportive working environments in higher education and research, equality in recruitment, retention, and in diverse career pathways in higher education.
- The Bologna Process Anniversary Conference and the 2020 Ministerial Meeting;
- Fundamental values and the social dimension in higher education;
- The work of the Observatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum;
- Challenges relating to European quality assurance agencies.

More information: [here](#)

ETUCE Reaction to the Horizon Europe Programme 2021-2027

In response to the European Commission's Horizon Europe Proposal 2021-2027, ETUCE member organisations adopted a statement which was sent to the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and rapporteurs of the European Parliament.

ETUCE welcomed the simplification of the application process, the specific measures aimed at benefiting the outermost regions, the establishment of research agendas in close liaison with the scientific community, the expectation that research must respect the code of ethics as outlined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the mention of values, inclusive and democratic societies.

However ETUCE calls for:

- all projects and institutions which are funded by the programme to prove that they respect the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers;
- more grants to be awarded to public research institutions;
- a restriction on Horizon funds being used to replace limited national budgets for research;
- increased funding for the European Research Area;
- less focus to be placed on industry-based research and innovation;
- more focus on research on the future EU-level education and training policies and on matters related to the social sciences;
- hosting institutions to respect the employment conditions of mobile researchers;
- more training to potential beneficiaries to enable them to submit quality applications;
- the protection of academic freedom of universities and freedom of research as well as the strengthening of the social dimension in higher education;
- the strengthening of the gender dimension with respect to the allocation of funding;
- researchers' rights to retain copyright to their work while promoting open access.

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 Social Governance, and more specifically the evolutions of the European Semester both as a system of economic governance and as a process of policy coordination, including in the education and training field.

The 2019 cycle of the European Semester was kicked off with the unveiling of the *Annual Growth Survey* in November 2018, and followed by the publication of the 2019 Country Reports. The Country Reports are European Commission-issued assessments of Member States' economic and social policies, and constitute a crucial basis for the *Country Specific Recommendations* CSRs. ETUCE produced a thematic overview on the content of the 2019 Country Reports, which revealed the choice of European policy makers to carry on with the promotion of business participation in universities' decisions to enhance science and business links, commercialisation of research outcomes, and increased collaboration between research, universities and enterprises, thus indicating that such initiatives will be further supported in the 2019 CSRs. The Country Reports recognised as well staff reductions and the deterioration of teaching and research conditions in higher education. The cuts in higher education investment have been the main cause of understaffed systems, precarity and low remuneration of academic staff (ES, FI, HR, IT, PL, and SI).

Following the Country reports' publication in February 2019, while welcoming the European Commission's call for enhanced investment in education and research (BG, HR, CZ, EE, FI, DE, GR, IE, IT, LV, LU, PL, RO, SK, ES, and UK), ETUCE rang an alarm bell for demands to enhance the cooperation between businesses and universities (BE, BG, HR, CZ, EE, FR, DE, LV, LT, PL, PT, SK, and SE). Though the new link between Country Reports and the EU Cohesion Policy budget can gear EU funding towards Country Reports priorities thus promoting quality inclusive education by enhancing access to and provision of tertiary education, teachers' competences and funding for education infrastructure, ETUCE denounces the detrimental effects of opening such EU public funding to market opportunities and blending finances in higher education and research.

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 urges for enhanced public investment, academic freedom, and fair working conditions in higher education and research through a dynamic three-way process: 1, by informing ETUCE member organisations on their opportunities to influence the process of the European policy coordination and governance (e.i. through the European Semester), 2, by raising the awareness of policy-makers at national and European level on education workers' viewpoints on these issues and 3, by promoting social partners' effective involvement in the use, management and governance of EU funds in the area of higher education and research, as to increase transparency, democratic governance, and to ensure that resources effectively meets those who are most in need, so as to address challenges of equity and equality in higher education systems across Europe.

Solidarity

[In February 2019](#), ETUCE Standing Committee for Higher Education and Research (HERSC) backed its French sister organisations' demands to withdraw the French Governments' plan to bring in higher tuition fees for students coming from countries outside the European Union to study in France.

In the run-up to the Estonian parliamentary elections of 3 March 2019, the Federation of the Estonian Universities, Institutions of Science, Research and Development (UNIVERSITAS) called on the Estonian political parties to insert the [Science and Higher Education sustainable development strategy](#) on the agenda as an emergent demand in late February 2019.

Reconfirming its strong solidarity with colleagues in Turkey, ETUCE took part in the [international symposium](#) "Education Trade Unions, Rights, Freedoms and Governance" organised by Egitim Sen on 6 and 7 March 2019 in Ankara, Turkey.

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