

ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

Statement

EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

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on the European Commission proposals in the framework of the European Semester 2012

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The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) would like to comment the proposal on [Communication on Action for Stability, Growth and Jobs](#) and on the [Country Specific Recommendations](#) on public spending and fiscal reforms of the EU countries, which were published by the European Commission on 30 May, 2012 in the framework of the second [European Semester](#).

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 135 Teacher Unions and 12.8 million teachers in all countries of Europe, 5.5 million teachers in the EU, from all levels of the education sector. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of teacher unions.



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1. General objectives

1.1 With regard to the **Communication on Action for Stability, Growth and Jobs**, we would like to remind the European Commission that education is a public service. Therefore, its objective should not be to generate profits but to give opportunity to all citizens to receive quality training and to get a chance for better qualification and employment. We believe that the EU Semester policy package has a broader influence on the education sector and on teachers than indicated in the proposals.

1.2 The education sector is facing a serious staffing crisis as a result of a significant number of dismissed teachers, mergers and closures of schools, a fast growing number of fixed-term and part-time contracts and reduced availability of permanent positions. Continued reduction in education spending will only exacerbate existing problems. For this reason we welcome the Communication of the European Commission as it lists protections in education investment within the context of “encouraging growth-friendly consolidation.” However, we would like to stress that it is necessary not only to maintain, but also increase, stable public investment in education. We are concerned that the Member States would not accept the recommendations on investment into education but that they would even further cut their budgets for education. ETUCE opposes the neo-liberal approach of slashing the public sector and increasing competition in all sectors as the only response to the economic crisis. Therefore, we call on the European Commission to deliver on its pledge to “use all the instruments of the new governance framework” in

urging Member States to protect education spending while laying out a clearer vision for “targeted investment.”

1.3 Unemployment in Europe has soared and it is not far-fetched to call today’s youth a lost generation. While unemployment rate in April 2012 was at 11 % in the Euro area and 10.3 % in the European Union, the rate in Spain inched towards 25 % and 50 % for its youth. We are greatly concerned that the recommendations of the European Commission lack strength to tackle this serious issue.

1.4 We call upon the European Commission to propose to the Member States to urgently take further and stronger measures to combat unemployment. Member States must focus on improved employment strategies for young people with a close link between economic and social policies. Internal devaluation via reduction in nominal wages has an adverse ripple effect for this target group. Member States should be advised to boost job creation for graduates. This would have a positive impact on the economy and help to improve the threatening economic situation in Europe. Creating fresh jobs for graduates would increase productivity, reduce unemployment costs, raise revenue, and assist in developing the knowledge economy.

1.5 We believe that the European Commission should make a reference to the future Proposal on Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning. It should also encourage Member States to increase their efforts to implement it as soon as possible. This would encourage mobility and assist in reducing unemployment among migrant workers.

1.6 We welcome that tackling early school leaving is presented as an important target in the European Commission’s Communication, including the improvement of skills.

1.7 As a result of the economic and financial crisis, social dialogue in many countries has grinded to a halt. To counter this trend, the European Commission should go by example in improving the consultation process with its social partners by taking concrete steps in augmenting their involvement. We call on the European Commission to urge the Member States to consult their respective social partners before presenting their fiscal positions. On education related recommendations we call for the European Commission to consult the European level social partners in education. If the “social partners” are to “play an important role in this dialogue,” the European Commission must take concrete steps to assist in making this a reality at both European and national level.

2. Country Specific Recommendations to Denmark¹

2.1 Regarding the Danish Country Specific Recommendations, we do not agree with the critique of the European Commission on the dropout rate and quality of the Danish vocational education sector. The provision of internships in the dual vocational education and training system in Denmark is the responsibility of the employers. As far as we are concerned, the demand for increasing the number of students and for improving quality is inconsistent, if the budget is not raised for the vocational education sector. Increasing

¹ Opinions received from DM and DLI, Denmark

funding is more essential to this sector taking into account also that the Danish enterprises find that not all vocational students are qualified for internships.

2.2 The European Commission could convince the Danish government to invest more in all education sectors with its previous policy papers. For instance the graph presented in the Commission Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care. Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow shows that the returns on investment at different levels of education and proves that investments in early childhood education and care are the most effective mean to growth.

2.3 We agree that the education sector can contribute to increase competitiveness but we strongly disapprove that the sole purpose of an education sector is to create competitiveness. Furthermore DLI wonders why education should be used as a tool to avoid large increase in wages in the future. We believe that education is not merely a service to the markets and a mean to growth but has a larger scope for each individual person.

2.4 We would like to underline that the expenses in primary and lower secondary education sector in Denmark for instance includes pensions for teachers while this is not the case for other countries. This must be taken into consideration when the European Commission makes a link between an expensive education sector and the quality of the education sector.

2.5 The Danish teachers' trade unions support initiatives for growth and opposed initiatives for austerity. We strongly disapprove the recommendations of the European Commission on wage policy in Denmark since it is a question of collective bargaining. Additionally, we identify here a remarkable change in the rhetoric (in particular in the Danish texts) from talking about securing the "welfare" and the welfare societies in Europe to talking only about "wealth", which of course is something completely different. We call upon the European Commission to change on this wording.

3. Country Specific Recommendations to France²

3.1 In the Country Specific Recommendations to France, improving youth employability is a welcomed objective. However, we believe that the proposal to boost apprenticeships will not necessarily lead to reducing early school leaving and improving the access to employment. Therefore, we urge the European Commission to propose to the French government to take on the responsibility to reduce early school leaving in all national programmes and to invest more in this field.

3.2 Concerning combating early school leaving, there are serious problems in France, such as lack of actual prevention actions within schools and lack of operational implementation support schemes or help for school leavers. Therefore, it is urgent that France initiates a real debate on the pupil/teachers ratios and on the organisation of teachings. We believe that tackling youth unemployment requires more and stable investment in human and financial resources at all levels of education.

² Opinion received from SNES-Education, France

3.3 The approach of the European Commission is not satisfactory as learning cannot automatically result in employment, when employment is dependent on the job creation. Initial and continuous training should not aim exclusively at preparing for the labour market, as a graduate of these schools is a human being and a citizen and not only an employee. Access to individual training should not be used by private companies for the only purpose of internal training, but each worker should have access to the training of his/her choice.

4. Country Specific Recommendations to Germany³

4.1 We believe that the European Commission is wrong in its analysis as well as in its recommendations for Germany.

The pretended success of the Federal Government in financing education is an expression of an insufficient overall financing of education as well as its mismanagement in the federal system. In many cases public spending for education is used ineffectively because the Federal Government has financial scopes within its budgets, but no competences to regulate important problematic issues in education policy. The latest example for this mismanagement is the “national scholarship programme”, wherein instead of the intended 10.000 scholarships, only 5.400 have been granted in 2011, the remaining funds were returned to the federal budget.

4.2 Moreover, the increase of education spending in relation to the gross domestic product (GDP) is essentially due to the support programmes following the financial crisis and the GDP which has dropped by more than 5% in 2009. During the perceptible stimulation of the economy in 2010 and 2011, the share of expenditures of the GDP could start to drop again.

4.3 The European Commission accepts as accurate that the education spending by the “Länder” and local authorities does not fulfill the requirements. However, the European Commission fails or does not want to recognise that it is exactly the constitutional debt brake that keeps the “Länder” from investing in education in a sustainable manner. In order to comply with the debt brake “Länder” and local authorities have made cuts in the field of education. 86% of public spending for education is borne by the “Länder” and local authorities. The percentage of education spending of the “Länder” in their budgets is between 30 and 40%. In order to comply with the debt brake, the “Länder” will be bound to cut education spending even more. This tendency threatens to go along with the downsizing of staff and low-cost solutions for instance in early childhood education. Thereby the aim to fight social discrimination in education cannot be achieved. The social divide in education will thus grow even further. Therefore, we urge the European Commission to recommend to the German Federal Government to withdraw the debt brake on the spending of the Länder for education.

4.4 Germany needs improved funding for education at all levels. Reasonable countermeasures in order to enable public budgets to do so could be (1) abandoning the

³ Opinion received from GEW, Germany

debt brake from the Federal Constitution in order to enable future investments in education, in consideration of the economic situation; (2) opening of new tax sources, especially a property tax for the benefit of the “Länder” as well as a financial transaction tax as well as (3) improving cooperation between the Federal Government and the “Länder” in education policy and education financing by amendments of the Federal law.

5. Country Specific Recommendations to Hungary⁴

5.1 The Country Specific Recommendations to Hungary focus on the recent higher education reform. The teacher trade unions agree with the aim of making reforms in Hungarian higher education and welcome the following goals: quality and the fragmentation of existing institutions. However, there are some principles and motions in the reform that are not in favour of the higher education sector or of employees.

5.2 First of all, the sudden and determined change of rates of the maximum number of students in the state-financed places in higher education institutions does not solve the existing problems. The reason for this is that the expected numbers of enrolment to engineering and natural sciences majors apparently are too high and contributed to unfilled places. This is a proof that the rise of numbers does not involve automatically the rise of the interest towards these fields of study.

5.3 Secondly, we stress that increase of mobility of students and employees of the universities is very significant. Empowering international value of university education could determine the future direction, for instance via a Euro bachelor Label, via re-accreditation of MEng, delivering joint degrees by foreign universities and the home university (Joint degrees, Dual degrees), and via Erasmus etc.. Above mentioned international possibilities could be factors in measuring the quality of universities.

5.4 Maintaining quality is also a determining element in the system (measured by determined quality indicators). We think that the conditions of qualitative university education are the following: good public education, an appropriate rate of students/tutors at universities, and appropriate financing. Taking into account the maintenance of talents, the Hungarian government should be advised to provide more measures against students’ drop-out from university and also measures against spin-out of study.

5.5 We are concerned about a conceptual problem in the future Hungarian strategy, which consists of withdrawal of funding for higher education. However, we believe that the European Commission could advise the Hungarian government that EU-conform, reorganised, qualitative higher education that meets national requirements cannot be shaped by withdrawal of funding.

5.6 Furthermore, it is unfortunate that the governmental strategy in higher education does not take into account the situation of private higher educational institutions, church-founded universities and universities financed by foundations. Moreover, there is no

⁴ Opinion received from Trade Union of Employees in Higher Education (FDSZ)

national plan about the employees who work in these higher education institutions. The government strategy does not contain plans covering all employees who operate in Hungarian higher education. We believe that the European Commission has a strong role to suggest to the Hungarian government to create a “career-bridge” programme, a new model of profession path, and to sign a sectoral collective agreement for the higher education employees.

5.7 Concerning the partnership between the teacher trade unions and the government, the conditions of work of the trade unions became worse with the modifications of legislative rules. Collective rights have been decreased. There is no special legislative act connected to trade unions in Hungary, according to law 2011: CLXXV they are a special form of association. Trade unions have rights for consultation with the government in the preparatory phase of legislative acts according to law 2010: CXXXI, but the government hardly accepts the trade unions to do so.

5.8 After the elections in 2010, the system of macro-reconciliation radically changed. In the seriously deteriorated economic, budgetary and fiscal situation, the conditions and possibilities to support the interests of the employees drastically weakened. We urge the European Commission to propose to the Hungarian government the following: new places of employment can be created by well-functioning economy, well-organised market and production of competitive, marketable goods not by the defencelessness of employees, mostly of public servants of the education sector. The European Commission could also recommend strengthening the social dialogue in Hungary and enhancing strategic partnership between the teacher trade unions and the ministries dealing with education.

6. Country Specific Recommendations to the Netherlands⁵

6.1 The Country Specific Recommendations to the Netherlands are partially welcomed, for instance when the European Commission proposes “to safeguard long-term growth drivers from possible additional spending cuts. In particular, although education budgets have raised slightly in nominal terms in recent years, real expenditure on education is under pressure, threatening the quality of future human capital resources, which are a precondition for sustainable growth. Similarly, efforts to promote innovation and preserve the high-quality base of basic research are essential.”

6.2 However, we would like to underline that the public expenditure on education in the Netherlands is under pressure. The relative good educational system in the Netherlands is based on investments in the past. Recent measures to alleviate teacher shortages in the so-called “covenant leerkracht” are counteracted by four successive years of frozen budgets for salary improvements. We would like to stress that while further investment in education should be the way out of the crisis, the Dutch government is doing the opposite: among others, the budgets for teachers are frozen; rising student numbers are not compensated with extra funding in higher education; and tuition fees are being raised.

⁵ Opinion received from AoB, Netherlands

6.3 We emphasise that there are insufficient measures in the Dutch system, in particular concerning autonomous schools, to ensure that public investments in education reaches the classroom: schools spend their budget on management, buildings, and savings instead of engaging enough well qualified teachers. Wrong financial choices of school management are aggravating the problems. A high amount of money is spent on bonuses for managers, buildings, external advice despite the fact that the Dutch national teacher trade unions lobby for restrictions and guidelines. However, only a modest change has been made, which is a law that limits the salary of public managers, also in education, is send to parliament.

6.4 We are pleased to inform the European Commission that the measures (budget cuts in inclusive education), which it refers to in the report⁶, have been withdrawn. Also the much opposed plan that was to be introduced for teachers, based on experiments with performance pay, is withdrawn as a result of a successful combined actions of trade unions, involving a demonstration of 50.000 teachers with the slogan 'no bonus but jobs'.

6.5 Dutch trade unions are against the "reform of higher education student support, moving from a grant-based to a refundable loan-based system"⁷, mentioned in the report based on numerous reasons. First of all, it negatively effects the accessibility of underrepresented groups to higher education and because financial incentives to reduce the study times are well in place. Secondly, we oppose to make the students pay for the financial crisis as most of the students are socially disadvantaged. Last but not least, the Netherlands have already had a progressive tax-system.

7. Country Specific Recommendations to Portugal⁸

7.1 Early school leaving has dropped in Portugal over the last years (from 45% in 2002 to 28,7% in 2010) due to the New Opportunities Programme and there is a commitment of reducing it to 10% in 2020. While the Ministry of Education has launched some measures to further reduce early school leaving, we are not convinced that such measures will be effective. These measures are for instance: curricular changes in lower and upper secondary education with the exclusion of the non-curricular subjects and with the intensification of the so-called structural subjects (Portuguese Language, Mathematics, English, Sciences and History and Geography); defining the basic knowledge at the end of each level as a curricular target; external assessment stand as more difficult subject-oriented national exams; and last but not least, reorganisation of vocational education. Despite the improved situation Portugal should continue to pay close attention to the rate

⁶ "The professed focus of educational policies is to improve quality instead of quantity, but some measures under consideration adversely affect pupils with special educational needs."

⁷ "The reform of higher education student support, moving from a grant-based to a refundable loan-based system, aims to reduce relatively long study times and allow budgetary resources to be invested in additional quality measures, in particular teacher training. Loans instead of grants might deter students from less privileged backgrounds from starting tertiary education, although the previous system produced substantial deadweight losses in subsidizing wealthy people getting high private returns on higher education."

⁸ Opinion received from SINDEP and FNE, Portugal

of early school leavers which is still one of the highest in the EU. It would be important to ensure adequate financing for a national strategy.

7.2 Concerning the level of qualifications in higher education, there is a commitment to increase it to 40% in 2020. However, for the unions it seems that this target is far from being accomplished since increasing the attendance of compulsory education up to 18 years failed as a result of the deep financial and economic crisis in Portugal.

7.3 The ongoing reforms have been implemented in Portugal in accordance with the Economic Adjustment Programme supported by the IMF, EC and ECB, have degenerated into harsh austerity measures. Obviously, the implementation of the programme has received great support so far and has been congratulated by the European Central Bank and by Chancellor Merkel. However, we would like to strongly remind the European Commission that the Portuguese people are the ones paying the crisis.

7.4 In the recommendation of the European Commission it is stated that “the salary cuts and the pension rights are being done bearing in mind a social care, once the lowest incomes will suffer from the austerity measures at a smaller scale”. We are concerned that Portugal cannot cope with further austerity measures taking into consideration the following: the minimum social pension is €195.40, which should not be cut more; the average remuneration of the Portuguese population is now of €867.50; the purchasing power in Portugal is one of the lowest in Europe, 80% of the EU; minimum salary in Portugal is now (2012) €485.0 and around 11% of the Portuguese population have to get by from this amount; and the unemployment rate is 15,2%, the second worst in the OECD countries.

7.5. Regarding point 3.2, page 10, we consider that the process of growth is a major steps to take for governments. But the concept of modernizing public administration cannot be used as a reason to remove services of the public sector that are fundamental for the welfare and social sustainability of the country.

7.6. The Portuguese government has launched the program “Impulso Jovem” to tackle the problem of youth unemployment and to better integrate young people into the labour market. More measures should be taken to increase the number of apprenticeships and work-based learning as well as to improve the quality of vocational training. The low level of qualification of the Portuguese workforce requires higher investments into education, training and long life learning which are risk due to financial cuts in the education sector. Skills mismatching seems to be an additional concern. There are continuing problems to match education outcomes and labour market requirements. The skills mismatch remains a huge challenge for the European society and must be challenged as one of the biggest priorities.

7.7. The internal market is a challenge for the necessary economic boost from the perspective that Europe must and should be a consumer area and a strategic market that can support part of the European business. The EU patent and the Services directive remain a challenge for the European system. On the other hand, the Single Market Act II stresses the need of investment in digital and network industries, new technologies and

networks. This can be realized if we increase at the same time the contribution to the education sector in this area. The investment in human capital is the base of the EU2020 strategy and remains a major task for Europe.

7.8. We urge the European Commission to be cautious when receiving statistical data from the governments. When the Portuguese government sends figures we are astonished that they do not correspond to the real situation, simply because the “Statistics Portugal” has statistical data only from 2010. Therefore, when the European Commission provides recommendations to Portugal for instance on employment, renewable energy, vocational education, social security, it should take into consideration the missing information from 2011 and 2012.

7.9. We expect the report on the quality of public spending, mentioned on page 4, point 2. 1 as we consider that the return of investment into education and R&D must continue to be a major priority of governments. We also need clarification on the multiannual framework 2014-2020, since the question of the fund research must be defined by areas and priorities.

7.10. Finally, we also consider the existence of the “European Systemic Risk Board” to be a major development in this sector, but we have some doubts regarding the responsibilities and power of this body. The lack of confidence mentioned in the page 5 of the document is a clear indicator of the European unrest regarding the European project and the development of the European area.

8. Country Specific Recommendations to the United Kingdom⁹

8.1 The attacks of the UK Government on the public sector are inhibiting the growth the UK economy needs. We welcome that the European Commission notes that the sharp fall in the public sector net investment will inhibit the infrastructure investment that is essential to UK growth. Investment in education – developing a ‘skills infrastructure’ – is also essential to growth.

8.2 The importance of education is reflected in recommendations 1 and 3 of the European Commission’s Recommendations on the UK’s 2012 national reform and 2012-17 convergence programmes. As far as we are concerned, the policy of the UK Government does not support “growth-enhancing expenditure” (recommendation 1). Furthermore, the UK public sector cuts, including significant real terms cuts in education, will support neither the “employability of young people”, nor “measures to reduce the high proportion of young people leaving school with very poor basic skills” (recommendation 3).

8.3 We believe that a more fundamental change to UK Government policy is required than is reflected in the European Commission’s Recommendations. In particular, the recent slowdown in UK growth has underlined the damage done by public sector cuts. Public sector cuts simply take spending power out of the economy at a time when demand is at a premium. The importance of the public sector to growth has been underlined by the

⁹ Opinion received from National Union of Teachers (NUT, UK)

sharp fall in growth rates since the Government began its attack on the public sector. At the same time the UK Government has opposed financial transaction taxes, which are a progressive means of raising revenue. Investing in high quality education is essential to the UK economy, yet the UK Government is reducing education spending in real terms even as it refuses to make the financial sector contribute to repairing the economic damage it caused.

8.4 We welcome the recommendations of the European Commission to improve the levels of employment for young people and to keep them in the labour market. In the United Kingdom there are continuing high levels of youth unemployment, especially in areas of social deprivation and among the most disadvantaged young people, including those from ethnic minority groups. In the UK, nearly one in five young people are not in full time education. A particularly worrying aspect of this trend is the number of graduates out of work in the UK. Some studies suggest 15 per cent of graduates under 24 and 20 per cent of new graduates. Also, social mobility has declined and though the number of professional management jobs continue to grow, there are not enough people qualified to do them. At the other end of the labour market in the UK, there is a large increase in low paid, unskilled work in areas such as retail, catering and the care industries. We are particularly concerned that existing income inequalities will be exacerbated as education becomes increasingly reliant on the ability to pay for participation in higher and further education. Youth employment programmes must also reflect strategies that include under-represented groups, including ethnic minorities.

8.5 Youth unemployment is not just a 'supply' problem with young people not having the right education, skills or aptitude. The changing nature of the economy and in particular the decline of manufacturing, means employers do not create 'youth jobs' in the way they used to. In the UK, in a service economy, where the growth of part-time flexible employment is increasingly apparent, young people face greater competition as employers look for applicants with experience. The recession in the UK has accentuated youth joblessness, it is not the cause of it. Thus, we think that it is vital that employers invest in education and training for 16-19 year old young people, alongside Government, schools and colleges based on equal partnerships to meet the needs of these young people for whom an occupational or vocational route will be most suited to meet their aspirations. Among the ways of incentivising employer investment in training in the workplace, is the introduction of fiscal measures such as tax credits for those employers who are investing in learning and training, or the raising of a training levy, part of which could be used to fund employee activities in 14-19 education.

8.6 The UK Government has introduced various strategies to address the problem of the rising number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). The strategy prioritises raising educational attainment; enabling local parties to provide co-ordinated services to young people; incentivising employers to recruit young people through apprenticeships and work experience; and establishing a new Youth Contract. The Youth Contract, launched in April 2012, is intended to provide funding for employment services, available over three years to provide new opportunities for young people in employment, education and training.

8.7 The teacher trade unions in the UK welcome these initiatives, we believe that there is still much to do to ensure that youth unemployment remains a high priority in the UK. Therefore, we urge the European Commission to recommend to UK to increase public spending to create jobs, to provide guarantees for young people finishing apprenticeships to find a job, and involve employers in offering apprenticeship places and work for young people, with acceptable contracts and remuneration at least at the level of the minimum wage. The Government must seek means to create incentives for employers to invest in training young people, based on the example of those employers who already work positively with schools and colleges, young people themselves, trade unionists in the employment sector as well as Government.

8.8 There are numerous problems on the higher education sector increased higher education tuition fees and non-independent careers information, advice and guidance services are marketising the higher education sector and contributing to social exclusion.

8.9 Furthermore, the welfare model requires any recipient of benefits to work without a wage and as there is high number of unpaid internships. We agree with the European Commission proposal that apprenticeships should be made more widely available. Teacher trade unions have been demanding the increase in the supply of apprenticeship places, with apprenticeships to pay at least the minimum wage, lead to guaranteed employment on completion, and to be of high quality and workplace based. There should be minimum quotas for apprenticeship places with the employment of appropriately skilled young people in any public work, commissioned and processed through public funds.

8.10 International evidence indicates that education and training across a lifetime must go beyond a narrow focus on employment-related learning. It must also respond to the need for learning related to cultural, political, social and community engagement, as well as to personal fulfillment. All curricula should move towards integrating knowledge, skills and the development of individual qualities in young people and the governments must take heed of such developments. It is right, therefore, that core literacy, numeracy, ICT, science that wider skills should be embedded into all 14-19 programmes. Such skills provide more general skills that can provide a basis for the development of specific occupational skills at work. Indeed, all young people should have an entitlement to develop skills which are of benefit to their adult lives. All young people further need the wider skills which enable them to play a full part in society outside the world of work. This range of skills is important to every learner. Too often the curriculum and qualifications system fails to sufficiently connect some of these skills for some learners.