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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

### ETUCE Report for debate

#### EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

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## Defending and enhancing the role and capacity of teacher unions as professional associations

Teachers' trade unions are increasingly facing with national reforms which close out teachers' unions from the discussions on teachers' competence development and training related to these reforms. There are attempts on establishing standards, code of ethics, recognition, quality assurance, and certification of teaching and teachers training many times without the involvement of the teachers' unions. At the same time, there are growing numbers of professional associations and NGOs which claim competence on teachers' professional development.

The following document tries mapping out this problem and providing possible solutions to enhance competences of teachers' unions on teachers' trainings.

This report was debated in ETUCE Committee on 17-18 March 2015.

### Background

The EI Constitution underlines the double role of Member Organisations as trade unions working both for the material as well as the professional interests of teachers:

- (a) "to enhance the conditions of work and terms of employment of teachers and education employees, and to promote their professional status in general,
- (b) to support and promote the professional freedoms of teachers and education employees and the right of their organisations to participate in the formulation and implementation of educational policies;"

The target of the whole EI Campaign on Quality in Education has been not only to enhance the role and capacity of Member Organisations to deal with educational and professional issues, but also to convince governments and authorities, parents and the broader public that teachers have a crucial stake in these issues.

Several EI and ETUCE policies underline the role of the teachers' trade unions as professional associations of teachers, especially on professional development of the teachers, for example:

- The EI Report on Academic Perception on the Bologna-process, 2012: *“Academic staff and their unions **must not be perceived only as social partners, but also as professional associations** representing the very persons on whom the practical implementation of the Bologna Process relies on a daily basis.”*

- ETUCE 10 Key Messages on Unite for Quality Education, 2014: *“ETUCE member organisations confirm their support for the EI initiative Unite for Quality Education to engage in united action for quality education as well as **quality initial teacher training and continuous professional development.**”*

- ETUCE Resolution on Shaping the Teaching Profession of the 21st Century, 2014, underlines that governments should *“ensure that all teachers are trained and have access to **integrated, free, high quality Masters level initial education, and induction and continuous professional development.**”*

### **Challenges at the European level**

Over the years, ETUCE has tried to balance between the material and professional approach in a flexible “2-leg-strategy” emphasising both aspects.

During this time, ETUCE has successfully convinced most EU institutions and the European Commission services that the term “Social Partner“ includes also the professional interests of teachers and development of education policies. However, there is a growing number of consultation and work between the European Commission and NGOs, private organisations etc., especially on the activities that the European Commission outsource to private service providers , e.g. consultant companies.

1. There is a growing number of competing organisations, NGOs, professional associations of teachers and private providers dealing with education policies and the professional interests of teachers. These have started to act as political actors, even at the European level, e.g.:

- The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL)
- European Association for practitioner Research on Improving Learning (EAPRIL)
- European Association of History Teachers (policy making and training)
- International Consortium of Research Staff Associations (ICoRSA)

- EAIR – European Higher Education Society (international association for higher education researchers, practitioners, students, managers and policy-makers)
  - ecoMEDIA-europe (targeted trainings all teachers and teacher trainers, headmasters and educational researchers)
  - European Association for the Education of Adults
  - The European Association of Teachers (AEDE)
  - International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
  - Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE)
  - European Teacher Education Network (network of schools and associations of teacher and social educators)
  - VET provider organisations, EfVET and EUproVET are not representing teachers but are considered as consultative partners of the European Commission on VET.
- Etc.

2. Many times the professional associations and NGOs claim to have a role in the European and/or national social dialogue on education and training in general, and on the competences of the teachers in particular. Therefore, several teachers' trade unions face problems in negotiating with the governments, which prefer discussing with the NGOs and professional associations on the teachers' competence development.

### **Examples of lack of consultation with teachers unions**

1. Governments of FYROM and Serbia started to focus on testing of students and evaluating the teachers' work via these tests without consulting with the unions. This contributed to strikes in FYROM.

2. The Hungarian government established a Teachers' Chamber as a professional association for teachers, wherein all teachers need to register compulsorily. This chamber is acting as consultative partner on teachers' professional development. Despite an agreement between the government and the teachers' unions that the Chamber will not touch upon the unions' field of work, the Chamber started to work on trade unions' issues.

3. The Regional Cooperation Council of Western-Balkan governments (RCC) is developing a list of recommendations on improving the competences and professional development of teachers in all education sectors. The governments complain that the teachers' unions in the regions do not have enough competences and expertise to be appropriate

consultative partners on teachers' competence development issues. Therefore, the RCC is recommending to the governments in the region to establish national and regional professional associations of teachers, which could be the consultative partners for policy development and implementation on professional development of teachers.

4. The Western Balkan Platform of the European Commission conducted a study on teacher education on the Balkans, without consulting with teachers' unions.

5. European Commission's events started to focus on competence development of teachers, without the involvement of teachers' unions. Private providers' associations were there.

### **An additional aspect**

Member Organisations are challenged not only on their role as professional associations, but also on membership. Over the years, more and new positions have been developed in the education systems. The use and integration of ICT and the increase of private education institutions have contributed to the increase of the number of new positions.

For the moment, it does not seem that we have a common strategy on recruitment and affiliation of members. However, it is evident that there is a link between the challenges we are facing with in our work as professional associations and whom we organise in the membership. Possibly our role on the education and professional issues will shrink if our membership is not mirroring the education system.

### **Possible actions**

1. Teachers' unions financial and human capacity should be enhanced to strengthen the position as professional associations of teachers.

2. In line with the discussions of the ETUCE Special conference, the membership of the organisations should be strengthened e.g. on organising early childhood educators, researchers of all sectors, early stage researchers, teachers from private schools, teachers from religious schools, etc.

3. The capacity of the teachers unions should be enhanced on discussing the professional competences of teachers within their social dialogue structure.

4. The capacity of the teachers unions should be enhanced on providing several forms of continuous professional training to teachers.

5. It would be important to exchange experiences among the teachers' unions and to map out the examples which teachers' unions act as professional associations of teachers at national levels, and which unions are included in the management body of teachers' professional associations (e.g, Irish Council of Teachers).

6. ETUCE applied to a project on enhancing capacity of teachers' unions on the professional development of teachers. The project plans to provide training to teachers' unions which needs the most capacity building to act as professional associations of teachers.

***The ETUCE Committee is asked to debate and suggest further steps to enhance the capacity of member organisations as professional associations.***