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ETUCE reaction on the European Communication's initiative on *School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life* to the Committee of Regions hearing

On 30 May 2017 the European Commission published its Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life*.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 131 education trade unions in 48 countries. The following text is the first reaction of the ETUCE on this initiative.

ETUCE comments are the following:

1. The aim of the initiative is to set up a list of additional actions of the European Commission to the Member States, while respecting the **national competence** on education and training, to improve the **quality and inclusiveness of schools**, support teachers and school leaders, and improve school governance. ETUCE welcomes that the initiative puts special emphasis on the need for further **investment in education**, improving **equality and social inclusion** in schools, and **cooperative school leadership and teaching**.

2. We fully support the attention given to **school autonomy** as an essential tool to reach a high level of learning outcomes. Supporting **democratic governance and collaborative leadership** are fundamental requirements of high quality education systems. The European Commission, however, forgot to mention in this paper the involvement of education trade unions in the framework of effective **social dialogue** with education employer organisations, including governments, in designing and implementing necessary educational reforms.

3. We welcome the **emphasis put on teachers**. The Commission mentions 'supporting teachers and schools leaders for excellent teaching and learning' as one of the key areas where actions are needed and where European level support can help. It also states that the teaching profession should be more attractive, recruitment and retention of teachers should be better supported, and that continuous professional development (CPD) needs to be accessible, affordable and relevant. Whereas the Commission notes that addressing challenges of school development and excellent teaching is a task for Member States, it often shifts the responsibility for actions and changes on schools, teachers and school leaders.

4. We strongly support the Commission's description about the link between attractiveness of the teaching profession and **pay, contractual status and career prospects of teachers**. As ETUCE surveys show, austerity measures imposed in the wake of the economic crisis have had a long-term impact on teachers and education personnel, whose salary cuts and freezes are still affecting their purchasing power. The European Commission rightly highlights that the **salary of teachers** in many countries still do not reach the salary of tertiary level graduate employees. Additionally, ETUCE stresses that teachers in many

countries have yet to see their purchasing power return to pre-crisis levels. As a consequence, ETUCE recalls that the **reinforcement of collective bargaining** is the prerequisite to guarantee decent salaries and decent working conditions for an attractive and rewarding teaching profession.

5. This is why we strongly believe that **some concrete suggestions to Member States** should have been included among the action points of the initiative in order to better support teachers and to improve their professional status. We believe that offering peer learning is a light tool to contribute to fundamental developments in some Member States. ETUCE has already, through joint projects and events, laid the groundwork for fuller and richer collaboration in this area. We support working closely with the **European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education**. Recommendations to countries on improving teachers' professional status could be included also in the **European Semester** process, together with a strong call for meaningful involvement of the European and national education social partners at all stages of the Semester. However, it is worth recalling that any reform in the field of education and training, receiving externally-generated contributions and assistance in the frame of the Structural Reform Support Programme should both respect the autonomy of and involve the education social partners at all stages.

6. Furthermore, we have concerns about the Commission's suggestions on **online continuous development tools and MOOCs** as a support of teachers' CPD because these suggestions do not consider the quality of these online tools, the recognition of such learning, and the fee of such courses. Teachers' CPD should be financially supported by the employers and take place during working hours related to innovative teaching methods, for example the use of digital tools.

7. The Commission's initiative seems to point to teachers as the reason for the lack of or not appropriate use of **digital technology** in schools. It should be noted, however, that digital tools should not be the aim but a tool of teaching. Also, use of digital technology needs appropriate and continuous **high investment** in schools, not only regarding the equipment but also regarding software updates. It should be noted that continuously learning about updates of these digital tools, different software, and the use of social media in class requires additional working time from teachers. Again, it should be suggested to the Member States to provide effective investment for teachers' and school leaders' use of digital tools and CPD. This is why it is difficult to see to what extent the support that the European Commission proposes to schools on a *Self-assessment tool of their digital technology use* and reporting on this self-assessment would provide any help and solution to the schools' abovementioned challenges.

8. We strongly support that the European Commission underlines the need of investment to high quality "**early childhood education and care (ECE)**". We believe that the Commission should recommend to the Member States not only to make ECE "affordable", but rather to make high quality ECE free of charge and accessible to all, and to support professionalisation of ECE teachers and other pedagogical staff. It must be underlined that ECE teaching continues to be the least paid profession in the education sector. In addition, this sector is highly gender imbalanced with more than 90% of teachers being women. These challenges need to be solved immediately in order to make the ECE teaching profession more attractive.

9. We also note that the Commission raises the problem of **early-school leavers** but does not propose real solutions for this challenge. Furthermore, the Commission raises the importance of linking learning with **real life experience**, but we miss the link to ongoing

efforts of the European Commission and social partners to improve fair and high quality apprenticeship systems.

10. Concerning supporting **social inclusion and equality** in schools, we note that the Commission lists among the benefits of education a successful career, protection against unemployment and poverty, personal development and active citizenship, but omits paramount importance of the understanding and ownership of the EU common values such as tolerance, freedom and non-discrimination within the context of pluralistic and multicultural societies in Europe. We support that the document underlines the problem of **gender imbalance** in the teaching profession. Indeed, reducing career segregation and fair and better work-life balance policies are crucial to attract a more diverse teacher workforce in the education sector. Also, **bullying, cyberbullying and violence** are mentioned only in connection to students, while in many cases, teachers are becoming victims of these types of aggression too. Harassment and violence are indeed serious psycho-social risk factors in the teaching profession.

11. We welcome the Commission's intentions to make school partnerships and pupil mobility under **Erasmus+** more accessible, because education trade unions consider the application to grants too bureaucratic and challenging. We note that the Commission plans to support the exchange of school staff between countries through the Erasmus+ programme, but does not suggest solutions to the challenges preventing teachers from participating in such mobility programmes, for example insufficient grants, replacement in employment, mobility of social benefit, etc.

Finally, ETUCE is pleased with many of the proposals of the European Commission mentioned in this initiative and encourages the EC and its Member States to seek more synergies and concerted EU-wide strategies in the field of education and school development. ETUCE would like to actively contribute to further consultations on implementing the action points.