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Andreas KELLER

Trudy KERPERIEN

Dorte LANGE

Galina MERKULOVA

Branimir STRUKELJ



Boulevard Bischoffsheim, 15  
1000 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92  
Fax +32 2 224 06 94  
[secretariat@csee-etuce.org](mailto:secretariat@csee-etuce.org)  
<http://www.csee-etuce.org>

**European Director**

Susan FLOCKEN

**Treasurer**

Mike JENNINGS

# ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education  
EI European Region

## Protecting academic freedom and good working conditions for higher education staff are key to the future of the European Higher Education Area

*Education trade unions' demands*

*to the Rome Ministerial Conference of 19 November 2020*

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), the European Region of Education International representing 11 million members of 127 education trade unions in 51 countries, believes that we are at a critical juncture in the implementation of the Bologna Process and the future of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The Rome Communiqué, to be adopted by the Rome Ministerial Conference, will focus on setting up a joint strategy of the Bologna Process countries for the short-term and the next decade of the EHEA. While the focus on the long-term future of the EHEA is important, Ministers also need to provide urgent solutions to employees in the higher education and research sector who are facing increased threats to their jobs, working conditions and professional status as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We regret that the protection and promotion of academic freedom has been a relatively neglected area for national and European policy makers. We, therefore, call on Ministers and higher education stakeholders to ensure that academic freedom is a genuine priority during the 2021-24 cycle of the Bologna Process. ETUCE believes that if Ministers are serious about strengthening academic freedom in Europe, they should reconsider market-based approaches to funding, governance and staffing, and guarantee effective social dialogue with the trade unions representing higher education and research staff.

We remind Ministers that in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to reassert the role of higher education as an essential public good.

Therefore, education trade unions call on Ministers to:

1. Protect and promote academic freedom as a fundamental value in its own right and recognise that threats to academic freedom exist and are increasing in the EHEA;
2. Strengthen democratic institutions, collegial governance and social dialogue as part of the strategy to safeguard academic freedom;
3. Improve the quality and inclusiveness of higher education and research by ensuring decent salaries, job security and good working conditions for staff, including occupational health and safety;
4. Guarantee sustainable public investment in higher education and research as one of the ways to ensure a long-term recovery from the current health, economic and social crisis.