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European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

Draft Minutes

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ETUCE Training Seminar on

Investing in Education: Strengthening the involvement of teacher trade unions in the European Semester on education and training

16-17 January 2017

Ljubljana, Slovenia

Chair:	Christine Blower, NUT, UK, ETUCE President
Participants:	Nevrus Kaptelli (SPASH, Albania), Stavri Liko (FSASH, Albania), Saudin Sivro (ITUPEWBH, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Selvedin Satorovic (ITUPEWBH, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Đevad Hadzic (TUSHENSC, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Igor Radeka (IURHEEC, Croatia), Ana Madžgalj (TUEM, Montenegro), Predrag Ražnatović (TUEM, Montenegro), Alexandra Cornea (FSLE, Romania), Christina Militaru (FSLE, Romania), Ion Imbrescu (ALMA MATER, Romania), Borka Visnic (TUS, Serbia), Jelka Velicki (ESTUS, Slovenia), Jernej Zupancic (ESTUS, Slovenia)
Speakers and project coordinators:	Sandi Modrijan (ESTUS, Slovenia), Branimir Strukelj (ESTUS, Slovenia), Lesley Hagger-Vaughan (University of Nottingham), Howard Stevenson (University of Nottingham), Thomas Hoelgaard (DLF, Denmark), Judith Patan (ETUCE)

1. Opening and Welcome

Christine Blower, ETUCE President, and Branimir Strukelj, ESTUS, ETUCE Vice-President

Christine Blower and Branimir Strukelj welcomed the participants to the ETUCE training seminar. Branimir Strukelj told participants about recent developments in Slovenia. Trade unions are confronted with austerity measures and have to fight for appropriate salaries in the public sector. Education trade unions need to be strong to master this challenge.

Christine Blower underlined the importance of trade unions' work in the field of European policy-making. She then introduced a short video about the European Union's structure and functioning, which was then showed to the participants. Participants learnt about important actors and decision making processes in the EU.

2. Education in Europe 2020 and in the South Eastern Europe (SEE) 2020 Strategy

Georgios Zisimos, European Training Foundation (ETF)

Georgios Zisimos introduced the work of the EU in the field of education and training. Through the agencies such as CEDEFOP and ETF, the improvement of vocational education and training systems in the EU and in candidate countries is supported. The EU2020 strategy foresees special targets for education, which are to be achieved by 2020. For South Eastern European countries, a similar strategy has been specifically set up, the South East Europe Strategy 2020 (SEE2020). The SEE2020 is a long term strategy for growth and financial stability in the Balkan countries.

Georgios Zisimos then introduced the European Semester mechanism and how it focuses on achieving the EU2020 targets. The European Semester is an annual cycle of (economic) analyses and reform plans, coordinated by the European Commission and the EU member states. EU candidate countries undergo a similar procedure, which is also called the European Semester, aiming at converging to the targets of the EU/SEE2020 strategy. Social partners can participate in consultations on the Semester-related reports during the year.

3. What is the European economic governance?

Prof Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham (external expert)

Prof Stevenson explained the economic background of the European Semester. As the annual cycle for EU and national interactions, created in order to prevent EU countries from financial and fiscal unbalances, it aims at achieving the targets of the Europe 2020 strategy for economic growth. Since one area of this strategy (embedding a dual target) is dedicated to education, education policies are increasingly affected by the European Semester process.

He explained the most important steps in the European Semester cycle related to education and training, such as the publication of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS), which kicks off the European Semester; the Education and Training monitor, an analysis of education policies and developments in EU member states; the Country Reports (CR), published in February as an analysis of the EU countries' state of play; the National Reform Programmes (NRP) and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), in which the European Commission recommends special actions in different fields to the EU Member states. Education Ministers and education social partners don't have a sufficient influence on this political and economic cycle.

The yearly fact finding missions, taking place in the EU member states usually in December are an opportunity for social partners to be consulted. He presented examples of the Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations on education and training in Spain and in Italy.

4. Why teacher unions need to speak about European economic governance in education?

Paola Cammilli, ETUCE Coordinator

Following Mr Stevenson's speech, Ms Cammilli identified the need for education trade unions to get involved in the European Semester. She analysed the impact of the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) on education reforms. The 2016 education-related CSRs could be grouped in three different types:

- CSRs related to improving the labour market relevance of education;
- CSRs related to enhancing private investment in education (especially in higher education and research);

– CSRs related to improving the quality of education and inclusive education

Ms Cammilli reminded that, on a regular basis, ETUCE informs and sends out calls for action to its member organisations on the draft CSRs, as well as informing on other key documents of the European Semester cycle. Ms Cammilli highlighted that the major competence on CSRs and the European Semester lies within the Economy and Finance Ministers and Employment Council Configuration (ECOFIN and EMCO). The Council of Education Ministers as well as others have only a consultative role. Moreover, she presented the ETUCE Action Plan on the European Semester and the ETUE Platform on the European Semester. She underlined the fast procedures in the Semester cycle. Therefore, education trade unions need to be prepared and react quickly at the right points of time.

5. The role of social dialogue in shaping education policy and investment across Europe in challenging times – Best practices and experiences from other countries

a. The case of Slovenia:

Sandi Modrijan, ESTUS

Sandi Modrijan, ESTUS, described the situation of the education and science trade union of Slovenia (ESTUS) with regards to the European Semester and social dialogue. He explained that through the support and training seminars of ETUCE, the importance and structure of the European Semester is much clearer. In order to fight for quality education in times of increasing austerity, trade unions must be involved and consulted in the European Semester procedures. However, proper consultation is often difficult to achieve. ESTUS is working to strengthen the links with the EU representation in Slovenia and the Ministry of Education on this subject.

b. The case of Denmark:

Thomas Hoelgaard, DLF

Mr Hoelgaard presented the strategy of DLF to be more involved in the European Semester jointly with other Danish education unions (through DLI) and the trade union confederation. After a “learning and identifying-period” and meetings with the Danish Ministry of Education and the European Semester Officer, a concrete strategy of getting involved in the European Semester was set up. In late 2015, DLF could start its actual work on the European Semester.

DLF pursues three main objectives through its strategy, namely: to respond to the reports and documents, to select issues from the Semester documents that underline DLF’s position and can be used for lobbying, and to mainstream the knowledge about the European Semester into all policies and actions of DLF. The different institutions responsible showed positive reactions about the unions’ interest in the European Semester. He then identified remaining challenges such as those related to the human factor and limited human resources, as well as lessons learnt, such as the increasing influence of business stakeholders in the Semester process. He underlined the importance of involvement in cooperation with trade union confederations, where possible.

6. Plenary debate: How economic and budgetary policies influence education reforms

In an open discussion, participants recapitalised the presentations and shared their views and experiences. It was concluded that the European Semester is not only a

bureaucratic procedure at European level, but can affect basic trade union activity. In the European Semester framework, policies and reforms in accordance to the European targets are triggered at national level. They might be related to budgetary decisions or reforms in the education systems, directly affecting teachers' salaries and working conditions. Through consultations, trade unions can participate in the development of such policies as they usually do through social dialogue. However, unlike social dialogue, the time frame of the European Semester is very rapid and does not allow for the proper engagement of the social partners and reflections on how to reform particular aspects of the education and training systems in the most appropriate manner. Trade unions need to know the European Semester timeline in order to undertake consultations at the right time. Especially the European Semester Officer should be contacted for consultations during the Education and Training Monitor-related fact finding missions.

7. Training Activity 1

Confronting education and training reforms in EU and candidate countries – can we identify common trends?

In two working groups, reforms in the EU and in EU-candidate countries were discussed and presented. For EU member states, the latest CSRs concerning education were reflected and compared. EU-candidate presented recent reforms and identified common trends in education policies.

8. Impact of the Semester on public spending. A pathway to privatisation?

Prof Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham (external expert)

Mr. Stevenson pointed out at the links of new, business-like management techniques in the education sector with changed funding structures and privatisation in different types. Cross-border trends of private funding replacing public expenditure are clearly visible.

By describing the extreme case of England, he illustrated the increasing marketization of education and downgrade of teacher qualifications. These developments are internationally recognisable and mainly caused by performance based funding and focusing on cost-effectiveness in the governance structures. He moreover diagnosed that trade unions have always been the main opponents to privatisation in/of education, and that collective bargaining in education has been weakened.

9. Plenary debate

Impact of the Semester on national Education and Training investment and reforms - Plenary discussion and Questions & Answers

Participants discussed the trends in reforms and policies in the education sector. It was overall regretted that "efficient expenditure" is the main focus. As its main consequence, quality of teaching and learning decreases. It is worth to reflect who could join the call for quality education, such as students and parents associations. It was identified that the European Semester itself does not cause the problems, rather, it is what it is made out of it. Another problem is a huge increase in the number of reforms. Governments are requested to make quick changes and to bring results, long-term effects and sustainable solutions are not taken into consideration.

10. The activity of the European Commission's national Representation office – Country reports, consultations and the Country Specific Recommendations

Ms Tina Vončina, European Semester Officer in Slovenia, European Commission

From Ms Tina Vončina, European Semester Officer in Slovenia, the participants learnt about the EU institutions' view on the European Semester process. She explained the functions and timing, procedures and documents in detail. She emphasised that the strategies and treaties behind, such as the EU2020 and the Growth and Stability Pact, are results of EU countries' democratic cooperation. One of the main reason for such strict economic and fiscal coordination is the economic crisis. The European Semester is a mechanism to prevent future macroeconomic unbalances and to foster economic growth and employment according to the EU2020 strategy. Ms Vončina described the guidelines of the AGS in the recent years, which are relaunching investment, responsible public finances and structural reforms. She identified the responsibilities of the main actors in the European Semester process and pointed out the role of consultations with social partners. Trade unions can take part in consultations with the European Commission, especially through the fact finding missions and consultations with the European Semester Officer for the Country Reports (after the launch of the AGS).

11. Plenary debate

Moderated by Branimir Strukelj, ESTUS

In a discussion with Tina Vončina (European Commission) and Branimir Strukelj, ESTUS, participants shared their views and national experiences. Specific questions and national specificities were presented and clarified. The importance of social dialogue for effective development of reforms was outlined.

It was made clear that the main competences of decisions in the European Semester framework lies with the Finance Ministers. However, Ms Vončina stated that other bodies and ministers are getting more and more involved in development of the recommendations and priorities. Mr Strukelj reported about enhanced interest of the European Commission in social partners' involvement and announced ESTUS' future cooperation with the European Semester Officer in Slovenia.

12. Training activity 2

Teacher union actions, the way ahead

In a second workshop, participants discussed concrete involvement of education trade unions in the European Semester/economic governance mechanisms and education reforms. Activities, resources, allies and opponents were identified for certain objectives. Different ways of setting up a strategy were outlined. Participants from Romania described their current projects on early school leaving and lifelong learning. Participants from EU candidate countries shared ideas to get involved in the SEE2020 negotiations and to be prepared for involvement in the European Semester as EU member states.

13. Evaluation and Conclusion

Paola Cammilli, ETUCE, concluded the Seminar by reminding the beneficial effect of cooperating with trade union confederations, where possible, in the Semester framework. She thanked the participants for their participation and contributions in

the Training Seminar and in particular ESTUS and DLF as project partners and organiser of the event.