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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

05-06 September 2016

Vilnius, Lithuania

Chair:	Ms Christine Blower, ETUCE President
Project coordinators:	Paola Cammilli (ETUCE), Thomas Hoelgaard (DLF, Denmark)
Participants:	Andrius Navickas (LEETU, Lithuania), Anna Jändel-Holst (LR, Sweden), Åse Bonde (DLF, Denmark), Audrius Jurgelevičius (FLESTU, Lithuania), Egidijus Milesinas (FLESTU, Lithuania), Egle Zukauskaite (LMPS, Lithuania), Elis Randma (EEMU, Estonia), Eugenijus Jesinas (FLESTU, Lithuania), Frantisek Sary (OZPŠaV, Slovak Republic), Gabriela Tlapova (CMOS-PS, Czech Republic), Harald Skulberg (UEN, Norway), Ieva Sirvinskiene (FLESTU, Lithuania), Inga Puiša (FLESTU, Lithuania), Juraj Stodilovsky (OZPŠaV, Slovak Republic), Jurate Voloskeviciene (LMPS, Lithuania), Mike Jennings (IFUT, Ireland), Natalja Grjazeva LIZDA, Latvia), Tatjana Babrauskienė (FLESTU, Lithuania)
Guests:	Mr Howard Stevenson (University of Nottingham), Alison Milner (University of Nottingham), Artūras Černiauskas (LPSK, Lithuania); Audronė Pitrėnienė (Lithuanian Minister of Education); Ricardas Alisauskas (Lithuanian Ministry of Education), Aidas Aldauskas (Lithuanian Ministry of Education), Jonas Rasimas (European Commission, European Semester officer in Lithuania)

1. Opening and Welcome

Christine Blower, ETUCE President; Audrius Jurgelevičius, FLESTU (LĖTU); President and Eugenijus Jesinas FLESTU (LEITU) President; Ms Audronė Pitrėnienė, Minister of Education and Science, Lithuania

Christine Blower welcomed participants and highlighted the importance of trade union work and the influence of economic issues on education policies and budgets. The Lithuanian Minister of Education, Audronė Pitrėnienė, outlined the current developments in Lithuanian education policies. By addressing the European

Semester, she declared that the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) for Lithuania need more focus on funding and quality education.

2. What is the European Semester?

Timeline, Key glossary and Effects on national reforms and investment in education:

Prof. Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham (external expert)

Prof. Stevenson explained the economic background of the European Semester and its strong influence on national education policies, especially with regards to privatisation and public spending. He outlined the functioning of the European Semester and presented examples of different important documents in this cycle. Furthermore, he emphasised the fact finding missions, which take place in the EU member states usually in December, and are an opportunity for social partners to be consulted, as well as the bilateral meetings between the European Commission and member states, hold in Brussels in February.

3. Why is the European Semester important for education trade unions?

Paola Cammilli, ETUCE

Ms Cammilli gave a more detailed insight into the process of the European Semester cycle and highlighted the connection to the economic crisis. She translated the economic terms to real occurrences in teacher unions' daily business in terms of investment and reforms as a consequence of the CSRs.

Concerning the different actors within the European Semester, Ms Cammilli explained that it are mostly Ministers of Finances and Employment who have a say in the development of documents, rather than Education Ministers; even when it concerns education.

Moreover, she emphasised the need of involvement in certain moments of the year and presented the ETUCE Action Plan on the European Semester.

4. Training activity 1

How the European Semester works at European and national level: timeline and actors :

The participants met in working groups where they discussed the different steps of European Semester and their relations, in order to reconstruct the timeline and to name the different actions and players involved. Thereafter, the results were presented and discussed in the plenary. Problems of getting involved as education social partners were mentioned.

5. Country-case presentation

a. The case of Denmark:

Thomas Hoelgaard (DLF)

Mr Hoelgaard presented the Danish union's way of getting engaged in the European Semester. He explained that after a "learning and identifying-period", meetings with

the Danish Ministry of Education and the European Semester officer were undertaken both in Brussels and in Denmark in order to get involved in the development of important matters on education policy. Following a yearly strategy, actions are undertaken in certain moments. The importance of a network of stakeholders as well as of a good dialogue with the different ministries, including the Ministry of Finances, was made clear.

The work of DLF is strongly influenced by the European Semester since there are occurring several Semester-related events during the year and it has a sizeable effect on national policy developments in Denmark. DLF has made its involvement in the European Semester a priority for the year 2016. The union is geared to this cycle concerning many of its actions and generally tries to link its thoughts and acts to the work on the European Semester.

b. The case of Lithuania:

Tatjana Babrauskiné (FLESTU)

Ms Babrauskiné addressed the importance of underlying contents like culture, trade union movement and social dialogue on the way of dealing with the European Semester. She explained problems of getting involved into effective consultations with the government as recognised stakeholder in Lithuania, especially concerning the Semester's Country Reports and CSRs. However, she underlined the active and persistence work of FLESTU, aiming at better consultation in the future.

Additionally, she considered the ETUCE Platform on the European Semester, which can be accessed by member organisations, as useful.

6. Training Activity 2

Impact of the Semester on national Education and Training policy and reforms: from Country Reports to Country Specific Recommendations

In working groups, the participants discussed the recent CSRs for their countries that are related to education. Their content and influence on national policies as well as strategies to deal with these recommendations were discussed. Especially problems of social dialogue and cooperation of unions/interest groups were mentioned.

Among different countries, similarities in recommendations and problems were found, such as the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

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

Alison Milner and Prof. Howard Stevenson, University of Nottingham (external expert)

Ms Milner spoke about the development of investment in education over the last years. By presenting statistics, she declared that public expenditure in education has decreased due to the financial crisis. Furthermore, she analysed changes of funding mechanisms, where rather economic structures have been used, and negative impacts on teachers' salaries and further needs. By showing figures comparing the trends and situation of privatisation in Europe, she leaded over to Mr Stevenson's

speech. He identified several types of privatisations. Referring to an ETUCE Survey (2016) he spoke about privatisation based on funding models and privatisation as part of a new management style of public administration that uses economic perspectives, stating that “schools function like businesses”. He recognised that especially through performance based funding and focusing on cost-effectiveness, teacher qualifications have been downgraded. Moreover, collective bargaining has been erased. Eventually, he remarked positively the campaign of education unions, which are the main opponents to privatisation in/of education.

8. Plenary debate

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

In a following plenary discussion, similar opinions and experiences with respect to an efficiently-run and performance-based system were noticed. The links between recent national developments and Recommendations (CSRs) of the European Semester became very clear. The role and competences of national and European decision bodies were discussed.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that the raising tendency to see education as ‘pre-job training’ which only needs to prepare students for the labour market is very controversial.

9. The activity of the European Commission’s national Representation office

Country reports, consultations and the Country Specific Recommendations

M. Jonas Rasimas, Economic Governance Officer in Lithuania, European Commission

Mr Rasimas introduced the participants to the demographic forecasts of Lithuania and international comparisons concerning the level of education, showing rather worrying results. As a result, the CSRs for Lithuania address investment in human capital, skills shortages and more. Mr Rasimas identified the quality of teaching as an essential factor for the achievement of further progress on these areas. He therefore called for the promotion of the teaching quality in Lithuania.

In a second part he described his activities and responsibilities as European Semester Officer for Lithuania. His tasks include providing information on the European Semester to various stakeholders at national level, through conferences and meetings, as well as to contribute to filling national reports feeding in the European Semester process.

10. The activity of the government

National Reform Programmes and Country Specific Recommendations on education and training

Mr Ricardas Alisauskas, Head of Strategic Programmes Unit, Ministry of Education of Lithuania

Mr Alisauskas spoke about the National Reform Programme and the CSRs on Education and Training in Lithuania. He explained that, in Lithuania, the education level and salaries are rather low. For young people, VET is the most attractive

opportunity and it is also well funded as it serves the labour market. In order to support achievement of pupils, the Lithuanian Ministry of Education awards good schools with financial support. The very low salaries of teachers in Lithuania are a difficult topic to discuss with the Ministry of Finances. He stated that, however, an increase of teachers' salaries does not mean an increase of education quality at the same time. In his last remarks, he recognised that only a greater involvement of the Ministry of Education in the decision-making process (mostly carried out by the Ministry of Finance) could provide a more holistic view on education reforms and policies.

11. Actions and challenges for trade unions

Artūras Černiauskas, LPSK President

Mr Černiauskas highlighted that Lithuania shows a strong emigration due to very low salaries and the fact that higher education mostly is not needed on the labour market. Since teachers earn only 50% of the average income and often suffer from psychological factors, this profession is very unattractive in Lithuania. For education trade unions, salaries are not possible to negotiate. A new law recently has been reducing trade unions rights and possibilities of involvement in the development of education policies, which testifies the weakness of the social dialogue.

A session of questions and answers between speakers and participants followed.

12. Training activity 3

Teacher union actions, the way ahead

In the third workshop, participants discussed objectives, activities, resources and tools, alliances and opponents within the European Semester process for education trade unions. Possible strategies of getting involved in the European Semester were outlined. The results were presented and discussed in the plenary discussion afterwards.

13. Evaluation and Conclusion

Paola Cammilli, ETUCE, thanked the participants for their active participation in the Training Seminar and in particular FLESTU, as project partner and leading organiser of the event.