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ETUCE statement on Brexit

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Following the 2016 referendum vote to leave the European Union, the United Kingdom government started the withdrawal process on 29 March 2017 by invoking article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, putting the UK on course to leave the EU by April 2019. This decision affects education trade unions and the whole teaching community, especially, teachers, academics and other educational personnel, in the UK, the EU and wider Europe.

ETUCE is calling on the negotiating parties to ensure that the article 50 negotiations lead to a social and economic agreement that protects employment, living standards and teachers' and trade union rights and not a free trade deal built on a platform of lower pay, pensions, social benefits, tax and standards.

Even though the long-term implications of Brexit on the education sector and on teachers, academics and education personnel are currently still uncertain, much will depend on what is agreed as of the [European Council's draft negotiation guidelines on the Brexit of 29 April 2017](#). It should be noted that within the UK there are four separate education jurisdictions reflecting the devolved settlements in place for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. ETUCE wants to draw attention to several important issues bearing in mind that the Brexit negotiations will lay the framework for the future of the education sector both in the UK and in the EU.

A) Education in the Brexit negotiations:

- 1. Education is a fundamental human right and a public good. The provision of quality education for all is vital for promoting democratic citizenship, ensuring social inclusion and creating more prosperous societies in the UK and in the rest of Europe.**
- 2. Articles 1 and 2 of the negotiation guidelines state that “preserving the integrity of the Single Market excludes participation based on a sector-by-sector approach” and that “in accordance with the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, individual items cannot be settled separately”. Education is a fundamental human right and as such it must be discussed at the forefront of the Brexit agenda, giving utmost priority to the teachers, academics and other education personnel’s situation, rights, working-conditions and social protection, including the status of their citizenship, in the UK and in the rest of Europe.**
- 3. ETUCE underlines the importance of ensuring that the Brexit negotiations deal with the special situation of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, including setting an objective for the post-exit agreement to protect the ‘Good Friday Agreement’ and ensure the continued rights of frontier teachers and educators, including the associated employment, social, and citizenship rights, in the context of the principle of free movement of workers. Similarly, the negotiations need to effectively address the situation of Gibraltar. Based on the principle of sincere cooperation, ETUCE believes that there must be no hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, nor between Gibraltar and Spain.**

B) Status of teachers, academics and other education personnel:

- Attractiveness of the teaching profession: Recognition of teaching qualifications
- 4. Brexit could have notable implications for the retention and recruitment of education personnel, in particular for school recruitment, aggravating the existing shortage of qualified teachers in the UK. ETUCE further deplores the continuing casualisation of the teaching profession (e.g. precarious, short term contracts or unqualified graduates in classroom) and attacks upon pay and working conditions. Furthermore, ETUCE warns about the **complexity of the procedure for the recognition of teaching qualifications** obtained in other EU countries in order for education professionals to be allowed to teach in the UK; about **the potential decrease in the attractiveness of the UK education system for qualified teachers** trained in other EU countries as well as obstacles for and possible dismissals of teachers who have gained their teaching qualification outside the UK and who may no longer be qualified to teach in the UK.
- 5. As the Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EU) is applicable only to recognition of diplomas obtained in the EU; after the Brexit, **the recognition of qualifications of students and professionals from the UK to the EU and from the EU to the UK will not be guaranteed.**
- Public investment: Higher education and research
- 6. Quality education is a principal responsibility of national governments, including the duties of the State to provide adequate and sufficient funding at all levels of education. Despite the Brexit consequences, ETUCE highlights that **continuous public funding in education must be revitalised at all levels of education as it is essential for the initial and lifelong teachers' training as well as for supporting successful and innovative teaching techniques and methods**, especially for inclusiveness purposes.
- 7. The European Union supports education and research through several important funding programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon2020. After Brexit, the United Kingdom will either have no or only limited access to these funding opportunities with devastating consequences for universities and colleges in the UK for science, research and innovation in the country. **The increase of adequate public national and/or EU financial support to diminish negative financial consequences for tertiary education is vital.**
- 8. International and EU academic personnel and students play a significant role in the UK Higher Education sector, contributing in economic and cultural terms. **ETUCE is concerned about the uncertainty that EU education personnel and students are facing over their immigration status (e.g. as regards their employment situation in doctoral and postdoctoral programmes in UK universities).** In addition, this situation may make it harder to attract non-UK talent to British universities and vice versa in the future, especially because access to UK student finance programmes may become more difficult for EU nationals and entail higher fees.

C) Education trade unions:

9. Brexit outcomes are also uncertain for education trade unions as a whole in the UK and across Europe. Especially, when it comes to teachers, academics and education personnel's status, rights, working-conditions and social protection, Brexit negotiating parties are urged to refrain from using education professionals as a 'bargaining chip' during the negotiation process. **Education trade unions will not permit any attempt of 'dumping' measures to level down teachers' rights, working-conditions and social protections, especially those already enshrined in EU laws, including the rights associated with the free movement of EU education professionals to the United Kingdom and vice versa.**
10. Education personnel and education institutions play a vital role in combatting racism and hatred of all forms. All teachers and students have the right to work, to study and to live in safety and without fear of intimidation, violence or abuse because of their nationality, ethnic origin or religious belief. **Education trade unions therefore need to support teachers and education personnel in combatting all forms of prejudice, discrimination and hate and in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.** ETUCE argues for action by governments across Europe to support education professionals and education trade unions in tackling all forms of racism, discrimination, hatred and related intolerance.

D) Social dialogue and trade union rights:

11. **The voice of education trade unions must be heard within the Brexit negotiation phases where education is concerned.** Education unions, as social partners in education, must be informed and consulted – according to articles 151-156 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), to the provisions of the UK Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1992 and to the ILO conventions on trade unions C144 - Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 and C154 - Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 – during and following the Brexit negotiations for possible transitional agreements between the EU and the UK. **EU institutions and British authorities must provide the framework to ensure that the interests of teachers, academics and other education personnel working and living in the UK and the EU are valued, notably, building on the support of social partners, in particular of education trade unions.**
12. **Social dialogue for both British and EU social partners must remain as a key mechanism** for the achievement of the EU2020 and future 2030 strategy goals as it brings together social partners to agree upon how to regulate the teaching profession.
13. Education trade unions at a European and national level must continue to represent the interests of teachers, academics and other education personnel living and working in the UK and the EU. To ensure this, we must avoid a Brexit which waters down the rights of teachers, their ability to engage in collective bargaining and their access to the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education (ESSDE).

E) Brexit and ETUCE member organisations:

14. Whichever way the British people voted, no-one voted to lose their job, their employment rights and their social protections. This is a critical time for the future

of Europe and ETUCE as the representative voice of teachers, academics and other education personnel in Europe must be heard, especially when setting the framework for the future of the education sector both in the UK and in the EU.

15. Despite the Brexit consequences, **ETUCE continues defending the position of all member organisations and their affiliates, advocating for the rights and interests of teachers, academics and other education personnel at all levels of education in the United Kingdom and across the European region.**