



## **CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE EU 2020 STRATEGY** **ETUCE RESPONSE TO THE COMMISSION'S WORKING DOCUMENT**

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 110 teachers' unions in the EU and EFTA countries and more than 5.5 million teachers from all levels of the education sector. The ETUCE is a member of the Education and Training Co-ordination Group (ETCG) and as the European industry federation for education is a member of the ETUC. The ETUCE is also an autonomous organisation within the Education International Pan-European Structure. We hereby respond to the European Commission's consultation on the future EU 2020 strategy (COM 2009 647 final).

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### ***Introduction***

The first comment to be made relates with the calendar of the consultation as part of the process for the adoption of the EU 2020 strategy. The Commission has given very short notice for contributions to the EU 2020 design and intends to present its proposal to the Council in January, expecting an adoption by the Council at the Spring Council in March 2010. One can wonder how the Commission will manage to integrate the social partners' and other Interest Representatives' contributions within the very short period between the end of the consultation and the submission of its first proposal to the Council. The ETUCE underlines that a realistic calendar, among other signals indicating that the Commission takes the consultation seriously, is required for the social partners and other interest representatives to produce comprehensive contributions.

Europe is entering the new decade facing the consequences of a financial and economic crisis that resulted from inconsiderate behaviours from some private business players coupled with a damaging laissez-faire attitude from public powers. While a global depression has been prevented thanks to a strong public intervention in the economy, the crisis has severely hit several European countries and its consequences, notably the rise of unemployment, will remain to be responded to in all countries in the coming years. Along with numerous European stakeholders, the ETUCE finds that it is time to move on right away with building a new regulation model for Europe, giving the priority to public services and to public interest and emphasising the social dimension of the European Union. The enforcement of the new Treaty provides the European policy makers and stakeholders with the opportunity to engage immediately in this process, both through a more social reading of the existing acquis communautaire and with new initiatives from the EU institutions. There is no doubt that such a vital exercise requires a revision of the orthodox neo-liberal policies that are promoted by the European Commission, in particular since 2004.

### ***The priority of priorities: no cuts in education and research***

The ETUCE fully supports the Commission's advice to member states to avoid cutting the public expenditure in education and research (p.3). This realistic approach complies with the Council's Key messages to the Spring European Council on the European Youth Pact and European cooperation in the youth field (02/16/09), the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council (03/19-20/09) as well as the Education Council message to the European Council as a contribution from the field of education to the reflection on the post 2010 Lisbon Strategy (11/26/09).

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The ETUCE wishes to stress that from 2002 to 2006 the total public expenditure of EU 27 countries has fallen by 0,5 %<sup>1</sup> and that this trend is likely to get even worse with the consequences of the crisis. In 2009, national authorities in Ireland, Latvia, Hungary and Romania have reduced their expenditure in education by a significant level. The ETUCE has stated that these drastic measures are putting the education systems of these countries at risk of degrading teachers' working conditions, infringement of pupils' rights, even school closure in some cases and a general deterioration of the quality of education.<sup>2</sup>

The ETUCE therefore calls on the European Commission to clearly stress in its final proposal for the EU 2020 strategy the paramount importance for the member states not to cut public spending in education and research. The continuity of the efforts on the way to reaching the Lisbon goals requires more than ever substantial investments in education. Within the context of the EU 2020 cycle as presented by the Commission in its working document, cutting in education and research is for the EU member states a dead end policy.

### ***A Strong Need for a New European Dynamic***

The ETUCE regrets that the Commission's working document, while setting ambitious goals, contains little concrete language on how to reach the target of a *"knowledge-based, connected, greener and more inclusive economy, growing fast and sustainably, creating high levels of employment and social progresses"*. The disappointing results of the Lisbon Strategy have shown that showing an ambitious agenda (e.g. becoming the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world) is not enough as such to implement a comprehensive and fruitful strategy. The ETUCE hopes that the adoption of the new Treaty coupled with the launch of the EU 2020 strategy will create a new European dynamic, developing a stronger coordination as well as concrete policy implementation at national level.

### ***Education and training: a transversal issue for the three EU 2020 priorities***

The ETUCE welcomes the Commission's will to strengthen the European coordination in education, both undertaking more education initiatives and campaigns at EU level and respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The upcoming European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education, which is expected to start in early 2010, will certainly play a role for the overall European cooperation on education issues.

A high-quality, attractive and dynamic education sector constitutes a transversal key element for the three priorities as exposed in the working document on the EU 2020 strategy (pp.4-8).

The ETUCE is concerned about the fact that the working document does not remind the Member states on the numbered targets as set-up by the newly adopted EU education benchmarks for the period up to 2020, notably on ECE participation, low achievers in basic skills, early school leaving and on tertiary level of attainment<sup>3</sup>. Along with the substantial investments in education required for reaching the benchmarks, Member states should develop a broad approach of these issues. The most essential task of the education systems is to educate for life and the outlook on education must be comprehensive, cover various skills and key competences and promote quality and equal opportunities for all in education, particularly for those with unfavoured socio-economic background and those at risk of exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat, 2009

<sup>2</sup> ETUCE statements on respective situations in LV, HU, RO, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') 2009/C 119/02

Teachers and school leaders will undoubtedly play a significant role for the overall objective of improving **school education**. The Commission has estimated in 2006 that more than one million new qualified teachers will have to be recruited to replace the retiring cohorts<sup>4</sup>. Good working conditions, better salaries as well as career opportunities are essential to attract qualified candidates and value teachers and educators in general. To that regard, initial teacher education and continuous professional development must be emphasised as a key factor. The ETUCE underlines that a Master's level initial education is needed to ensure a high-quality teacher education<sup>5</sup>.

The ETUCE doesn't understand the reasons why the Commission's working document does not mention the crucial need to strengthen and improve **Early Childhood Education (ECE)**, when this area is also transversal to the two first priorities for the EU 2020 strategy. The ETUCE wishes to underline the dual purpose of ECE, social and educational, involving the work of qualified personals to provide children with opportunities to learn and develop knowledge. The Barcelona targets to provide childcare to at least 90% of the children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and to 33% of children under 3 years of age has now been complemented with a specific benchmark on ECE in the new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (2009/C 119/02). Within this context, the ETUCE calls on the Commission to include ECE as a fully recognized segment of education and therefore as another important area of work for the EU 2020 strategy.

The Commission's working paper on EU 2020 also misses a clear reference to **Life Long Learning and Vocational Education and Training** as part of the effort to be made in most Member states to implement the second priority (pp.6-7). When it comes to LLL and VET, the ETUCE wishes to warn the Commission and the Member states not to take a simplistic approach regarding the objective of better matching the supply and demand of qualified workers. The "labour market needs" is an extremely variable factor and a narrow interpretation of the Commission's approach as exposed in the working document as well as through the New Skills for New Jobs initiative could lead to short-term VET and LLL policies at a high risk of failure. Even though this segment of education relates more directly to the labour market, VET and LLL are full part of the overall education systems, aimed at educating for life<sup>6</sup>. The three priorities for the EU 2020 strategy involve the responsibility for the Member states to improve the existing VET and LLL systems as well as to facilitate the European portability of certifications. For that purpose, strengthening the Copenhagen process, notably the achievement of the EQF and ECVET systems, should be emphasised in the EU 2020 strategy. The ETUCE also stresses that this process is to be carried out along with the social partners in education in all member states.

Finally, developing a better access for all citizens to **Higher Education and research** should also be a priority for EU 27 Member states. The ETUCE finds that the access to Higher Education for a broader portion of population from EU Member states is a more urgent and concrete objective to "*achieve a European Knowledge Area*" than the portentous intention of being labelled "best in the world". Anyhow, both require major efforts to increase public investments in Higher Education and Research. As an indicator of the urgent need to foster investments in this area, the most recent available data shows that the EU 27 countries all together spent less than half of the United States per student in tertiary education.<sup>7</sup> The ETUCE also wishes to remind to the Commission that Higher Education and Research personnel all agree on the fact that a market-oriented and corporate vision of universities, over-focussing on output and links with private

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<sup>4</sup> Commission working document "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training", 2006

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ETUCE Policy Paper "Teacher Education in Europe", 2008

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ETUCE statement on the EC Communication "New Skills for New Jobs", 2009

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, 117/2008

business will jeopardise the success that the European university system has achieved so far in terms of enrolments, quality and democracy.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion to its contribution to the EU 2020 strategy consultation, the ETUCE wishes to stress that quality education is a public responsibility. Education is not merely a tool to improve the economy but also plays a pivotal role for social cohesion, equality, active citizenship, cultural diversity and personal fulfilment. National governments and EU institutions should bear in mind this broad and comprehensive concept of education in all their future actions aiming at *“rethinking education systems and labour markets”* (p.3) in Europe.

The ETUCE fully agrees with its European Confederation the ETUC to say that while the original 2000 concept of the Lisbon Strategy presented a balanced approach between its economic, social, environmental and educational strands, the 2005 shift has given too much focus on the economy to the detriment of the other aspects. The fact that the Lisbon Strategy has failed to protect the European economy from the global financial and economic crisis should lead the European Commission, the Parliament and the Council to take a more balanced approach for the EU 2020 strategy. While education is not meant to replace the states’ duty to protect the citizens from unemployment and poverty, it will undoubtedly play a central role in the overall organisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s European societies. This role can be fulfilled only with high-quality education systems, publicly funded and regulated.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. ETUCE statement in response to the 2008 review of the Lisbon strategy, 2008