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ETUCE Social Dialogue Status Conference 4-5 June 2007

The third part of the ETUCE Social Dialogue project *Strengthening European Social Dialogue in the Education sector III* has reached its final stage. To conclude the project, a Social Dialogue Status Conference will be held in Brussels on the 4th and 5th of June 2007 gathering participants from both the employers' side and the trade unions' side to take stock of the progress made so far and give directions for the future work on social dialogue.

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Green Paper on the European Research Area

ETUCE has recently consulted its member organisations within Higher Education about the latest research initiative from the European Commission: the Green Paper on the European Research Area (ERA). This internal ETUCE consultation will prepare the ground for the elaboration of an ETUCE statement giving input to the future orientations of the ERA and its initiatives for 2008 in response to the Commission's Green Paper.

The Commission's Green Paper is intended to take stock of the ERA, firstly introduced at the Lisbon European Council in 2000. Many initiatives for European Research have been launched since, but much ground work remains to be done to build the ERA completely.

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ETUCE sets focus on teachers' work-related stress

Through several activities during 2007, ETUCE wants to bring teachers' work-related stress into focus at European level. The problem of work-related stress is increasing in the European Union and, undoubtedly, teachers are among the professions reporting the highest level of work-related stress.

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Calendar

June:

4-5: Conference: "Towards a European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education", Brussels

6: ETUCE Quality Panel Meeting

13: ETUCE Working Group on Teacher Education

[Read more >>>](#)

ETUCE Social Dialogue Status Conference in Brussels, 4-5 June 2007

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During the autumn of 2006 and spring of 2007, a series of seven bipartite ETUCE regional seminars on the theme "Towards a European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education" have been held throughout Europe. Following the discussions in national bipartite groups during the seminars, the vast majority of countries represented are currently ready to continue the process at national level. Social partners in the majority of the countries furthermore committed to create (or have already created) national working groups preparing the European Sectoral Social Dialogue on Education in their country.

Building on these commitments, the Conference aims to prepare the further steps to be taken in the process and will thus focus on:

- The representation of the employers and teacher trade unions in a European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education;
- The scope and content of the Social Dialogue;
- The elements and directions for the future work on the statutes and work plan of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee.

Various speakers from the European Commission, CEEP, the ETUCE, HOSPEEM (European representative body for the employers in the Hospitals sector) etc. will provide the participants with information and experiences on how to create a Sectoral Social Dialogue. Separate

workshop sessions on the topic “Next steps in the process” will give the opportunity of in-depth discussions among teacher unions and employers respectively on how to move ahead with the process. The entire draft agenda for the conference can be downloaded [here](#).

For further information about the conference visit the ETUCE Social Dialogue web-site: www.edu-dialogue.eu

Green Paper on the European Research Area



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The Commission’s Green Paper is intended to take stock of the ERA, first introduced at the Lisbon European Council in 2000. Many initiatives for European Research have been launched since, but much ground work remains to be done to build the ERA completely. In the public consultation on the review of the ERA, the Commission is therefore asking for viewpoints centred on six central objectives as listed below:

- The establishment of a **single European labour market for researchers** with attractive conditions for easy movement between institutions, disciplines, sectors and countries, without financial and administrative obstacles.
- The creation of **world-class research infrastructures** in the form of European joint ventures accessible to research teams from across the whole world enabling the free circulation of knowledge, researchers and technology.
- **The strengthening of the European research institutions** through better networking and cooperation between research institutes and the world of business to attract the necessary critical mass of human and financial resources.
- The introduction of a simple and harmonized regime for intellectual property rights and innovative communication channels with public access to enhance an **effective knowledge transfer** between public research, industry and the broader society.

- **The coordination of research programmes and priorities** by ensuring coherence between European, national and regional research programmes to jointly identify major challenges and define broad research agendas.
- The promotion of **international cooperation** enabling other countries in the world to participate in the ERA to promote the development of multilateral initiatives addressing global challenges and the international exchange of researchers.

The Commission's public consultation will run from the 1st of May to the 31st of August 2007. In order to prepare the ETUCE response, all member organisations within higher education are invited to respond to the ETUCE Secretariat by the 15th of June 2007. The Green Paper can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/consultation-era_en.html.



ETUCE sets focus on teachers' work-related stress

Through several activities during 2007, ETUCE wants to bring teachers' work-related stress into focus at European level. The problem of work-related stress is increasing in the European Union and, undoubtedly, teachers are among the professions reporting the highest level of work-related stress. The increasing workload on teachers, the lack of social recognition, the school environment and job insecurity are all among the factors which have been identified by teachers in several European countries as leading to a rise in stress-related illnesses.

To fight this negative trend, the ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP signed a Framework Agreement on work-related stress on 8 October 2004 to be implemented before 8 October 2007. The objective of the agreement is to provide employers and workers with a framework to identify, prevent and manage problems of work-related stress. Tackling stress at work often leads to greater efficiency and improved occupational health and safety, with consequent economic and social benefits for the individual, the workplace and society as a whole.

During 2007 ETUCE will carry out several activities in order to support member organisations in implementing the framework agreement in their respective national contexts, focussing in particular on improving their expertise on teachers' work-related stress and intensifying their efforts to reduce it. Importantly, the European framework agreement not only brings about greater focus on work-related stress but also gives impetus for national social partners to conclude cross-sectoral or sectoral agreements on this issue.

ETUCE's project activities on stress will be carried out in close cooperation with six member organisations: Solidarnosc (Poland), MUT (Malta), GEW (Germany), Lärarförbundet (Sweden), FNE (Portugal) and ESTUS (Slovenia). ETUCE has recently sent out survey questionnaires to all member organisations in order to obtain information on recent developments in the implementation of the framework agreement, the identification of potential stress factors in teachers' work and the responsibilities of employers and employees to combat stress. The project's expert is currently conducting the analysis of the responses in close cooperation with ETUCE. In order to disseminate and further discuss the results of the survey, a seminar will be arranged in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on the 21st and 22nd of September 2007. The framework agreement on work-related stress will also be discussed and analysed at this seminar, and the results of the discussion will be published in a booklet by the project expert.

[For more information on the project, visit the ETUCE webpage.](#)

[The Framework Agreement on work-related stress](#)

ETUCE Executive Board approves revised Action Plan for Social Dialogue

On the 16th and 17th of April 2007, the ETUCE Executive Board gathered in Brussels for their biannual meeting. Here, the Executive Board took stock of recent developments within ETUCE's work on social dialogue and approved a revised Action Plan for the future steps to be taken in the process towards establishing a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education at EU level. Following the upcoming Social Dialogue Status Conference in June, the next steps in the process will be three seminars gathering affiliates from the different levels of the education sector (pre-primary/primary/secondary, VET, higher education) to discuss specific issues relevant for the level in question in relation to a Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee, as well as a separate meeting only for employers' representatives. In approving the revised action plan, the Executive Board emphasised the importance of strengthening the process at national level by ensuring close cooperation with employers in all countries in the next phases of the process.

Statements on the EIT and ECVET endorsed

Besides the approval of the revised Action Plan for Social Dialogue, the Executive Board endorsed two ETUCE statements; one on the Commission's proposal for a regulation establishing the European Institute of Technology and one in response to the Commission's Consultation on the ECVET system. The Commission's proposal on the EIT has been thoroughly discussed by the Higher Education and

Research Standing Committee (HERSC) and the results of these discussions provided the basis for the ETUCE statement. The Statement expresses serious reservations regarding the proposed funding model and governing structure of the EIT and questions the added value of such an initiative. The other adopted statement, the ETUCE position paper on the Commission's proposal to establish a credit transfer system within VET, is based on responses from ETUCE member organisations in 16 countries. The statement welcomes the ECVET's potential for increasing the possibility for citizens to transfer between different education and training systems and between working life and further education. However, the ETUCE statement also puts forward some concerns in relation to the proposed design of the ECVET, in particular the definition of the credit points, the relation between ECVET and ECTS and gives finally specific recommendations regarding the process of implementing the system at national level.

Finally, the Executive Board reiterated ETUCE's support for the ETUC petition on high-quality public services and urged all member organisations to do their utmost to help reach the goal of collecting 1 million signatures.

Public Services on the agenda in the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee

The European trade union movement, the public employers and political parties at EU level have for some time been discussing the idea of a European framework on Public Services and have called on the Commission to carry out the legal work. A recent conference titled "A European Framework on High-Quality Public Services" organised by the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee once again brought up the issue and stressed the urgent need to clarify the rules applied to public services in Europe.

Instead of the non-legislative initiatives concerning public services which the Commission has presented in recent years, a number of speakers at the Conference once again asked the Commission to put forward a clear and concrete EU horizontal legislative proposal on public services. High quality public services – open and transparent, with equal access for all – are essential elements in the European Social Model and need to be safeguarded, and only a European framework directive can ensure this, stated representatives from the European Socialists Party, the ETUC, CEEP, EPSU, and the European Social Platform.

A legislative proposal would provide clarity about the responsibilities between the EU and Member States and enshrine the sovereignty of local authorities in the design and management of the public services for

which they are responsible. A clear distinction between services of “general economic interest” and of “non-economic interest”, and between the provision of public services and the rules of the internal market, must as well be clarified in such a legislative proposal. For the education sector, such a framework directive on public services would not give further competences to the EU in the field of education but would rather ensure that the existing division between EU and Member State competence in the education sector is upheld. At present, decisions on the boundary between EU and Member State competence with regard to the application of EU competition law in the education sector is often left to the European Court of Justice. A European framework for Public Services would provide a legal basis to determine this boundary more clearly than is the case today.

Commission Communication on Public Services

In response to the conference debate, the Commission representative presented their intentions to draft a Communication on public services. A review of the public services in the EU will be the crucial point in the Communication and the leading objectives in this review are intended to be subsidiarity, compatibility, diversity and universality, and legal certainty in line with the guiding principles outlined in the Commission’s White Paper on Services of General Interests.

The question remains, is this enough? A Communication such as that proposed one may end up being one among all the other non-legislative initiatives dealing with public services in the EU, but not providing the needed legal framework. The position of the European trade union movement is clear: The ETUC petition for ‘high-quality public services, accessible to all’ urges the Commission to put forward framework legislation designed to safeguard public services. By mid-May around 325.000 signatures were collected. To reach the 1 million signatures, ETUCE encourages all member organisations once again to promote the petition in all ways possible. The petition can be signed via a link from the ETUCE website.

The up-coming Portuguese Presidency will address this crucial matter. In September, the Presidency will host a “Forum of Social Services” focussing on attaining a better definition on the role of Services of General Interest to ensure high quality social services for all. The discussion on a European Framework for Public Services will continue.

Sign our petition for high-quality
public services, accessible to all

www.petitionpublicservice.eu



European Trade Union Confederation

European Survey on Language Competences

A language skills indicator is one of the proposed 20 indicators in the Commission's recent proposal for a new coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks. This indicator is intended to measure the general level of foreign language knowledge of pupils in the Member States. In this context, a large European survey on language competences is planned for the first semester of 2009 to collect the necessary data to construct such a language indicator. On 13 April 2007 the Commission presented a detailed plan for this survey which is to be approved by the Council of Ministers during 2007.

The European survey on language competences intends to provide Member States, policy makers, teachers and practitioners with reliable and comparable data on foreign language competence in the EU. It will provide knowledge about the multilingual capacities of young people, identify where good practice and performance can be found, and measure progress towards the objective of improving foreign language learning.

The framework of the European survey on language competences

The survey will test a representative number of pupils in the age of 14-16 (pupils enrolled in the final year of lower secondary education or the second year of upper secondary education). The test will measure three kinds of language skills, namely *reading comprehension*, *listening comprehension* and *writing* in the first and second most widely taught European languages of the EU: *English, French, German, Spanish and Italian*. The Commission also intends to take the initiative to develop instruments to cover the fourth language skill – *speaking* – later on.

In the exact testing the survey will be based on an instrument measuring a continuum of increasing levels of competences from level A1 to level B2. This scale is outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages which consists of six levels divided into three broad divisions: Basic user (A1-A2), Independent user (B1-B2) and Proficient user (C1-C2). Besides the direct testing of language skills, the Commission intends to make a questionnaire for students, teachers, headmasters and governments to gather contextual information (on socio-economic background, migrant status, education of language teachers etc.) that will allow analysis of possible factors which might impact on pupils' language competences.

The survey will be implemented in three steps. The technical work was launched in March 2007 (defining the sampling methods, selecting participating institutions and individuals etc.), the development of the test and pilot test will be carried out in the spring of 2008 and the full tests should be released in the Member States at the beginning of 2009. The national cost of implementing the survey will depend on the final structure of the survey (testing methods used, sample size, number of skillstested etc.). The international costs of the survey are foreseen to

be covered by the European Union within the framework of the lifelong-learning programme (2007-2013) in agreement with the Programme Committee. These costs will be related to the development of the tests, the coordination and follow-up of the Pilot tests and the analysis and reporting of the final results.

For more information:

[Commission Communication: Framework for the European survey on language competences](#)



ETUC position on the Commission Green Paper “Modernising Labour Law”

On 20-21 March 2007, the ETUC Executive Committee adopted their position paper on the Commission’s Green Paper “Modernising Labour Law”. The Commission released their Green Paper in November last year to launch a debate in the EU on how labour law can evolve to face the challenge of combining greater flexibility with the need to maximise security for all, the so-called flexicurity approach. The outcome of the consultation on the Green Paper will provide the basis for a Commission Communication on flexicurity later this year.

In their position paper, the ETUC welcomes the recognition of the need for increased protection of the growing proportion of workers across the EU in precarious forms of employment. However, the ETUC strongly disagrees with the analytical framework presented in the Green Paper. The Commission’s approach to the concept of *flexicurity* is simplistic and one-sided according to the ETUC, as the Commission sees flexibility of labour law as the key instrument to promote adaptability of workers and enterprises. In relation to this the Green Paper does not pay sufficient attention to the broad spectrum of policy measures necessary for the proper functioning of the labour market and the integration of the most disadvantaged groups.

In the position paper, the ETUC is therefore first and foremost stressing the need to eliminate the gap between “insiders” and “outsiders” on the labour market by improving the protection of precarious workers, and the ETUC proposes the following actions:

- Invest in better enforcement of existing national and EU labour law, and where necessary refocus the scope of labour law, to ensure that it properly covers all workers.

- Address real causes for segmentation, such as gender inequality and the lack of policies to support work-life balance.
- Extend protection to new forms of work, by considering the development of a “core of rights”, which is offering all working people regardless of their employment status a set of essential rights including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The reading of the Green Paper in the European Parliament

The lead Committee in the European Parliament dealing with the Green Paper, the Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL), is currently debating the draft report by the Rapporteur Mr. Jacek Protasiewicz's (EPP-ED, Poland). The Rapporteur's draft report has encouraged much debate within the EMPL committee and some 450 amendments have been proposed. A number of MEPs in the Committee are calling for a clearer and broader definition of security, stressing that security is more than economic security; it also depends on the workers' right to continuing training and lifelong learning. The role of social partners and social dialogue are other areas which a number of MEPs have highlighted should be given greater attention in the report. Voting on the amendments will take place on the 5th of June 2007.

In a recent press release, the ETUC expressed disappointment and strong criticism of the Rapporteur's draft report. The analysis of Europe's labour market problems in the draft report is too simplistic, and the subject of protection for precarious workers should be enhanced. The ETUC calls on all political groups in the Parliament to come up with a more balanced approach that will give the growing number of precarious workers around Europe a genuine prospect of quality employment and proper protection.

[Read the entire ETUC position paper.](#)

ETUCE Calendar

June:

4-5: Social Dialogue Status Conference

6: ETUCE Quality Panel Meeting

13: Meeting of the ETUCE Working Group on Teacher Education

September:

21-22: First Seminar in the Stress Project

New Publications

- [ETUC: The flexicurity debate and the challenges for the trade union movement](#)
- [ETUCE: Ahead of entrance – Cooperation between Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania – Second Seminar, Bucharest, October 2006](#)
- [Eurydice: Focus on the structure of Higher Education in Europe. National trends in the Bologna Process 2006/07](#)