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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

### ETUCE COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGY PLAN ON THE EI GLOBAL RESPONSE TO COMMERCIALISATION AND PRIVATISATION IN/OFF EDUCATION

April 2015

**The EI campaign** *The Global Response to Commercialisation and Privatisation in/of Education* aims to realise the second objective set out in UNITE campaign of demonstrating that commercialisation and privatisation undermine public education and are detrimental to the interests of society. To achieve this goal the EI campaign sets out a global project with the aim of demonstrating where and how commercialisation and privatisation *in and of education*<sup>1</sup> undermine the right to free quality education, create and entrench existing inequalities in education, undermine teachers' working conditions, labour relations and rights, and erode democratic decision-making and public accountability in relation to education governance. The core emphasis of the campaign is on education corporations and consultancy firms taking part in education governance, in particular in relation to the sale and provision of for-profit education and education services. Below is outlined the priorities of the European region, which are based on specific expressions of privatisation encountered in the European region.

**The level of commercialisation and privatisation** in and of education in the European Region is in general still low; however continuous pressure on public budgets and the accumulating effect of the economic and financial crisis seem to invite several Governments to consider options to relieve the constrained public budgets. In addition, the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) may put considerable strain on public education systems. GERM emphasises and drives increased competition, wider school choice, teacher deprofessionalisation and test-based accountability within education systems.

**The big education Corporations** are not visible in Europe like in other parts of the world, however this picture may change and there is no reason to believe that current developments, especially in the Southern- and Eastern part of Europe, would not provide ideas and incentives to Governments in general supported by a growing political sentiment that competition, also in education is good.

**The Social Dialogue** and with it the collective bargaining mechanisms have been under pressure and in decline in Europe for the last 8 years. This is a worrying development and a severe setback for the trade union movement. As a consequence it furthers more

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<sup>1</sup> Ball and Youdell (2008) distinguish between privatisation *of* public education, which entails "the opening up of public education services to private sector participation [usually] on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education" and privatisation *in* public education, which "involves the "importing of ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like businesses and more business-like".

encouragement for Governments to decide on policymaking initiatives without any consultation and discussion with the trade unions.

**Teacher's professional status** and development are under pressure. Increasing demands to raise the effectiveness of teaching is spreading all over Europe, but very little resources are allocated to ensure the teachers professional development, which is a prerequisite for the development of a quality public education system.

**The investment in education** is not sufficient in many countries in Europe. Following the economic crisis half of the European countries have cut back on the education budgets. Such a financial situation is an encouragement for Governments to look for other ways of financing education e.g. by outsourcing and privatisation.

### **Activities and priorities of ETUCE and Member Organisations**

1. **Governments must be held accountable for their responsibility to provide free quality universal education.** In particular, governments must respond with appropriate legislative responses. The negative impact of commercialisation and privatisation concerns in particular discrimination of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion or the ability to pay.
2. **The European Semester and the country specific recommendations have become crucial for national reforms of public education systems.** Across Europe, the continuous demand for fiscal consolidation and to bring down public debt has resulted in cuts in education budgets and has widened the spaces for private, commercial and financial actors in education, and thereby jeopardising access to free quality education for all.

#### **ETUCE and member organisations in cooperation should:**

- **Assess the state of play of commercialisation and privatisation in and of education** in the European region to expose the scope and scale of private sector involvement in education governance and policy making, as well as its effects on the education sector through a survey addressed to ETUCE Member Organisations and desk research. In addition, developing national plans to reversing current as well as preventing future commercialisation and privatisation in and of education;
- **Call for legislation** that prohibits for-profit education and requires private actors to be subject to and comply with national quality, performance and accreditations standards and requirements on the same basis as public schools and institutions, as well as ensuring transparency around the activities of private schools and institutions and prevent conflict of interest of private actors;
- **Examine EU legislation of relevance to the education sector**, including the [EU Procurement Directive](#);

- **Assess possibilities for and exchange experiences of strategies to negotiate collective agreements** with private education establishments to secure a fair level of remuneration and decent working conditions to make it less attractive to set up none-public or public supported competing institutions;
  - **Lobby for ensuring the Social Dialogue and consultation of teacher trade unions** on the development of education policies and national reform agenda in the framework of the European Semester process;
  - **Urge governments to adequately support financially public education** systems. This must also be reflected in all policy areas affecting education, including in the European semester and the country specific recommendations;
  - **Develop further the ETUCE Action plan on the European semester** to make sure that Member Organisations have maximum influence during the budgetary planning and procedure;
3. **Trade agreements pose significant risks to public education by restricting public policy space and could have the effect of locking in and intensifying the pressures of commercialisation and privatisation.** Moreover, investment agreements, including the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism, cause serious concerns about the ability of states to maintain domestic regulatory space in the public interest. This could result in a serious chilling impact on democratic decision-making in the education sector.

ETUCE and member organisations in cooperation should:

- **Continue to fight for the exclusion of education from trade and investment agreements**, notable TTIP, TiSA and CETA. In addition, the EU and European governments should not pressure other countries to make commitments in education in trade agreements as this would seriously infringe their ability to develop and enhance public education systems;
4. **Governments' external development cooperation policies should promote free quality universal education where public education systems are in a process of developing or still need to be developed.**

ETUCE member organisations in cooperation should:

- **Foster external policies, including development aid that promotes development of quality public education;**
  - **Prevent governments from using external policies, including development aid, to promoting and supporting private education**
  - **Increase North – South/East solidarity in cooperation, advocacy and DC programmes;**
5. **Corporate Social Responsibility policies should be mandatory and include effective follow-up mechanisms to ensure that private corporations can be held accountable for their activities and actions.**

ETUCE and member organisations in cooperation should:

- **Advocate for corporate social responsibility**, such as code of conducts or charter on corporate and private sector responsibility in education, that are mandatory and that include instruments for legal redress for victims of human rights abuses, including by contributing to the revision of the European policy on corporate Social Responsibility;