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European Trade Union Committee for Education

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ETUCE Position on the

Investment plan for Europe

Adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 10 December, 2014

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)¹, which represents 131 teacher unions in Europe, i.e. more than 11 million teachers from all levels of the education sector in 48 countries, has long been advocating for increasing [growth-enhancing investment in education](#). ETUCE considers the European Commission's [Investment Plan for Europe](#), which was launched on 26 November 2014, as a first step. More significant measures in terms of investment in education and training should be taken.

However, ETUCE calls upon the Council of the European Union and the European Commission to turn away from potential further marketization of education. **ETUCE calls the European Council of 18-19 December 2014 to take a holistic view on investment for Europe; to regulate and clarify the role of public-private partnership in deploying the new funds in education infrastructures; and to maintain and develop the public responsibility and public investment in education**, while endorsing the Investment Plan for Europe.

Our reasons are the following:

1. As the European trade union federation of teachers, researchers and educational staff, ETUCE promotes and defends the rights and status of the teaching profession. It also **advocates for quality education for all and demands to increase investment in education as the sole way to increase potential economic growth in Europe and to reduce social inequalities**. ETUCE believes that the Investment Plan for Europe does not put sufficient emphasis on the social dimension of Europe. The need for growth and competitiveness should be far more balanced by the need to ensure social equality and improve quality of life of the people.
2. The Investment Plan for Europe **proposes further possibilities of investment in education infrastructures driven only by the needs of the labour market and business**. Therefore, we demand the European Commission to urgently focus more on the social dimension as well as on more democratic governance. In order to reach this objective, the **inclusion and recognition of the role of social partners at European, national, regional and local levels** as key stakeholders into the

¹ ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of teacher unions

governance of the Plan is essential, as well as **the inclusion of social standards and appropriate regulation** into the investment guidelines for the selection criteria.

3. Quality education is a human right and as such should be sustainable, inclusive and equally available for all. The goal of education is to prepare people for personal and for professional life, for citizenship and critical thinking, and should not be reduced to serve the short-term needs of the labour market. ETUCE invites the European Commission to avoid using expressions which reflect this narrow and partial view of the purpose of the education which considers EU citizens merely as 'economic units'. ETUCE encourages the European Commission to **broaden the scope of investment in research and innovation, which goes beyond benefitting only EU competitiveness.**
4. Education is not an economic good, it is a societal good, and must serve the interests of the public rather than those of the private investors. ETUCE is very concerned by the fact that the Investment Plan for Europe might **force governments into public-private partnership** on targeted future economically viable projects,² also in the field of education infrastructures. Teacher trade unions have long been proposing alternative approaches to improve education systems as a whole, based on growth-enhancing investment and solidarity rather than economic and social competition. However, ETUCE regrets that the Investment Plan for Europe fails to fuel sustainable public investment in education as a whole.
5. ETUCE believes that education must be **publicly funded and accessible for all.** In the context of the current austerity policies, many governments are implementing drastic cuts in education budgets. At the same time, they increasingly privatise potentially profitable education services, thus they jeopardise free access to quality education for all. All across Europe, privatisation and marketisation of education are resulting in increased discrimination, social fragmentation and widening inequality, the most affected being those with fewer resources.
6. Teacher trade unions are concerned by the fact that there is no viable solution which can lead to real recovery, sustainable growth and social cohesion in Europe without **a radical shift from the neoliberal paradigm.** The foreseen €21 billion investment of the Plan (€16 billion from the EU budget/European Commission and €5 billion from the European Investment Bank) is public money used to attract private investments. This means on the one side that taxpayers are accountable in case of private losses, and on the other side that private investors capitalise their profits. In other words, the **Investment Plan socialises the risks and privatises the profits.**
7. Furthermore, the Investment Plan **fails to reverse the austerity dogma.** In the last European elections European citizens asked the European institutions to reverse the paradigm of austerity and fiscal consolidation towards investing on people, qualitative growth and social cohesion, for a just and democratic Europe.

² From the [Investment Plan for Europe](#), COM (2014) 903 final, 26.11.2014, page 6: '[...] parts of the EU budget should be used differently, at both EU and national level. The main idea is to provide greater risk-bearing capacity through public money in order to encourage project promoters and attract private finance to viable investment projects which would not have happened otherwise. This will make the best use of EU public resources'.

Although the Investment Plan gives some budgetary flexibility to those Member States that contribute to the new European Fund for Strategic Investments³, the European Commission - in the latest [Annual Growth Survey 2015](#) - continues to impose measures upon governments to accomplish fiscal consolidation and to bring down public debt. It is hard to believe that those Member States hit by the economic crisis are going to find the necessary resources to protect and increase public spending in education. As a solution, ETUCE has long been proposing **to exclude education from the calculation of public deficit and debt within the European Growth and Stability Pact**, strongly affirming that education has a value to society that goes far beyond issues relating to levels of expenditure and cannot be limited by austerity-driven budgetary policies.

We hope that the demands of the teachers, researchers and educational staff in Europe that are expressed in this ETUCE Position will be taken into consideration.

³ The new Fund will be set up in partnership between the European Commission (EC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). They will contribute to the Fund for a total amount of €21 billion according to the following criteria: €16 billion as the EC 'risk-bearing' guarantee and €5 billion as the EIB contribution.