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ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education
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CALL TO MINISTERS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

For the Tirana Ministerial Conference, May, 2024

The digital and green transitions, the health and cost-of-living crises, demographic changes, attacks on fundamental values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy, freedom and respect of knowledge and science, and Russia's war against Ukraine and the risk of its escalation, as well as the war in Palestine whose result is the destruction of education infrastructures including universities and the humanitarian disaster are having a strong social, economic and political impact on the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and higher education and research personnel.

The European higher education and research sectors and their personnel have a key role in defending the fundamental values of higher education, human rights, democracy and equality, passing on these values from generation to generation and building bridges between nations. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are vital pillars of strong democracies and social development. Academic freedom is essential for any democracy to enable freedom of expression and open and critical discussions, build mutual trust, and create sustainable development. Higher education teaching and research that is free from political, economic and religious influence also helps to ensure a knowledge-based society wherein people make rational and reasonable decisions as citizens and in democratic processes.

In order to guarantee quality higher education and research and to develop “a more inclusive, innovative, interconnected and resilient European Higher Education Area (EHEA)”¹, it is crucial that staff are properly valued and supported.

It is vital to ensure that academic careers are attractive to talented teachers and researchers. However, increasing pressures on academics and higher education and research institutions including underfunding, privatisation, the casualisation of academic work and declining salaries are making academic careers unattractive. Improving the attractiveness of academic careers and the retention of staff in higher education and research are [priorities](#) for the Member Organisations of the European

¹EHEA Rome Ministerial Communique, 19 November 2020
http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) which represents staff in the higher education and research sector in 52 countries.

In the run up to the 2024 Tirana Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process, we call on Ministers to commit to the following goals in the forthcoming Communiqué:

- Strengthen **academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and other fundamental values**, such as freedom of knowledge, science, and speech, and ensure that they are effectively monitored across the European space with the involvement of the staff in the process;
- Encourage **cooperation** instead of competition among institutions, staff and students within the Bologna Process;
- Guarantee sustainable and long-term **public investment and funding** in higher education and research to ensure high quality education and research and a supportive working and learning environment for staff and students;
- Ensure **research-based quality teaching and learning**, parity of esteem between teaching and research, a shift from quantitative towards qualitative assessment of teaching and research, and responsible, transparent and collegial evaluation of staff;
- Strengthen **collegial governance and effective social dialogue** with the trade unions of academic staff, in particular in relation to the digital and green transitions of higher education and research and their impact on the jobs and working conditions of the staff;
- Make the **career attractive** for highly skilled personnel by guaranteeing **attractive salaries, fair pensions, decent working conditions, job security with permanent contracts, reliable career paths, and equal opportunities** for staff in higher education and research;
- Ensure **the health and safety** of academics and researchers, and equip them with effective support to fight against fake news and protect them from hate speech and harassment;
- Recognise that innovations in teaching and learning including **digitalisation** must be underpinned by pedagogical practices, and guarantee **work-life balance** for the staff, respect their **right to connect and disconnect and to telework**;
- Respect and protect **intellectual property** of higher education and research personnel when developing open science and education;
- Support access of **early career academics** to quality induction and preparation for the profession, permanent contractual status and fair career development pathways;
- Ensure equal access to **quality continuous professional development** for all staff to take place during normal working hours;

- Ensure **equal access** and the incorporation of the social dimension of higher education and research for both staff and students and **greater equality in the recruitment, retention, career development and evaluation of academic staff.**

Our specific national demands:

- **Permanent positions, i. e. civil servants,** at all levels and all posts, ensuring stable work teams;
- **Increase in salaries** and increase of the “index point”;
- **Salary scales and career paths** that do not incite to leave academy;
- End of the project-based funding hegemony and **re-establishment of permanent funding;**
- Researchers on full-time positions and teachers-researchers who can effectively combine teaching with research;
- Collegial evaluations by peers, a majority of whom are elected;
- **Really democratic governing** boards;
- Staff representatives whose prerogatives should **be strengthened and who should finally be listened to;**
- **The utmost urgency:** give back the 900 billion stolen from the HER budget by decree on February 24, 2024.