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5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92
Fax +32 2 224 06 94
secretariat@csee-etuice.org
<http://www.csee-etuice.org>

European Director

Martin RØMER

Treasurer

Mike JENNINGS

ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

ETUCE position on the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014 – 2020

Adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 22 July 2014

On 6 June 2014, the European Commission presented the *EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014 – 2020*. ETUCE* wishes to convey its opinion on this EU Framework to the Italian Presidency and to contribute to the on-going preparation of the Council resolution on this document.

ETUCE acknowledges the effort made by the European Commission to finally launch a new common European Strategic Framework on occupational health and safety to ensure decent workplaces. The launch lies two years behind schedule – a sign of how little some European governments supported the development of a common EU strategy on health and safety.

ETUCE underlines the European Commission's statement that "**investment in [occupational health and safety] OSH contributes to the well-being of workers and is cost-effective**" as it is of particular importance to highlight the advantages of OSH prevention in times of economic recession, when governments and employers advance austerity policies to cut occupational health and safety provisions.

Indeed, given the importance of public services, including health and education, ETUCE supports further investment and the maintenance of high standards in this area. In this context and in light of the increasing number and scope of free trade agreements, such as TTIP¹, ETUCE warns that public policy space is being restricted though legally enforceable trade rules and strongly advocates for a carve-out of public services from such agreements².

The fundamental support to investment in OSH also needs to be considered in the European Commission's work regarding the regularity fitness and performance programmer (REFIT) which is due to be assessed and which should not lead to the reduction of the European Union's work on safeguarding and promoting occupational health and safety of workers. It should most certainly invite member states and employers to maintain and further invest into their responsibility of providing decent, safe and healthy workplaces.

ETUCE positively notes the consideration given to **social partner initiatives** in supporting the implementation of the 2007-2013 OSH Strategy. It is however, not evident whether the national social partners have been consulted by their governments on the compilation of their national reports concerning the implementation of the 24 OSH Directives, which they recently submitted to the European Commission.

We therefore ask the Council to insist that the member states involve the social partners at national level when reviewing national OSH strategies and when they write their

¹ The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

² Statement on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership:

http://etuice.homestead.com/Statements/2014/Statement_on_the_Transatlantic_Trade_and_Investment_Partnership_EN.pdf.

implementation reports to the European Commission, especially as regards the evaluation of the implementation of the present strategic framework at national level.

ETUCE welcomes that the European Commission recognizes the **prevention of work-related stress** and the support for mental health and well-being as one of the three main challenges in Europe. However, the prevention of mental health problems does not only need to be addressed in light of an ageing workforce. It is an integral part of the health and well-being of all workers and should, be given greater significance in the framework. Furthermore, we severely criticise the European Commission for not highlighting any concrete actions, on how it strives to address the prevention of work-related stress. Establishing a network of OSH professionals and scientists and the dissemination of findings of the European Risk Observatory and of good practices can hardly be called innovative measures. We therefore call on the Italian Presidency to provide a backbone to the European Framework with more concrete benchmark targets for the member states to achieve by 2016.

On the same topic, we reject the unique connection that the framework establishes between innovative technologies and the rise of work-related stress. Various studies (by EUROFOUND, EU-OSHA, etc. show that work-related stress is not solely connected to the increased use of innovative tools and technologies, but especially related to heavy workload, working time, lack of influence on work content, lack of reconciliation of work, family and private life. In the education sector, it is related to a variety of aspects, such as emotionally demanding work, violence and harassment and, amongst others, noise and voice strain. The European Council should take all different aspects related to a **decent workplace** into account in the prevention of psychosocial hazards such as work-related stress.

The education sector, like other public service sectors, is a female dominated profession. Therefore a special **focus on the prevention of women's occupational health and safety hazards**, maternity and parental leave, reconciliation of work and family life as well as pension, social security and insurance schemes that take into account care work is crucial. ETUCE therefore demands the Italian Presidency to duly note the failure of the EU Strategic Framework in tackling these issues and to appropriately address in its resolution the gender equality aspect and the challenges linked to them on implementing the framework.

ETUCE recognizes the good will of the European Commission in highlighting the **education sector as one of the policy areas for synergies**. Indeed, raising awareness on OSH strategies starts in education; this implies however, all levels of education and cannot be limited to primary or secondary education alone. Vocational education and training, higher education and research as well as adult learning play an essential role.

Furthermore, ETUCE wishes to remind the European Commission that education is a human right and a public good and according to the subsidiarity principle, the member states are responsible for developing education policy at national and regional level. If OSH issues are to be better reflected at school level, it is important that member states commit themselves to incorporate teaching and learning for health and safety issues in their national education systems not only through aspects of the curriculum, but also through sustainable school operations such as healthy and safe workplaces for education staff. The prime centre of attention for the European Commission concerning health and safety in the education sector therefore should be to support member states in providing decent workplaces in education and to protect and promote the health and safety of teachers, educators and other staff working in the education sector.

Recognising that the working environment of education staff is the learning environment of pupils and students and thus has a crucial impact on the quality of education and the future of the member states, we ask the Italian Presidency to highlight these issues in its resolution.

**The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 129 Teacher Unions and 11 million teachers in 45 countries of Europe. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at 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.*