

**Report of the**  
**ETUCE Training Seminar on**  
**Investing in Education: Strengthening the involvement of teacher trade unions in the European Semester on education and training**  
**29 February – 01 March 2016**  
**Malta**

**Addressed to:** ETUCE member organisations in Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal Spain and Turkey

This report gives a summary of the main points of discussion/training. The report is available on [ETUCE website](#) together the [pictures](#) of the event.

### Opening session

Odile Corderlier (ETUCE Vice-President) and Kevin Bonello (MUT President, Malta) welcomed all participants. Odile Corderlier explained the context of the ETUCE activity on the European Semester. She introduced the ETUCE Action Plan on the European Semester adopted by the ETUCE Bureau in



2014, and the impact of the European Semester on education and training reforms and investment in Europe. Since active involvement is needed both at national and at European level, ETUCE as the European region of Education International, EI, encourages and supports involvement of both national teacher unions in this process and cooperation at European level in order to tackle common challenges. Kevin Bonello emphasised the importance of social dialogue both at national and European level. He stressed that the EU policy-making is getting closer to the national level and it strongly affects all European countries. In this context, social dialogue is an opportunity to contribute to the development of education and training policies both at national and European level.



## Introduction to the project and training



Paola Cammilli (ETUCE) gave an overview of the European Semester and explained the project context. The European Commission (EC) introduced the European Semester in 2011 as a reaction to the economic crisis. Recently, countries are experiencing a slight economic recovery. The European Semester has therefore shifted from a mere budget surveillance to a more

'socially oriented' economic governance, aimed at achieving the Europe 2020 strategy targets (EU2020), here including the targets of the 'Strategic framework - Education and Training 2020' (ET2020). The ETUCE project focuses on raising awareness of teacher unions and enhancing their specific know-how on actors, activities and timing of the European Semester, in order to strengthen their involvement and to influence education-related country specific recommendations and national reform programmes both at national and European level. During the project life-time, five regional trainings are to be delivered to ETUCE member organisations across Europe. Alongside an enhanced knowledge, participants are also having the chance to discuss how to enhance cooperation with other actors, such as governments, employers and other trade unions on the European Semester. In parallel, a research is being conducted for ETUCE by the University of Nottingham, UK, on the effects of the European Semester on education and training reforms at national level, the involvement of teacher unions on the implementation of Country Specific Recommendations, and on the changing nature of investment in education, whether and to what extent this has resulted in some privatisation/outsourcing of education services.

Participants were invited to introduce themselves and their expectations from the training seminar.

### EU policies impacting national Education and Training

Agnes Roman (ETUCE) emphasised that although education is a national competence, it is influenced by several priorities and recommendations from the European level. Agnes Roman explained the process and interplay of the EU2020 and the ET2020 targets more in detail. National reform programmes and Country Specific Recommendations of the European Semester are based on priorities and benchmarks defined by the EU2020 and ET2020 strategy.

### What is the European Semester and why is it important for teacher trade unions?

Professor Howard Stevenson (University of Nottingham), external expert of the project, shortly reported the focus of the ETUCE research, which is to analyse the process of the European Semester, its relationship to investment in education and whether the decrease of public education funding across Europe had an impact on privatisation trends in and of education.

Professor Stevenson explained the glossary, actors and timing of the European Semester. Its interlink with the EU 2020 and ET 2020 strategy targets. He strongly emphasised the effect on



education system reforms and the Country specific recommendations. He also pointed out how social partners can intervene in these different steps.

### Training activity 1:

#### How the European Semester works at European and national level – timeline and actors

Divided into small working groups, participants discussed and built the timeline of the European Semester process with the support of ETUCE and Danish Union of Teachers (DLF – as project co-applicant) as moderators and experts.



After the reporting from the working group activity in plenary, Paola Camilli (ETUCE) presented the structure, mechanism, actors and timeline of the European Semester. She explained the concrete effects of Country Specific Recommendations at national level.

Kristina Aaltonen (DLF) presented the DLF's action plan on the European Semester by describing concrete activities at national level DLF is undertaking.

### Training activity 2:

#### Impact of the Semester on national Education and Training policy and reforms: Country Specific Recommendations

In small working groups, participants compared and discussed concrete outcomes of the Country Specific Recommendations on education and training in their countries.

Common issues were identified as outcomes, such as: the increasing workload for teachers and decreasing salaries, 'rationalisation' and constant reforms. Some consequences of major concern are: the rise of inequalities, less support to students and demotivation among teaching staff. Furthermore, a lack of social dialogue was reported.



To conclude the day, participants agreed on the need to influence the European Semester especially before and after National Reform Programmes and Country Specific Recommendations. Odile Cordelier (ETUCE Vice-president) emphasised the importance of analysing the situation first and intervening accordingly.

## Panel discussion: Country case Malta – the different actors, timing and actions of the European and national Semester explained

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The panel session was chaired by Odile Cordelier (ETUCE Vice-president) who introduced Alexandra Zammit (European Semester Officer for Malta from the European Commission), Ms Gwen Gatt (Ministry of Education and Employment of Malta) and Kevin Bonello (MUT) as speakers. Alexandra Zammit shortly described the European Semester from the European Commission's perspective. She affirmed that social partners are consulted in December/January, when priorities are decided in preparation of the Country Reports. She explained that social partners are consulted, but the main counterparts are Ministries. Gwen Gatt presented the contribution of the Ministry of Education to the National Reform Programme. However, this yearly document is prepared and written by the Ministry of Finance. She also presented the Country Specific Recommendations for Malta directly concerning teachers. Kevin Bonello (MUT) clarified that MUT does not give direct inputs to the European Semester. Much indirect input is given to the Ministry of Education which develops targets and strategies. Moreover, MUT works in cooperation with employer organisations and other stakeholders, such as parents' associations and it is widely involved in several discussions and pre-discussions. According to MUT, the problem is the demand for quick decisions and reforms, which leads to inadequate work.

## Training activity 3: Teacher union actions, the way ahead

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In working groups, participants debated about strategies to get involved in the European Semester process according to teacher unions' objectives, activities, allies, opponents, resources and timing.

Among the objectives: to influence the political decision-making process through communication, monitoring, consultations, diffusion of information and involvement of the media. Stakeholders with common interests are often other trade unions, schools,

students, parents and other interlocutors. The media can often be among the opponents. Human resources within the trade union are not always sufficient. The good management of communication tools and financial resources are also desirable. All these elements should work together to strengthen the involvement of teacher unions in the European Semester.

## Conclusion

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Odile Cordelier (ETUCE Vice-president) closed the Training Seminar wrapping-up the national and European challenges. She stressed the crucial importance of cooperation and information flow within ETUCE in order to contribute effectively to the European Semester on education and training.