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ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

ETUCE Statement

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on the Draft Council conclusions on Early Childhood Education and Care

ETUCE welcomes in general the Draft Council conclusions on Early Childhood Education and Care, which will be debated at the Education Council meeting on 19-20 May, 2011. However we would like to highlight some important views prior to the Council discussion by commenting the draft conclusions.

ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education represents 135 Teacher Unions in Europe and 12.8 million teachers from all levels of the education sector. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and an Industry Federation within ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International.

We strongly support that the Draft conclusions promote to enhance the attractiveness of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) profession by providing better working conditions, better competences and qualification of the professionals. We welcome that there is a strong emphasis on the gender balance among the professionals in this education sector.

On the other hand, we believe that the text is not as explicit in the details as the Commission Communication on *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow*. The Draft Council conclusions miss to mention that the attractiveness of the profession for highly qualified and committed staff is closely related to rewarding salaries. It is unacceptable that in most of the EU countries the teachers' pay still depends on the age of the pupils, and that the ECEC profession is to a great extent undervalued. Thus, we invite the Member States to ensure better, attractive salary for the ECEC staff, reaching the level of the primary school teachers' wages.

At the same time, we urge the Education Ministers to consent to the highest level of qualification regarding the professionalism of the ECEC staff. ETUCE regrets that the Council intends to recommend the Commission to monitor "better" but not the "best" quality of ECEC. We would like to emphasise that the wording here should be changed in order to really achieve the best outcome.

Providing high standards and safeguarding the best quality of ECEC is a government responsibility. It must be recognised that education is a fundamental right; therefore all education sectors must be publicly funded and publicly regulated. Hence, ETUCE opposes to increased private investment in the ECEC sector and invites the Education Council to foster more public investment rather than to encourage to strive for a right "balance between public and private investment".