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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

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## Statement on Greece

### ETUCE stands in solidarity with the Greek teachers

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In light of the upcoming general strike in Greece the 26 September 2012 the ETUCE, the European Region of Education International stands in solidarity with our Greek colleagues:

There seems no end to austerity in Greece. After having been bailed out already twice followed by severe austerity measures that have brought education and health services nearly to a collapse, the Greek Government are preparing for another round of cuts and privatisation.

Creditors are demanding the government extend the working week to six days plus further deregulation of the labour market, as a condition for releasing more funds as part of the country's second bailout. A leaked letter reportedly sent to Greece's finance and labour Ministries from the troika -- the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Union -- is believed to order drastic labour market reforms to minimum wages and working hours.

To comply with the demands the Greek Government is seeking new ways to implement budget cuts of 11.5 billion EUR to ensure the country receives its next bailout instalment in October.

The amount invested in public education in Greece has always been among the lowest in Europe. After several cuts in the education budget and cuts in teachers' salaries, pensions and benefits, schools are now finding themselves in a situation where they can't even secure heating in winter time. At the same time the Greek public health service has deteriorated leaving elderly and serious ill people in a state of "help your-self situation".

It has been clear from the outset that the Greek Government must reform the public administration, the budgeting system, the tax system and to take measures that could increase the productivity. However, what we are seeing in Greece is the biggest austerity experiment in European history. In many ways Greece has been turned into an austerity laboratory under control of purely economic interests. There seems no end to how far investors seem ready to go in demands for deregulation of the labour market.

ETUCE has several times denounced the policy of austerity which just leads to a vicious circle of more cuts and austerity. In the present situation in Greece cuts in the education budget leads to nowhere. Instead both the creditors and the Government should understand that protection of investment in education is one of the ways to get out of the crisis and an important component in insuring a sustainable and social coherent society.

The latest Greek employment data shows that more than half of people under the age of 25 are out of work. As of May 2012, 53.8% of young Greeks were unemployed, according to Eurostat, the statistics division of the European Commission. At the same time more than 6000 private businesses have fled to Bulgaria where they find a more profitable climate. Despite tax and VAT increase in Greece the amount collected by the Government

is shrinking and the GDP is continuing to contract which means that only more austerity measures are waiting in the months to come.

With cuts in teachers' salaries varying from 25 to 35 % teachers already paid more than reasonable for a crisis in which they do not have any part. The cuts in salaries are continuing in an even more sophisticated and selective way. We note that academic staff in universities are now being singled out for selective punitive wage cuts not being imposed on comparable categories of public servants, in spite of their already having faced freeze and cuts in salaries in the past four years. We support the industrial action which university staff is considering.

ETUCE recognises the need for reform but clearly denounces the policy of austerity that has been enforced on Greece. In the current situation where many countries in Europe are in crisis there is very little prospect of recovery unless real and coordinated action at the European level are initiated to support growth. In several countries, not only Greece, employers are not lacking cheap labour but a shortage of demand for their products.

The ETUCE believes that safeguarding and even more invest in education in Greece could add an important help in the already developing social crisis and ETUCE stands with our Greek Member Organisations in their fight against the austerity measures and gives the full support to our colleagues in the general strike the 26 September.

The ETUCE also encourage all our European Member Unions to send messages of solidarity and show their opposition and defiance of the policies in Greece by protests to the Greek Government, the Greek Embassies, the President of the European Union and the political groups in the European Parliament.