



Education and Culture DG

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STATEMENTS ON 'The teaching profession; changes, challenges and perspectives'.  
EUNEC Conference Vilnius, 13-15 October 2008

## 1. The EUNEC conference on the teaching profession.

### 1.1 EUNEC

EUNEC is a network of education councils in the European Union. As a network, EUNEC brings together the expertise of advisory bodies and of the stakeholders and experts who are involved in the national/regional advisory processes. These advisory bodies give advice to the governments on the different European countries in the field of education and training.

### 1.2 What are these statements meant for?

EUNEC discussed the findings of the European Union and OECD with regard to the teaching profession and the results of national projects. The European councils gathered in Vilnius and formulated critical remarks and statements on these issues.

EUNEC wants to disseminate these statements pro-actively towards the European Commission, the European Parliament, relevant DGs. EUNEC also wants to promote actions by its members at national/regional level. These critical remarks and statements offer an input for national advisory opinions of education councils. They should provide a significant input for reflection and action by relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training such as providers of education, teacher trade unions, social partners, experts in the field of education and training.

### 1.3 The conference

EUNEC organised the conference on the teaching profession on the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008 together with the Lithuanian Education Council. 15 countries were represented.

## 2. Statements

**The great amount of expectations towards teachers<sup>1</sup> and schools** is a constant issue in all presentations and discussions. On one hand, this is a sign of trust of society in the added value of the education system, but on the other hand it means an overwhelming amount of expectations from:

- the society (economy, labour market, equity, pupils with special needs, migration,..)
- the international/European and national/regional policy makers
- new educational paradigms (learner oriented teaching, learn to learn, learning outcomes,...)
- stakeholders at a school level (pupils, parents, social partners, welfare system)

Teachers are expected to find a coherent balance between these diverging and often contradictory perspectives. Therefore **we need negotiation platforms** involving decision makers, public stakeholders, the teaching profession (professional teacher organisations, education councils, advisory bodies,...). Anyhow, society and decision makers should rely on **the professional autonomy** of teachers to decide on the concrete pedagogical consequences of the choices made.

In this context, all teachers should be **drivers of change**, innovation and creativity, not just an object of change defined by others:

- the teacher should be an expert in learning
- the teacher should be an active member of the school team and of the learning community
- the teacher should be an active partner in the communication with parents, pupils and the environment of the school.

As a consequence, it is necessary to consider the teacher **as a professional with a high status** in society. All professionalization efforts should stimulate teachers to become **reflective practitioners**.

### **A CONTINUUM OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALIZATION**

These two critical conditions oblige to consider teacher professionalization as a continuum, a coherent process in which we can distinguish three phases, with consequences on the level of structures, tools and resources:

- the initial teacher education
- the induction
- the continuous professional development

EUNEC considers **that these three phases have to become a structural part of national policies on teacher professionalization**.

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<sup>1</sup> Using the term “teacher” we refer to the whole teaching profession in compulsory education, VET, LLL and higher education. We also include trainers in VET.

### **A. The initial teacher education.**

- The teacher has to be a scientific expert, capable to manage the subject within the curriculum.
- The teacher must be capable of a critical reflection on his/her own practice.
- The teacher should be educated in a broad humanistic perspective, with attention to language proficiency, social and emotional competences, an ethical reference, commitment and capability of teamwork.

As a consequence, the initial teacher education should be strongly research based, in combination with relevant school based experiences. Initial teacher education has to be highly qualified on a life long learning perspective. There is a tendency for longer studies at higher education level, possibly within a master but also within a structured continuous professional development approach.

### **B. Induction.**

This necessary phase of induction, school and practice based, is an obligation for the school, for the teacher and for the system. There is a need for recognition of this separate phase in the continuum of professional development.

Coaching and mentorship within the school have to be developed.

This will have financial and structural consequences, for the induction needs to be integrated within the assignment of the new teacher.

The quality of the induction phase and of initial teacher education will be enhanced by the creation of partnerships between the mentorship at school level and the initial teacher training institutes.

### **C. Continuous Professional Development.**

Continuous Professional Development is a right and a duty for every teacher. It has to be a structured, not a linear process.

Teachers need to have access to a structured offer of high quality specialised training, fully recognised and answering to their demands.

In this process informal and non-formal trajectories have to be taken into account.

The right balance between the personal development and school development is important.

The most important features of continuous professional development are:

- personal coaching, school team based work and peer learning
- time for self evaluation, self assessment, reflection
- networking between schools, and between schools and higher education institutions and pedagogical centres
- mobility of different kinds : international mobility, mobility between school levels, exchange programmes
- involvement in research

To make this continuous professional development effective, the assignment of the teacher has to be defined, benchmarking with other sectors has to be taken into account, the teacher needs time and facilities, so there is a need for financial incentives.

## **IMPACT FOR THE SCHOOL AS AN ORGANISATION**

If we want schools to become real learning communities, they have to be autonomous organisations with a real human resources management policy to deal with recruitment, school development and financial responsibilities. The notion of school leadership becomes extremely important. Schools have to be part of a networking between schools and higher education institutions and pedagogical centres.

Therefore, schools should be entitled to integrate other professionals as staff members. Nevertheless the task of teaching itself should remain exclusive for the teacher.

To be able to provide a positive climate and incentives for teachers, schools need the commitment of all stakeholders, especially trade unions, parents and pupils.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL / REGIONAL POLICY MAKING**

Governments have to give priority to financial investments in teacher professional development, both at school and at policy level. If we want good teachers, teacher status and salaries have to be revalued.

After three days of listening to experts and discussing, a lot of questions remain unanswered:

How to deal with shortages of teachers? How to deal with unqualified teachers?  
How to attract talented candidates?

And finally, what support and what instruments coming from the European Union could help us to face these common difficulties?