

ETUCE Final Conference of the ETUCE project on Teachers' Work-Related Stress,

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OPENING SPEECH

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Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the executive board of OLME you are welcome in Athens and I do wish you a pleasant stay. Unfortunately, our conference coincides with the national elections in Greece causing thus difficulties in the guided tour plans. We hope to compensate you for this in a future ETUCE conference or seminar in Greece. This conference is indeed the best way to celebrate the World Teachers Day and at the same time to think seriously on the teachers needs, problems and perspectives and act accordingly.

Dear colleagues,

Allow me to introduce you some thoughts in relation to the conference topic, education and the schoolteachers' condition in Greece.

We live in an era where those in power declare the importance of education for the future of our society. However, whereas the educational institutions are being expanded and their role is upgraded, the teaching profession is constantly being denigrated in relation to the schoolteachers' professional status, social position and recognition.

The problems which our schoolteachers are being confronted with, not only in Greece but elsewhere as well, are related to the:

- a) Financial policies (funds on education reaching the 3% of the GDP, low salaries, cutbacks in the social insurance rights, e.t.c)
- b) Neoliberal educational policies exercised by the governments (privatization, competitiveness, e.t.c) and
- c) The working conditions and flexible work arrangements.

The implementation of all these three factors creates an unbearable working environment, and forms a background within which the schoolteacher is invited to work and contribute to the education of young people. The development of WRS is an inevitable consequence of this background.

Low salaries force schoolteachers to seek a second job. The motto of the Greek trade Unions is to "live in dignity out of our salary" expressing our concern for the schoolteacher who could contribute to the public school beyond any short of influence. "Poor teachers, illiterate people" is a 60's motto encompassing the need to invest in the schoolteacher in order to educate people.

The lack of actual teacher training in secondary education all along with the inadequate pedagogical training related to secondary education issues in the universities causes difficulties in our career

development. In reality, the schoolteacher has no help to meet the demands of the contemporary classroom.

The controversial written competition for the admission of schoolteachers in secondary education as well as the lack of transparency in hiring procedures diminishes the status and the position of schoolteachers at the outset of their career.

The efforts to reinforce the monitoring and guidance of the teacher through the assessment in secondary education, the use of benchmark assessment system to gauge the students strengths and weaknesses against end-of-year standards lead both to a competition based on private sector type financial criteria, and to the categorization and crashing of the schoolteachers' personality and pedagogical freedom.

The educational reform in our country is realised without an actual dialogue with the educational institutions. It is done roughly and without planning. As a result, every time the Minister of Education changes, a new reform appears. The educational reform has turn out to be the shortest joke in Greece.

The social changes and their consequences in family, the increasing phenomenon of violence among the young people cause additional communication problems between schoolteachers and students.

This unstable environment in relation to the sense that the state does not take into account the teachers' point of view leads not only to the increase of the WRS but to the disappointment and the gradual slowing down of one's efforts to improve his/her work.

KEMETE (The Greek Centre of research and documentation of OLME) along with other institutes has undertaken a research on the conditions under which the teacher's profession is exercised. A part of the research is related to WRS and refers to the consequences that the terms and the working conditions of the schoolteachers have on their mental health laying emphasis on the satisfaction from their profession. Through this research we expect to determine the depth of the problems and then undertake the appropriate measures.

In a research on the secondary education teachers conducted by Panteion University and published 5 years ago, 67% of the respondents consider that both the bad organization and the malfunction of the educational systems are mainly responsible for the WRS whereas 57% of them feels exhausted during work and another 53% would change work if they could. On the other hand a 55% thinks that the construction of a good relationship between the teacher and the pupil is the greatest difficulty in their work.

Dear colleagues,

The causes of WRS are both social and collective therefore we should act collectively in order to deal with these causes.

By encouraging collectivity, unity and solidarity within our unions we could create a teacher's front through which they could fight to change these policies, cope with the causes of WRS and finally resolve both the teachers' problems and the problems of education in a positive way.

Thank you.