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Galina MERKULOVA  
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5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th  
1210 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92  
Fax +32 2 224 06 94  
[secretariat@csee-etuice.org](mailto:secretariat@csee-etuice.org)  
<http://www.csee-etuice.org>

### European Director

Martin RØMER

### Treasurer

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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

TO: President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso

Ref.: MR/9495

24 May 2013

### RE: Education system in Greece is on the brink of collapse

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the ETUCE, which represents 10.6 million teachers and education employees in 45 countries, I would like to express my deep concern in relation to recent developments in Greece and to urge you to take personal action to help teachers who face imprisonment or dismissal because of disagreement with their government's policies.

The civilian mobilisation order recently issued by the Greek government prevents trade unions from exercising their right to strike action. This decision clearly erodes basic civil liberties and democratic rights.

I believe that your political vision is not to stand by in the face of injustice. I urge you to condemn the fact that education in Greece has been subject to harsh measures over the past three years, including the reduction of public spending on education by 33 per cent (2009-2012) and by 47 per cent until 2016 as well as the reduction of teachers' salaries up to 45 per cent for new teachers. Furthermore, the number of permanent teachers has been cut by 12 per cent. There have been school closures, a dismantling of educational support structures, and a loss of 32,000 teaching hours per week by the end of the school year due to teacher shortages.

This Easter, when schools were closed, the government in Greece passed draconian measures:

- Dismissal of 10,000 substitute teachers as of September
- Compulsory transfers of permanent teachers across the country,
- Increase of teaching hours by 2-5 hours resulting in teachers being made redundant and, therefore, subject to dismissal,
- Further closures and mergers of schools and an increase in the numbers of students in the classroom.

Our member organisation, the Federation of Secondary School Teachers of Greece (OLME), has twice called on the Greek government to open dialogue, both prior to the vote on these measures and after the vote.

OLME has asked for the withdrawal of these measures until public dialogue takes place and urged the education minister to make a public commitment to stop the dismissals. So far, the government has refused to participate in any dialogue with the teachers.

Mr. President, I believe that the European Commission should take action to stop the erosion of democracy in Greece. Now, and in this particular issue, your involvement could show the European public that your Commission cares deeply about democratic principles.

The future of Europe depends on high quality education and the European Commission placed education among the five headline targets of the Europe 2020 initiative. In numerous documents, your Commission has stressed the importance of the education sector.

According to your Commission's Communication on Rethinking Education, education is "a core strategic asset for growth." Further, "the Commission will ensure that the contribution of education and investment in skills to growth and jobs is fully reflected in the European Semester."

As part of the "troika," the European Commission has deep influence on the decisions taken by the Greek government and by that is also partly responsible for the situation. Mr. President, I urge you to take a stand for education because your Member States' austerity policies are jeopardizing the future of Europe and contradicting your Commission's words.

Austerity must stop if Greece is to have a functioning education system and the European Commission cannot stand by or condone injustice. Teachers – who help ensure that the children and students in Greece have a future – cannot be made subject to harsh austerity measures.

I will appreciate your personal involvement in these matters and your efforts to stem the erosion of democracy in this country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Rømer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M' and 'R'.

Martin Rømer  
European Director