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TO: Mr. Gentiloni Paolo

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Subject: ETUCE supports its Italian member organisations in their fight for free high quality public education to remain the priority on the government's agenda

Dear Prime Minister,
Dear Minister,

ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education, is the European Region of Education International, the global umbrella organisation of education trade unions. It represents 131 education trade unions in Europe, i.e. more than 11 million teachers from all levels of education in 45 countries. ETUCE is a social partner in education at EU level and a trade union federation of the ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation.

The ETUCE member organisations in Italy, UIL-Scuola and FLC-CGIL, informed ETUCE about your intention to apply norms allowing Italian private schools to benefit from funds made available under the Italian National Operational Programme on Education for the implementation of the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the period 2014-2020.

The priorities of the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund under the EU Cohesion policy are based on the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy aiming to, inter alia, promote equal opportunities, social inclusion and cohesion, better education and employment; and to reduce imbalances between regions, combat poverty and tackle discrimination.

ETUCE would like to remind you that the thematic objective of the ESF “investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and life-long learning” focuses on, among others, [...] “(i) Reducing and preventing early school-leaving and promoting equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education

including formal, non-formal and informal learning pathways for reintegrating into education and training;

(ii) Improving the quality and efficiency of, and access to, tertiary and equivalent education with a view to increasing participation and attainment levels, especially for disadvantaged groups” [...], as stated in Article 3, Chapter 1 of the EU Regulation No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Along these lines, the Operational Programme (OP) negotiated by the Italian government with the European Commission, involving the social partners, commits your government to *“pursue the fight to reduce early school leaving and increase quality of education, while fostering safety, quality and energy-efficiency in school infrastructure”* through the EU-public funds generated by the ESF and ERDF.

To this end, supplementary funding from EU-funds such as the ESF and the ERDF must respect the right to free quality education for all, and in no way should such funding lead to further privatisation of education, which ETUCE and all its member organisations strongly oppose. Resources allocated under these funds should, first and foremost, contribute to narrow the equality gaps in access and learning and to enhance the provision of high quality public education for all, regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity or economic status.

An increased promotion of private actors in education governance - through funding, management or policy-making – as well as the diversion of funding and support for State funded schools to private schools, contributes to exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities, ethnic and religious segregation and undermining social solidarity. This comes at a critical time for the future of Europe. As the Italian Prime Minister, Paolo Gentiloni, stated on Wednesday, 15 March 2017, in Strasburg, when discussing the “Rome declaration” on the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome: *“We should focus on social Europe, because if we leave the weakest behind people will not trust the European Union”*.

Thereby, ETUCE stands firmly with its Italian member organisations in their demand to you to take a step back in order to re-negotiate the norms which could privilege private education institutions already financed by households and private provider. The existing norms can potentially further divide students between the rich or most privileged and those most in need or marginalised in Italy.

ETUCE encourages you to further commit to your responsibility to ensure access to and free and high quality public education for all and to involve education social partners in all decision-making in relation to education to the benefit of all students in Italy.

ETUCE is confident that you further develop and implement projects within the European Structural and Investment Funds in close cooperation with and taking into consideration the views of education social partners to ensure the effectiveness of the expected outcomes.

Sincerely yours,



Susan Flocken,
European Director

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