

President Hadar, Friends

It is a real pleasure to return to Romania and to Alma Mater so soon after attending your last Congress –but, on this occasion to join you in celebrating the 20th anniversary of your founding.

As President of the Pan European structure of Education International which incorporates the European Trade Union Committee for Education, I bring you the best wishes of our 141 member organisations coming from 45 different European countries.

I thank Alma Mater for your membership and very active participation in the work of our European organisation and its Board. I acknowledge the friendship and very active contribution of Mr Bobulescu over the years. And I also thank Alma Mater for the kindness and generosity shown to me on my visits to you – including a very enjoyable evening yesterday.

May I also bring greetings from my own organisation, the Educational Institute of Scotland. We think that, at the age of 20 years, you are very young, since we were formed in 1847 and we believe we may be the oldest teachers' organisation in the world!

Now, of course we have very different histories and paths of development, but we are all teacher trade unionists together in the European family of teacher organisations and we share many challenges in common.

In almost every European country our thoughts and our meetings are dominated by the economic crisis and its impact on public services in general and on education in particular. The whole concept of our European community is being tested by the crisis and the overwhelming pressure to repair the public finances.

Despite the fine words and ambitions of the Lisbon goals for 2010 and now 2020, when the crisis came, Europe was in no sense immune or protected from its effects.

Now, in some many countries extreme austerity measures are being applied – sometimes because of political choice, and sometimes because of conditions attached to financial support measures. The result is that there is a growing imbalance between **economic** imperatives and the **social** dimension.

You in Romania understand this better than most since you were among the first in to the recession and the most deeply hurt by it.

Other countries are at different stages. In the UK, the last government provided fiscal stimulus to keep the economy going but our new government has decided to introduce very harsh public spending cuts which we will learn about on 20 October in order to reduce the public debt. So we have the “calm before the storm”.

I am not sure anyone has a really good map we can use to navigate our way out of this dangerous situation we face. But, as trade unionists, we have take on this task to ensure that education and the young people who benefit from our work are as little damaged as possible.

At European level the ETUCE is working on a project whose final conference will be held in Bucharest on Tuesday. This enables an exchange of information on experiences and strategies being adopted across Europe.

On Wednesday and Thursday there will be an opportunity for unions from Central and Eastern Europe, which has been particularly badly affected by the crisis, to meet for a round table seminar on current issues.

Also on Wednesday the ETUC will organise a major demonstration in Brussels saying NO TO AUSTERITY.

Of course, there is work to do in our individual countries, to try to ensure that the interests of our members, of ordinary working people, are not trampled into the ground by an obsession with trying to satisfy the markets.

Of course we need to rebuild economic activity and prosperity. But only if it improves the quality of life of all our citizens. We need to ensure solidarity across all groups and take care that no one is left behind or excluded – the young, the elderly, the sick, the homeless, the unemployed or the low paid.

We can only do that through proper dialogue and engagement. In too many instances, governments have acted unilaterally and have excluded the representatives of civil society, such as trade unions, from the process. That is wrong and it is dangerous and could lead to social unrest.

We are in the early stages of constructing a social dialogue on education at European level with employers, so it is more important than ever that there should be meaningful mechanisms for dialogue at individual country level to underpin that process.

President. There is much work to be done. I congratulate Alma Mater on reaching its 20th Anniversary. I wish you all every success in your activity in the coming years, in carrying on your work, which will never be complete. A strong and influential trade union movement is an essential pillar of a healthy, democratic, civil society.

Thank you again for the invitation to be with you and for listening to me.

Ronnie Smith
President EIE

