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FLC CGIL CONGRESS
“Crisi e educazione: sindacati a confronto”

Manuela Mendonça
International Secretary
FENPROF - PORTUGAL

First of all, I'd like to thank FLC CGIL for having invited FENPROF for its 3rd congress. We are honoured to be here and willing to strengthen the long standing relation between our two organizations.

Concerning the theme of this meeting, the impact of the crisis on education is an issue of great concern for us because the severe cuts in education in our country are jeopardizing most of what we have achieved in 40 years of democracy in promoting quality public education for all.

Three years after the signing of the memorandum with the troika, Portugal is poorer and the Portuguese society increasingly unequal and unjust. In fact, in a country that occupies one of the last places among EU countries regarding the distribution of wealth, the neoliberal response to the crisis – that is, cuts in salaries, pensions and social benefits, restraints to rights, privatizations, weakening of the welfare state – is widening the social gap even more.

Austerity measures are severely hitting the middle class and brutally aggravating unemployment – officially reaches it now 17% of the workforce, and over 37% of young people. Many of them, educated and trained in Portugal, are emigrating every day, contributing to the development of richer countries.

As far as education is concerned, in 2013 the investment in education (3.8% of GDP) was the same of 1989, which means that we have regressed 24 years! The State budget for 2014 has a new cut of 570 million euros in public education (from early childhood to higher education) and, significantly, a rise in the amount of money to finance private schools – for example, to the implementation of a pilot project to introduce vouchers in our education system there is a sum of about 20 million euros, which proves that the crisis is being used to accelerate neoliberal reforms, namely to dismantle public services and to promote their privatization.

The harsh budget cuts are deteriorating teachers' living and working conditions as well as the quality of public education and their impact is felt at several levels: cuts in salaries and pensions; rising unemployment and insecurity; reduction of schools and universities' budgets; narrowing of the school curriculum (less hours for arts, technologies, laboratory experiences, civics, etc.); closure and merging of schools; increase in the number of pupils per class; increase in teaching hours; less support for pupils with special educational needs; increased dropout in higher education (this year there were less 5 thousand candidates to higher education, in a country whose rate of graduates is much lower than the average of the EU); a drastic reduction in the number of teachers [officially, unemployment among teachers increased 225% between 2009 and 2011. This year more than 30.000 teachers are unemployed and thousands of permanent teachers are candidates for dismissal].

In Science and Research (one of the main success of Portugal for the last 20 years, that brought us from the bottom of the EU Science parameters to the average, or even sometimes above it), these 3 years, and namely the last 6 months are fatal: dismissal of 80% of the researchers at the end of their contracts, cuts of 2/3 or more in the doctoral and post-doc grants, the transparency and the legality of all the evaluations and selections being questioned... proposals for complete casualization of all the researcher's careers, Portugal risks the quick destruction of the progressive research policy of the last two decades. The researchers (young and less young ones) are fighting together for the first time, with the help of the unions (Fenprof included, of course), and will have a National Meeting for Employment in Science next May, where unions also collaborate.

FENPROF strongly opposes the neo-liberal policies and these attacks against quality education, equal opportunities and employment in the education sector. In 2013 Portuguese teachers, answering to an appeal of all trade unions, developed a strong process of struggle, with big demonstrations, strikes in a period of student assessment and national examinations. It was the toughest action plan teacher unions have ever organized and that put education at the centre of public debate in Portugal.

FENPROF has also developed several initiatives integrated in IE campaign on quality education. campaigns:

- an 18-day campaign in favour of public education. Teachers and students actively participated in this campaign and many people made statements about the importance of public education.
- a campaign on "the importance of school in the social inclusion of disabled children" launched by FENPROF and the National Confederation of Disabled Organizations.
- an Open Letter calling on the Portuguese society to engage in a common action in defence of high quality public education and against the privatization purposes of our government. We are now promoting meetings with representatives of parents, students, municipalities, school leaders... to reinforce this appeal. And we are planning a big March for Education with all these participants in 2014, the year of the 40th anniversary of our revolution.
- an initiative to put pressure on the candidates to the European elections, seeking to clarify their position on three important issues: What percentage of GDP should be invested in education and science? Under what conditions can private schools be publicly funded? What concrete measures should be implemented to improve working conditions in schools?

FENPROF has been advocating the urgency of strong and visible actions at European level against the austerity policies. For that purpose, we have been trying to reinforce cooperation with other unions. But we do have to be more effective

in putting pressure on our governments and on the European Institutions, with common proposals and common demands.

In face of our governments' neoliberal, anti-social and anti-educational policies, we must join forces (in ETUCE and in EI) but also build alliances with other actors and social movements, both at national and international levels. That's why it is so important to be here and to have the opportunity to discuss with all of you our common challenges. Because, dear colleagues, we will only defeat a global attack with a global response.