

Progetto europeo “Rafforzare la cultura della negoziazione nei sistemi scolastici europei”

“UNC STRENGTHENING UNION NEGOTIATION CULTURE IN EDUCATION” PROJECT

Key aspects of the visit study to Madrid (22/23 April)

The meeting with the national and regional officials of Catalonia and the FETE UGT’s Madrid Community, which took place at the trade union training school “Escuela Julian Besteiro”, revealed the **strong regionalist connotation** of Spain’s educational and training system.

In fact, while the State is responsible for the general organization of the system, the definition of the basic elements of the curriculum, the control and evaluation of the system and its application, the **regional** communities are responsible for the administrative aspects, the definition of part of the curriculum, personnel management, the design of educational projects, personnel training, the allocation and financing of subsidies. Lastly, **local authorities** are responsible for preschool institutions and private schools, extracurricular activities and the monitoring of children of compulsory school age.

Regional communities have different curricular autonomy, based on the **teaching of languages**. In certain regional communities – such as Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque country, the Balearic Islands and the Valencia region, where Spanish is taught alongside the local language – the national curriculum reaches 55% and the local curriculum 45%. In all the other regions, where only Spanish is taught, the local curriculum reaches 35% while the national curriculum reaches 65%.

As the Regions are responsible for personnel management, the payment of certain allowances, and the organization of personnel training activities, which is also compensated (every six years of service after 100 training hours), it follows that the **criteria** to determine the number of staff, the amount of workers’ salaries and the **rules** related to mobility from one region to another **vary** from community to community.

Sometimes, at the regional level there are excessive salary differences, which do not reflect real differences in terms of organization and quality of work, but are determined by the resources available to the individual regional communities.

This aspect was addressed extensively during the meeting. The FETE UGT does not regard favourably salary differences that are not justified by differences in work organization among the various communities and included in its agenda the objective to obtain a **basic package**, in professional and compensation terms, which is the same throughout Spain.

Given a situation where the State and the autonomous communities are the decision-making centres of Spain’s educational system, the FETE UGT is organized at both national and regional level. At these levels, union activities are carried out in **general and sector bargaining**. The former address all general matters concerning the work and salaries of all civil servants, and the UGT participates alongside other confederations. The latter address matters related to the individual sectors and the FETE UGT participates in such activities, which relate to educational and training matters, together with other unions representing sector workers.

At national level, matters covered include the resources to be transferred to the autonomous communities to finance all the important services as well as **the signing of national level agreements** on the school system and on all the other public sectors. The autonomous communities, which are responsible for personnel management, allocate the funds received, through a regional bargaining process, to the different public sectors, obviously in accordance with certain national guidelines, and enter into agreements with local unions on work conditions.

To govern the complexity of the Spanish school system, which is characterized by a strong regional connotation, emphasis is placed on the consensus of all the parties involved in the management of the sector (Government, social partners, parties, professional and parents' associations, which are very active and influential in Spain). The agreements entered into are intended to create, through the broadest possible consensus, conditions that might allow the introduction of reform and modernization in Spain's school system, in harmony with the autonomous model.

In this respect, the State School Council (**Consejo Escolar del Estado**), a representation and participation body of the Ministry of Education consisting of representatives from the educational community, plays a key role. This body is consulted in connection with proposed legislation or regulations on teaching and submits proposals to improve the education system.

But what does the FETE think about this regionalist feature of Spain's school system? The FETE UGT thinks that **this process is rooted in history**; it is part of the identity of post-Franco Spain and, as such, should be considered as shared and irreversible. With this in mind, the FETE tries very carefully to strike a balance between national policies and local solutions, avoiding major gaps and inequalities among regions.

The visits to the school complexes " Ceip Ciudad de Saragoza" and " Ies las Musas", both in Madrid, allowed us to get to know first-hand the organization of a primary full-time school and a vocational high school. In addition, the meeting with the staff of these schools allowed us to take cognizance of the overall school system and to identify the role of the individual schools within the system, which is characterized, as already noted, by a strong autonomist process.

In terms of overall organization, the Spanish school system is structured as follows: **Pre-school education** (3-6 years), **primary education** (6-12), **compulsory secondary education** (12-16), followed by a **post-compulsory high school (Bachillerato) and vocational training**. Upon graduation from high school, a student may enrol at the University or in Higher Learning institution. At the end of the professional training programme, a student can start to work; on the other hand, with a bachillerato a student can enrol at university or in a higher learning institution.

In management terms, we thought that the role of the School Council was important. This is a body involved in the governance of the **school centre** which consists of representatives of teachers, parents, students (high school) and local authorities, who have broad authority to approve or reject educational or management projects.

The School Councils of the individual schools is a fundamental link in the decentralized school system and oversees the organizational, educational and economic management of the individual schools.

Thus, Spanish schools have a strong autonomy within strongly autonomous regions.

Witness to this are the teachers' working hours, which are spent only in part for teaching. **Spanish teachers at every school level work 35 hours a week. Of these, 30 hours are spent in school teaching**, performing activities related to teaching, supplementary activities and planning and support activities as required by schools organized in accordance with the autonomy principle. The remaining five hours can be spent also outside the school, in relation preparation and continuing education, among other things.

The organization of the space and the activities organized in accordance with the laboratory model that we observed in our visit to the primary school show the autonomous character that pervades the entire Spanish system, which reaches to a significant extent also the individual schools.

Another significant element is the continuity that characterizes, from a logistic and organizational standpoint, the schools at the various levels. Often, as we saw during our first visit, the school complexes include all levels from kindergarten to high school or, as we noted in our second visit, high school (compulsory and post-compulsory) and vocational training.

We found interesting that the **high school and the vocational school** which we visited **share the same building and have the same principal**, even though their curricula are different. Surely this type of organization attributes equal dignity vocational training, avoiding its marginalization and separation from the final segment of secondary education.

We also think that it is worthwhile to underscore the role of vocational training in the Spanish system. **Vocational training starts only after the end of compulsory schools at the age of 16 and continues until the age of 18, with 20 training hours a week.** The vocational school that we visited was designed to train healthcare workers. The school is equipped with special laboratories and has internal teachers. However, it relies also on external teachers with special qualifications and allows students to have internships in hospitals and healthcare facilities in the community. The organizational level and professional quality that we found is remarkable. Based on what we were told by the school's staff, graduates can find employment in keeping with their educational level without any difficulty.