

INTRODUCTION

European Parliament Roundtable

25 May 2011

Ana Gorey, President, Interparents

Thank you Mr. Cavada for inviting Interparents, which coordinates and represents the parent association's from all 14 European schools and has an official seat on the Board of Governors and in their working groups. Interparents attach great importance to European Education, the European spirit and sense of European identity that our schools give their pupils. Interparents attach great importance to this Committee's report and are delighted that the European Parliament is again looking at the question of European schooling as is their role. Today's report is an opportunity to see, not just where we are ten years on, but more importantly, where we are going.

Ten years on from the 2002 Bösch report "on the future financing of the European schools" and the famous 2005 Honeyball report "on options for developing the European Schools system". These reports led to the European Parliament and member States advocating the opening up of the system and the strengthening of the Baccalaureate, They led to the creation of a High Level Group under the Dutch presidency of the European schools and Commissioner Kallas and eventually, to the Reform, adopted in 2009. So you see why we look to you for direction and inspiration. We also look to you for concrete, independent, information such as the study you commissioned October 2008 on the Analysis of the academic and professional careers of the European schools' graduates. An analysis which showed what a great product we have.

Today we are at another turning point exacerbated by the financial crisis. There are many well-known, long standing problems at the schools due to overcrowding, lost hours, insufficient schools days, lack of common

educational materials. That too many students have to leave the system because they are failing, repeating, or the schools are unable to offer a curriculum suitable for their abilities. The governance system is too complex - incomprehensible, opaque to most, inappropriate and dysfunctional at best - and this year we have seen the financing of the schools collapse with the European Communities no longer providing a balancing budget, as stipulated in the Convention, but instead a closed envelope and I quote *“The schools were requested to produce their estimates in such a way that the Communities contribution can be limited to 164 million”*. However, despite every effort, the preliminary draft budgets for 2012 stood at 1.2% higher than 2011 with further saving only possible by adopting substantive pedagogical changes, which they did regardless of massive protests by parents, teachers, students and staff representatives, which you saw on 12 April, the day of the Board of Governors.

There are also new concerns regarding the opening up of the system, with associated schools coming in all shapes and sizes, generally left to their own devices with insufficient quality controls. They have the European schooling recipe but not much in the way of instructions or training. In fact, the Board of Governors specifically stipulates zero cost.

Reform under such straightened circumstances is a poisoned chalice. One size does not fit all. Each and every school has their own specificity and needs, hence the importance of real autonomy. For this to be successful, we need a framework, a strong European glue if you like, to ensure school autonomy, flexibility within a coherent, harmonious system which guarantees quality control and standards.

A system which separates what is the **management** of schools and what is the **management** of the quality of the curriculum and the qualification. A system which can stand on its own merits, underpinned by the intergovernmental basis it has today plus the participation of all its stakeholders.

Therefore, Mr. Cavada's report, your report, could not be more timely, especially as it is on the "European Schools system". Indeed, there is urgent work to be done on the existing system, starting with a call to reinstate the lost budget, better operational conditions and high educational standards in the 14 schools but there is also urgent work to be done on the wider European schools system of the future, starting with a feasibility study into how something like an independent European Baccalaureate Institute or Agency could be set up oversee the wider European schools system comprising of more and more schools.

Interparents believe that it is time for political impetus to be renewed. The European Schools and the European Baccalaureate are a platform for the European Union to coordinate. They are part of public education in Europe and we look forward to your recommendations to this end.