

INTERPARENTS

**ALICANTE BERGEN BRUSSELS I, II, III & IV CULHAM FRANKFURT
KARLSRUHE LUXEMBOURG I & II MOL MÜNCHEN VARESE**
– THE ASSOCIATION OF THE PARENTS ASSOCIATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS –

Strasbourg, 11 July 2011

Dear Member of the Petitions Committee,

I am writing to you on behalf of Interparents, the umbrella association of all the parents associations of the European Schools. Next week you will have a discussion on European Schools concerning “the effects of the budget cuts on the functioning of the European schools system”.

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. These are not due to new cuts but to years of under-investment and lack of governance, especially following the European Union enlargement and the enormous pressure on the schools for new pupils, languages, language sections, etc.

However, this year we are at a turning point in the financing and management of the schools exacerbated by the financial crisis and the failure of the European School Reform process. 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 made clear in first paragraph of the Preliminary Draft Budget 2012:

“With reference to a letter from the Commission of 29 November, the schools were informed that the Community contribution to balance the 2012 budget would change on the scale of the revised subsidy for the financial year 2011. The schools were requested to produce their estimates in such a way that the Communities contribution can be limited to 164 million”. (pg 1 [2011-D-02-14])

However, despite much time-consuming efforts by all the schools and the Office of the Secretary General, the consolidated preliminary draft budgets for 2012 was slightly higher than 2011. First of all, well over 80% of the school’s budget is on teacher salaries over which they have no control, leaving schools very little margin to find “savings”. Nor do schools have money left over from previous years to which they can tap into. Also the increase in costs are mainly due to the new sites of Brussels IV and Luxembourg II, increase in pupil numbers of 843 and loss of income due to decline of 142 Category III pupils. Other factors, such as arrival/ departures of teachers, also affect budgets especially when many of them leave simultaneously because of the 9 year rule. Alicante and Frankfurt are cases in point having opened 9 years ago.

“Before the Budgetary Committee Committee’s meeting, the Community subsidy stood at €168,201,240 and was thus €4,201,210 (=+2.56%) higher than the prospective Community contribution foreseen by the Commission.

The total amount of the preliminary draft budgets stood at €285,372,308 and was thus €3,373,427 (=1.20%) higher than the 2011 draft budget.

Further saving on the expenditure side are possible although they require substantive decisions to that effect to be taken by the Board of Governors” (pg 1 [2011-D-02-14])

These substantive decisions, seriously affect key areas of pupils’ education – class sizes, creation of classes (options), support measures; teacher secondments, timely replacement of absent teachers, inspections, infrastructure, to mention but a few, are to be found in the *“Revision of the Decisions of the Board of Governors concerning the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools”* [2011-01-D-33] and it’s two annexes – Annex I concerning coordination time for teachers, reduction of teaching hours and internal structures of the school and Annex II on Learning Support, SWALS support and Rattrapage.

Despite massive protests by parents, teachers and students on 12 April, the day of the Board of Governors including the petition you have before you, the Board of Governors adopted these measures, and *de facto* the 2012 budget. Their voice has not been heard nor that of the Joint Teaching Committee which rejected this document in. Nor did they see the final version, therefore, those responsible for the pedagogical integrity of the educational offer at European schools, as stipulated in the Convention, have also been ignored.

Interparents, amongst many other stakeholders in the European schools system, believe that these decisions go to the very core of European schooling (see aims and principles www.eursc.eu/index.php?id=132) and have been introduced not only with no pedagogical agreement by the Teaching Committee but with no clear financial implications as there was no costs analysis or impact assessment or plan B (fewer administrative meetings or fewer representatives) or a compromise solution with a planned transition, phase out or sunset clause or thought for the long term impact on the children or the system itself.

Today the European Parliament has a unique opportunity to give the impetus needed to move forward and have a global vision of the system and to honour a system, which tries to put into practice what we all want – learning through languages, not language learning – living amongst others with respect, not merely imagining it – lessons for Europeans, not lessons on Europe – teachers exchanging best practice in a school environment, not during a training course. The “European dimension” is not an abstract concept, it is already here in the European Schools, a reality for many children, teachers, parents which it could be for many more.

We remain at your disposition for any further information and look forward to your report and proposals.

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