

## INTRODUCTION

European Parliament Petitions Committee

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Pierre Choraine, President, Brussels I – UCCLÉ

Good afternoon, my name is Pierre Choraine and I am President of the Parents Association for the European School Brussels I – UCCLÉ. There are 13 other European schools throughout Europe: 3 more in Brussels, 2 in Luxembourg, 3 in Germany (Frankfurt, Munich and Karlsruhe), 1 in Alicante, Bergen, Culham (Oxford), Mol and Varese.

I would first like to extend our gratitude to the Committee for taking this petition into consideration so urgently and secondly, emphasis that we are not disputing general cuts to the 2012 European schools budget, which have been numerous and painful, but one specific cut – 2.56% or 4.2 million Euros.

You see, despite all the efforts by the 14 schools and the Secretary General's Office to find sufficient "savings", it proved impossible to reach 'zero budgetary increase' compared to 2011 – which, by the way – had already been cut last December from 171 million to 164 million Euros. Why was this 'zero budgetary increase' not possible? First of all, schools do not have any reserve funds. Secondly, more than 80% of their budget is on salaries over which they have no control. Thus schools have a very narrow margin indeed for finding "savings" and finally, there are almost 900 new pupils in the system and two new sites opening in Brussels IV (Laken) and Luxembourg II (Mamer). That the 2012 budget was only 0.18% more than the 2011 budget, is already a miracle.

In order to fund this gap, "substantial" decisions had to be taken. Not my words, the words on page 1 of the draft 2012 Budget (Document 14). These substantial decisions are to be found in Document 33 "Revision of the Decisions of the Board of Governors concerning the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools" and its Annexe I dealing with the reduction of teaching time and Annex II with Learning Support, SWALS support and Rattrapage. Parents, teachers, pupils and staff representatives, believe that these measures go very heart and principles governing our schooling system and have far-reaching pedagogical consequences. Parents, teachers, pupils and staff representatives came together on the 12 April to protest these measures – the petition before you is just one of the many things that happened that day – but were ignored.

Three things are significant in what I have just said. One, is that for the first time we no longer have a “balancing budget” by the European Union, as stated in the Convention, but a fixed sum, which schools were told to submit budgets accordingly. Two, that there is no longer any respect for the pedagogical integrity of the system and thirdly, other stakeholders, such as parents, clearly have no voice. We look to the European Parliament to hear to our voice. Rule 48 of your Rules of Procedure make you the guardians of the European Schools system.

You will be told that we have been listened to, that on Action Day we were received by the Commissioner himself. It is true, I was there. Members of the European Parliament, Edite Estrela and Maria Badia i Cutchet, also received similar replies to their concerns.

*“The changes to the organisation of studies and ... represents a rationalisation of the resources put at the disposal of the European Schools' system. These measures are applied equally to all language sections. Therefore there is no specific disadvantage for the Portuguese pupils. The Commission's first priority was to preserve the core curriculum and the absolute necessity for the pupils to receive the education required for access to higher education after the European Baccalaureate. The adopted document assures these priorities.*

This is simply not true. It is clear that the smaller language sections will suffer more, particularly with regard to sciences as they will have even greater difficulties than they already do finding the critical mass of pupil numbers to offer Physics in Dutch for example. But it isn't only the smaller language sections. The French and German sections will also have trouble, seeing as they are spread over the the four Brussels schools. What does “Core Curriculum” mean anyway? Everything in French, German and English? Nor should you forget, Annex I, cuts in teaching hours (remember most of budget is for teaching so save there and you save a lot) and Annex II further reductions in learning support, rattrapage and - YES - special needs (SEN) hitting the most vulnerable children hardest. The short and long term implications are complex and will affect each school, each section and each child in a different way not only because of its immediate pedagogical effect but the knock on effects that the reduced educational offer will mean well into the future.

So we ask you today, what we asked in the Petition and on Action Day, stay the decisions in Document 33, restore the 2.56%, find the 4.2 million for this year and seriously start to look for alternative financial solutions.