

The future of the European schools,

**(Information meeting with Mr Kari Kivinen, Secretary General of the European schools
and The Deputy Secretary General Giancarlo Marccheggiano, 23 October 2013)**

On 23 October 2013, GUDEEⁱ organised (<http://www.gudee.eu>) in Brussels (Grande Salle of CLP-Local staff committee, Loi 80,) an information meeting between the parents of the European schools of Brussels and Mr Kari Kivinen, Secretary General of the European schools and The Deputy Secretary General Giancarlo Marccheggiano, on the future of the European schools.

The moderator of the debate was Mr Tremeur Denigot, ex- teacher and representative of the personnel of the European Schools.

After a short introduction from the moderator, Mr Kivinen took the floor and presented to the crowded audience (the room was packed with more than 600 parents, some sitting on the floor) the point of view of the office of the Secretary General regarding the future developments in the European schools.

He recalled that the first European school opened its doors 60 years ago, and despite all the difficulties, currently we have 14 European schools across the continent. In addition, 25 Member States expressed the wish to open accredited European schools and a new bigger school is opening in Munich in order to cover the needs of 1500 additional officials hired by the EIB.

In Brussels, we have 4 schools with 11.000 pupils. Possibly there is space for more students in the Berkendael and Laeken schools, but the old schools like Woluwé are overcrowded. On the other hand, new sections are created, the most recent one is Croatian. The creation of 2 new schools in Brussels is under discussion with the Belgian authorities, possibly the continuation of the existence of Berklendael and the creation of one more.



Mr Kivinen (left) with Mr Tremeur (right).

Recently the schools have been facing a serious problem with the well-known question of the "Cost sharing" (Regarding this problem please refer also to the October edition of "European Education" published on the website of GUDEE). Mr Kivinen expressed the hope that a solution to the problem might be found soon, possibly in the meeting of the Ministers of Education on 25th of November.

The replacement of the missing teachers remains a serious issue; for the current school year some 37 teachers in English are missing. The schools received many applications for replacements in response to press advertisements, but the financial conditions on offer are not attractive enough for the teachers who should come from abroad and this is posing problems. The Schools proposed a "statute" for the replacement teachers but the proposal is blocked.

Regarding the proposed reform of the schools, Mr Kivinen pointed out that this is a real challenge since the student population is large and not homogeneous. As an example, some thousands of pupils (circa 7.500) have 2 nationalities, 150 have 3, one pupil has 4 and the schools should give to all of them high competences at local, national and European level.

The reform is on its way, a new special needs support system (Ex "SEN") is already in place which is more flexible than the previous one, new syllabuses are made and others are under preparation. A new assessment system will be soon in place. The schools foresee a specific effort regarding the teaching of "Language II" which will aim to bring all students at a high level of knowledge of the language at the last year (S7) of the secondary (This is the "C1" level in the EUR classification – where C1 corresponds to the high level 5 on a scale of six levels). The BAC was modified and now has only 3 oral exams (instead of 4). Also, a new system is proposed for the "grading" in the secondary (and for the BAC).

Other points related to the reform of the secondary are to start the teaching of LIII in the first secondary, to start Latin earlier and to teach Religion in LII (All this starting from 2014).

There will be no changes for the pupils who are now in S5. The future modifications of the secondary and subsequently of the BAC (Creation of "orientations" (called "Filières"), with a given set of subjects for each one and some (limited) options, will be done with special attention to avoid any negative consequence affecting the value of the BAC and access to the Universities.

The intervention of Mr Kivinen generated a large number of questions from the audience.

Many parents expressed their fears regarding the possibility to impose LII for the teaching of difficult matters like Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry; they considered it unacceptable to put the pupils in great difficulty in order to save some money. Also they have fears related to the foreseen limitations of the access to the laboratories and the teaching of mathematics in "2 steps", i.e. with a "core" group for all and additional teaching for the more advanced students.

Mr Marccheggiano replied that the teaching of mathematics in LII happens already in many small EUR schools. In the schools of Brussels, the probability to apply this measure remains limited. This is because, if for a subject, we have at least 5 pupils, the teaching will be made in L1 as of now. Regrouping with another language (LII) is envisaged only for smaller groups. He insisted that the reasons behind the reform are not only economic (He said that the potential savings are limited, currently calculated at circa 500.000 euros / year for all schools). On the contrary introducing LIII in S1 will raise the costs.



(Mr Marccheggiano answering the questions of the parents)

Regarding the limitations for the laboratories in the proposed “filieres” of the secondary, he said that the school wishes to limit the possibility for a pupil to opt to have the Labs courses “standing alone”, that is, without the pupil choosing the main teaching of the subject (Chemistry etc).

Regarding mathematics, Mr Marccheggiano considered that with the system currently in place we actually have at present a lot of failures. On the other hand, pedagogical research indicates that it is good to have a “core” group and additional teaching for the stronger pupils. He considers this as an attempt to improve the current system. In this way, if a pupil can pass the standard maths, but fails the advanced part in S4, he will be able to continue with the standard course. He reminded that in the International BAC there are no levels of maths. Mr Kivinen added that currently we have a lot of failures in S4 and S5 in many sections, and especially in the French section, because a lot of students opt for the advanced maths without being able for that level, and then they fail.

Many parents said that the "orientations" ("filieres") envisaged for the secondary can create serious problems for the acceptance of the BAC from the Universities, because the choice of the subjects of the "filieres" is not corresponding to the requirements of many Universities.

Mr Kivinen said that there is a Commission of experts working on this matter in order to avoid potential problems with the Universities.

Regarding history, some parents considered unacceptable the proposal to make it a non – compulsory subject. Mr Kivinen said that indeed there is a thought not to include history as a compulsory subject in the scientific "filier", but there is as yet no final decision on this matter.

The question of the teaching of religion was raised and Mr Marccheggiano replied that there is indeed a decision to have 2 hours of compulsory religion taught in LII, but the subject will be essentially "Studies in religion and ethics" and not just "religion" as now.

Asked regarding the SWALS, Mr Kivinen reminded that we have 2.200 SWALS and they are, in the huge majority, excellent students. Their numbers will be reduced progressively as the new sections are opening.

Mr Marccheggiano considered that the fears of many parents are based on a lack of sufficient information regarding the reform. In order give more details, to reach the parents who were unable to be present at this meeting and to allow others to ask more questions if they wish, accepted to have a new information session the 6 of November (same time, same place).

ⁱ Groupe Unitaire pour le Développement des Écoles Européennes