

RESOLUTION ON THE WAY FORWARD FOR EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

Preamble

GUDEE (Group Unitaire for the Development of European Schools) agree that the European School system is facing an unprecedented threat due to budgetary constraints which are imposed in the context of the preparation of the 2012 budget.

GUDEE notes that:

- European Schools, with their European curriculum cumulating in the prestigious European Baccalaureate, have helped, and continue to help, our continent prepare young people to live in a world where frontiers are porous and where work and exchanges are increasingly trans-national and trans-cultural;
- European Schools are more relevant than ever with the European Parliament and other major inter-governmental organisations all recommending multilingual, multicultural European education in all member States;
- European Schools serve as models and only need to be adapted to a wider mission than just catering to the children of the staff of EU institutions.

GUDEE calls on:

- The European Parliament to play a key role and fulfil its mandate to oversee all aspects affecting the European Schools system as a whole and to guarantee that the necessary resources are given to develop the European dimension in education, intercultural dialogue, foster the concept of European citizenship, mobility, free movement of persons and help to strengthen European integration;
- Member States to provide a clear political, educational and financial framework necessary to strengthen the present system, particularly whereby national teachers are appointed ensuring access for the European Schools to the teaching expertise of these States and promote linguistic and cultural diversity;
- The Board of Governors to ensure that the necessary guarantees are in place so as to meet the quality standards on which the Baccalaureate is based whilst at the same time giving greater autonomy to the individual schools;
- The European Parliament and the Member States to ensure that the priority is on high quality and accessible education for all citizens and that this education also reflects the core values of diversity and intercultural understanding and contribute to cultural enrichment and European integration.

Diagnostic

The European schools, under considerable pressure for many years, are now facing budgetary constraints which cut to the very heart of the system and the very spirit of European schooling. We appreciate the need for cuts in the Community budget, but they should be restricted to administrative overheads and efficiency savings. When it comes to education, savings will only be possible by compromising the cultural and linguistic diversity, which is the principal and distinguishing characteristic and the main asset of the ES's, and by lowering quality standards.

Seen from the point of view of the Institutions, the presence of type I schools in combination with a high quality educational offer is a key factor, not only in recruiting but also retaining high quality staff and scientists.

Years of coping with the demands of new member states, new language sections, increased number of pupils, inadequate infrastructure and fewer and fewer seconded teachers, have already put a severe strain on the schools. The quality, standards and principles of the European schools system can be compromised no further.

Most stakeholders, including the Central Staff Committee of the European Commission and parents who have contributed towards this reflection on European schooling, strongly oppose any cuts to the curriculum, or extensions to teaching core subjects by non-native speakers or in non-native languages and insist that cuts must not affect the replacement of teachers or affect the maintenance of basic infrastructure for providing core services such as canteen, transport, extracurricular activities, nor safety and security measures which are the responsibility of the School system. If sufficient political impetus is found, the provision of a high quality, multi-cultural and truly European education can be maintained and reinforced in the current system and be made available across the EU.

European Schools are not a "luxury" or "benefit" that staff could conceivably do without, but, on the contrary, a cornerstone of the Europe of the future. A future that, in our view, includes all European citizens. Together we can ensure that European Schools are no longer perceived as an elitist and closed educational system, but rather as a model with over 50 years experience at the service of our societies.

Some important facts

- European schools provide a top quality education leading to the prestigious European Baccalaureate, which assures university level entrance throughout Europe.
- This specific educational system enables pupils to study all subjects (particularly the sciences) in a multicultural and multilingual environment, with qualified teachers, with the necessary learning support and maintain their mother tongue.
- This is an essential factor in order to attract, and retain top scientists and highly skilled staff from all over Europe.
- European Education is an essential building block in the construction of Europe and future European citizens. Proposed cuts in the 2012 budget compromise the EU 2020 strategic goals.

Opening of the system

It is extremely important to remember the European Parliament Resolutions in 2002 and 2005 which urged the opening up of the European school system. This was followed by the creation of a High Level Group under the Dutch Presidency and Vice-President Siim Kallas as European Commissioner in charge of European Schools. Their conclusions led to the decision by the Ministers of Education on "Promoting the European Baccalaureate in an opened up and strengthened European schooling system".

We strongly supports the opening up of the system, because we believe in this type of European Education (we see its benefits every day). However, we would like to see more focus on the original determination to "open up and strengthen the European schooling system".

The school system is not being strengthened – we are seeing a deteriorating schooling offer in Type I schools, increasing differentiation between categories of children, less support for small language groups, SWALS and SEN children. What is worse, is an increasing closed shop mentality with all the enthusiasm and expansion happening "outside the system", while teachers, pupils and staff of the schools offering an European schooling are not invited to participate in the working groups, trainings, events, common activities, etc. So instead of opening up, we have to admit that what is actually happening is the opposite.

Also, with regard to the effective and sound management of the whole system, there are also needs for an analysis of how effectively it is working (quality, standards, role of the inspectors, etc) and where improvements/changes need to be discussed, for example, with regard to the rather vague Mondorf criteria (rules set for the accreditation of schools).

Red flags

The drastic budgetary limits, some of them already in force in 2011, have led the European Schools to implement some actions which are clearly beyond the pale of what is acceptable in a democratic society where equality of treatment and equality of chances are amongst the most basic tenets of the citizens' covenant.

- Discrimination between pupils. Although it is acceptable to set admission criteria, it is absolutely not acceptable to establish differences of treatment between pupils throughout their cursus, once they are admitted. In particular, European Schools are discriminating pupils according to their social origin (determined by the admission 'categories') for allowing or not the access to optional studies or to teaching of the mother tongue.
- Denial of equality of chances. Options determine the 'flavor' of the European Baccalaureate allowing or restricting the access to some university cursus (for exemple,

access to scientific studies). Decisions have been taken to raise the threshold for the creation of these options, or worse, for the diminution of the hours taught, thus effectively barring the access to this type of university studies to some children. Therefore, in some schools, children might be denied access to their choices of options. Raising the threshold from 5 to 7 pupils is a disproportionate decision as in fact this will affect the whole life of the children and deny them career opportunities, regardless of their abilities.

- Discrimination on account of disability is an infringement of the EU treaties and the UN conventions. New restrictive practices within schools in reaction to budget cuts as well as some projects currently discussed in the SEN Policy Group should be discontinued or dropped. The European Schools ought to be a role model in this area.

Qui sommes-nous ?

Le Groupe Unitaire pour le Développement des Ecoles Européennes (GUDEE) regroupe les associations des parents des élèves des Écoles Européennes (EE), les comités de personnel et les syndicats des institutions européennes, des représentants des élèves, du personnel administratif et de service des EE, du bureau central des EE, les comités du personnel et syndicat de l'Office Européen des Brevets, des représentants des enseignants ainsi que des représentants des crèches et des garderies.

Plus d'information : <http://www.gudee.eu/>