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|  | **Schola Europaea**  Office of the Secretary-General  General Secretariat |

**Ref.: 2014-03-D-26-EN-1**

**Original**

**Creation of an Estonian section**

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**

**Meeting in Sofia on 8, 9 and 10 April 2014**

**BACKGROUND**

The December Board of Governors’ meeting was informed by means of a written communication (2013-11-D-22-en-1) about the official letter from the Estonian Minister of Education, **Mr Aaviksoo**, requesting that an Estonian section be created at the Nursery level at the European School, Brussels II (BXL2). In the letter it was stated that the number of Estonian pupils at the School was constantly increasing, the vast majority of pupils being SWALS in the English and French sections. The request would be to open an Estonian section as from September 2014.

The Secretary-General explained orally that:

* the Estonian request largely fulfilled the criteria for creation of a language section, as there were 38 Estonian pupils in the Nursery alone;
* the Latvian pupils were in the same situation;
* the Estonian and Latvian pupils had a dominant presence in English and French classes at BXL2;
* the school had been forced to close five rooms as a result of a safety audit and based on the new statement from the fire brigade, 180 pupils had had to be relocated from the second and third floors of the Primary building;
* security audit negotiations with the *Régie des bâtiments* (Belgian Public Buildings Authority) had been started;
* the creation of an Estonian language section in the Nursery Cycle would create a need for two extra classrooms – yet it would be ‘mission impossible’ to find them in the present situation;
* the request was indeed fully justified and if two rooms could be found, the matter could be referred to the members of the Board of Governors via a written procedure.

Based on the mandate given, the Secretary-General started negotiations with the School, met the Estonian parents at the Estonian representation, presented the request to the Administrative Board of the School and initiated negotiations with the *Régie des bâtiments* and with the OIB (EU Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels). Because of the matter’s complexity, it was decided to refer it to the Board of Governors at its meeting for discussion and decision-making.

**GROWTH OF THE ESTONIAN POPULATION AT BXL2**

The Estonian population has been growing steadily year on year at BXL2.

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|  | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| Estonian pupils at BXL2 | 82 | 89 | 107 | 115 | 138 |

There are currently 138 Estonian SWALS in the School: 38 in the Nursery, 63 in the Primary and 37 in the Secondary Cycle.

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| **2013-2014** | **Estonian pupils** |
| Nursery | 38 |
| Primary | 63 |
| Secondary | 37 |
|  | 138 |

Based on the information received from the Estonian Permanent Representation and from the European institutions, there is a growing body of category I Estonian children aged 0-4 who will apply for school places in the coming years.

**LANGUAGE SECTIONS IN BRUSSELS**

The number of pupils on roll in the four Brussels European Schools is also rising steadily. The Brussels I, II and III Schools are overcrowded despite the efforts made by the Central Enrolment Authority to distribute pupils across the four schools. One of the factors behind this overcrowding lies in the schools’ linguistic structure, the characteristics of which have an impact on the allocation of places in each of them.

The four Brussels Schools currently have **17 language sections**, breaking down as follows:

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| **Schools** | **BU** | **DE** | **EN** | **FR** | **CS** | **DK** | **EL** | **ES** | **FI** | **HU** | **IT** | **LT** | **NL** | **PL** | **PT** | **RO** | **SW** | **Total** |
| **BXL I** |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  | **8** |
| **BXL II** |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |  | ✓ | **9** |
| **BXL III** |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  | **7** |
| **BXL IV** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  | **7** |
| **Total** | **1** | **4** | **4** | **4** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **2** | **1** | **1** | **3** | **1** | **3** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **31** |

The DE, EN and FR sections are present in the four schools, the IT and NL sections in three schools and the ES section in two schools.

**11 language sections** (BU, CS, DK, EL, FI, HU, LT, PL, PT, SW and RO) are **so-called single** sections, as each is present in only one school.

SWALS have been distributed in the Anglophone, Francophone and German-speaking sections across the four schools. The Croatian population is at BXL IV, the Estonian and Latvian populations are at BXL II, the Slovak pupils are at BXL III and the Slovenian pupils are at BXL I. In addition, Maltese pupils are in the Anglophone section of BXL I.

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| **SWALS in Brussels** | | | | | | |
| **Schools** | **HR** | **EO** | **LV** | **SK** | **SL** | **Total** |
| **BXL I** |  |  |  |  | ✓ | 1 |
| **BXL II** |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |  | 2 |
| **BXL III** |  |  |  | ✓ |  | 1 |
| **BXL IV** | ✓ |  |  |  |  | 1 |
| **Total** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** | **5** |

It should be noted that the Bulgarian, Romanian, Lithuanian and Czech language sections are not yet complete from the Nursery up to Secondary S7 level.

The overall situation in Brussels is challenging. The Nursery classes in all four schools are full and in some schools, including BXL II, the Nursery classes are accommodated in the primary classrooms.

**The pupil population in the four Brussels School s in 2013-2014**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Section** | **Population** | **%** |
| FR | 3 437 | 31.3% |
| EN | 1781 | 16.2% |
| DE | 1148 | 10.5% |
| ES | 762 | 6.9% |
| IT | 762 | 6.9% |
| NL | 633 | 5.8% |
| EL | 468 | 4.3% |
| FI | 379 | 3.5% |
| SW | 322 | 2.9% |
| PT | 278 | 2.5% |
| PL | 259 | 2.4% |
| DK | 234 | 2.1% |
| HU | 190 | 1.7% |
| CS\* | 162 | 1.5% |
| LT\* | 109 | 1.0% |
| RO\* | 33 | 0.3% |
| BG\* | 20 | 0.2% |
| Total | 10977 |  |

The situation is particularly challenging at BXL2, because the school has been obliged to limit use of the second and third floors of the Primary building for safety and security reasons. In addition, the five classrooms in the old prefabs were closed in November 2013, also for safety and security reasons.

In an ideal world, all the new language sections would be opened at BXL5. Unfortunately, that option is not yet available.

On the other hand it has to be noted, that the Estonian delegation conducted a study 2 years ago about the possible creation of the Estonian section. The results of the study demonstrated, that 57% of Estonian parents wouldn’t put their children into Estonian section, if the section would be created in another school than BXL 2.

**CRITERIA**

The so-called ‘Gaignage report’ (Criteria for the setting up, closure or maintenance of European Schools, 2000-D-7510) provided indicative criteria for the creation of a language section:

*“For the language section to be viable, it would be desirable to have*

* *A minimum of 75 primary pupils from the 5th year after its opening*
* *A minimum of 84 secondary pupils from the 7th year of opening.*

*The figures adopted (75 pupils in the primary section and 84 in the secondary section) are applicable to the year groups as a whole in each of these sections*

*For number of Category I pupils to be minimum of 70% of the total number on roll in cities where Community Institutions and bodies are heavily concentrated (Brussels and Luxembourg at present) and 50% in other cases.”*

It can be concluded, that the Estonian category I population at the BXL2 School already fulfils the criteria laid down.

**EUROPEAN SCHOOL, BRUSSELS II**

The Estonian request to create an Estonian section at the Nursery level starting from 1 September 2014 is fully justified and meets the Gaignage criteria.

However, the situation at the Woluwé School is not at all simple.

**Pupil population of the Brussels II School in 2013-2014**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **BXL II** | **DE** | **EN** | **FI** | **FR** | **IT** | **LT** | **NE** | **PO** | **SW** | **TOTAL** |
| Nursery | 23 | 30 | 33 | 61 | 15 | 31 | 16 | 25 | 36 | **270** |
| Primary | 113 | 127 | 153 | 205 | 99 | 76 | 68 | 94 | 157 | **1092** |
| Secondary | 168 | 287 | 190 | 471 | 171 |  | 145 | 156 | 129 | **1717** |
| **TOTAL** | **304** | **444** | **376** | **737** | **285** | **107** | **229** | **275** | **322** | **3079** |

The maximum capacity of the BXL2 School was determined in 2010 to be 2 850 pupils. At present there are 3 079 pupils on roll and the estimate for next September is roughly the same.

The school already has nine language sections in the Nursery and Primary Cycles. The school has a limited number of Nursery classrooms. At present in the class structure, there are 12 Nursery classes, whilst the Finnish, French and Swedish Nursery classes are divided into two.

It is estimated, that the possible creation of an Estonian language section in the Nursery Cycle for the 2014-2015 school year would increase accommodation needs, with two additional Nursery classrooms required, and the total pupil population would go up by 10 to 20 pupils.

**2014 ENROLMENTS**

The Central Enrolment Authority (CEA) has received more enrolments than ever before in its history for September 2014. The applications include only eight Estonian enrolments for the Nursery and five for the Primary Cycle. It is likely that CEA will receive more Estonian enrolments in due course.

One of the objectives of the Enrolment Policy for the 2014-2015 school year was to reduce the number of pupils at Woluwé by means of strict enrolment criteria limiting new enrolments and by allowing transfers to other schools. Unfortunately, due to the structure of the BXL2 School, the results have not really been apparent. There have been a large number of priority applications – so far, 175 pupils with a single language section, SWALS or siblings status among the enrolments – thus making it difficult to reduce the overall pupil population.

**ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD OPINION**

The Administrative Board was requested to give its opinion of the proposal to create an Estonian language section in the Nursery Cycle at BXL2 for the 2014-2015 school year 2014-2015. The majority of the voting members of the Administrative Board rejected the possibility of opening an Estonian section in the BXL2 School.

The acting Director of the School, Mr Schmelz, concluded that the staff and parents of the school were against the creation of a new language section - whatever nationality it might be - because the school is suffering from a serious overcrowding problem.

The members agreed that the request was fully justified, but it was stated that the school does not have sufficient infrastructure to accommodate an additional language section.

It has to be noted, that the Secretary-General has received several petitions signed mainly by the UK and Irish parents of BXL II. In these petitions the parents have urged the Board of Governors to take a decision to find a solution to the overrepresentation of SWALS pupils in the Anglophone section. There are about 70 % SWALS students in the Anglophone and Francophone Nursery sections in BXLII at present.

**HOST COUNTRY ISSUES**

Despite the 2013 consensus agreement about the future infrastructure needs, based on the estimates commonly agreed with all the main players – CIPS (*Comité interministériel pour la politique de siege* – Inter-ministerial Committee on policy on providing seats for international organisations), *Régie des bâtiments*, French and Flemish-speaking Communities of Belgium, European Commission and the European Schools - the situation in Brussels remains unclear.

The meetings with the Cabinet of the Prime Minister and with the representatives of the *Régie des bâtiments* have not yet produced any results.

We are still awaiting:

* the decision on permission to use the Berkendael premises after 1 September 2015
* the decision on BXL5
* concrete progress on renovation of the Fabiola building at the BXL1 School
* the promised safety and security renovation work at the BXL2 School.

It has to be acknowledged that it is not now realistic to expect the BXL2 School to have any additional infrastructure available in September 2014.

The Belgian authorities have reminded the European School representatives at the various meetings that there is not at present any lack of space in the Brussels Schools. That is very true. There are still about 800 places available at the BXL4 School and the BXL1 School uses about 50% of the premises of the Berkendael site. According to the Belgian authorities, the European Schools should use the space available more efficiently.

On the other hand, the BXL4 School is expected to be fully populated in the coming three years and it is impossible to send more pupils to the Berkendael site, because the future of that site is still unknown.

**EUROPEAN SCHOOL BRUSSELS IV**

According to the Director of the BXL4 School, Mr Wulf Schlabe, it would be within the bounds of possibility to create an Estonian section at the BXL4 School. The School has only seven language sections and two of them are quite small as yet.

The particularity of the Laeken School is that over 50% of the population is in the French-speaking section. For example, at the Nursery level, there are five parallel French-speaking classes. It would be relatively easy to regulate the creation of French classes, if necessary.

**CONCLUSIONS**

According to the European School rules and requirements, Estonia’s request to open a language section is fully justified.

The percentage of the SWALS pupils in the Anglophone and Francophone classes in the Woluwe school is very high.

At present, there seems not to be enough space in the Woluwe School to create an additional section.

At present, we have no clear information about the future possibilities related to the Berkendael site.

At present, we do not yet have a political decision on the BXL5 School.

It would be possible to create an Estonian section starting from the Nursery classes at the BXL4 School.

**PROPOSAL**

The Board of Governors is requested to take a decision as to whether:

1. an Estonian section should be created in the Nursery Cycle at the BXL2 School starting from 1 September 2014,
2. an Estonian section should be created in the Nursery Cycle at the BXL4 School starting from 1 September 2014,
3. there should be a decision in principle to create at Estonian section in the Nursery and Primary 1 in September 2015 on the most suitable site.