European Schools' system

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PURPOSE: to present the Commission’s report on the Europeaqn Schools’ system.

CONTENT: in its report, the Commission notes that 2009 was a year of progress in some fields but also confirmation that some structural issues still need to be addressed within the system. The process of reform that was launched by European Parliament resolutions in 2002 and 2005 came to a close in April 2009 at the Board of Governors' meeting in Stockholm. Major achievements include the following:

- the opening up of the system of the European Schools through the possibility of accreditation of national schools, in order to enable the latter to deliver the European curriculum and possibly also the European Baccalaureate. The European curriculum is taught in Parme, Dunshauglin, Heraklion, Helsinki, Strasbourg and Manosque. A school in Bad Vilbel is currently going through the process of accreditation. In addition, the European School in Culham is in the process of preparing a transition with the aim to apply for accreditation which will be a valuable experience for the system of the European Schools. The reform includes the possibility for accredited schools to sign an agreement in order to receive a financial contribution from the EU budget in relation to the number of children of EU staff attending the school in question;
- in the context of opening up of the European Schools system to the accredited schools, the baccalaureate working group has submitted some proposals to simplify the organisation of the examination, to cut costs, to review the examination's content, without jeopardising the certificate's quality and while keeping in mind the current requirements of universities and other higher education institutions;
- efforts to render the system more efficient in terms of governance also resulted in reforms on central and local level with more autonomy for local schools within the boundaries of the existing rules and financial regulations. For each school, a road map setting out the objectives (annual school plan) and resources (draft budget) and also the control mechanisms and reporting obligations are tools to be used in the new framework;
- the European Schools continued their efforts to integrate children with special education needs, where necessary with an adapted programme of studies and appropriate human resources. During the school year 2008/09, there were 457 pupils under a SEN convention, meaning an increase of 10.1% compared to the previous year. The Commission has continued to make the necessary financial resources available by agreeing the transfer of credits which allow the adjustment of credits to real costs supported during the year. The SEN executed budget increased from EUR 3 426 685 in 2008 to EUR 4 441.142 in 2009. Nevertheless, there is concern about this continuing increase and the report mentions the necessity to analyse in depth the SEN criteria in order to focus resources optimally.

The overall economic situation obviously had an impact on the schools' finances. The overall number of pupils increased by 3.15 % from 21.649 to 22.331 from 2008 to 2009. The budgetary execution figures show a decrease in the share borne by Member States, in the share accounted for by revenue from contracts with private entities and for the revenue from school fees and also in the share of other sources (mainly bank interests). Consequently, there is an increase in the share paid from the EU contribution:

The evolution of the budgetary demands observed for the European Schools combined with the current economic situation has led the Commission to request a revision of certain expenses in the system of the European Schools A more cost efficient approach and fairer distribution of the financial burden is necessary. The future budgetary planning needs to be kept under control and the Commission made the approval of the 2011 budget conditional on a certain number of revisions of expenses.

In addition, It is clear that some systemic problems persisted and even became more serious during the year 2009:

- the unresolved problem of a constant lack of seconded teachers is continuing to put undue strain on the EU financial contribution to the system. The cost of paying for locally recruited teachers in order to make up for the short-fall still falls heavily on the Commission. In 2009, this represented a cost of EUR 2.1 million. Efforts in the area of cost-sharing were difficult to achieve and already signs are evident that more needs to be done in this field combined with cost-cutting efforts;
- Member States' delays or non provision of sufficient infrastructure in the locations of the overpopulated schools continued to affect the quality of life for students and parents. It also had major implications on enrolment policies. The infrastructure situation is going to be very worrying in the coming years in several locations. The Brussels and Luxembourg schools welcome more than 60 % of the overall pupils of the system and both locations will suffer in the coming years before permanent solutions will be provided in 2012 by the host countries responsible.