European Schools' system

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The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Jean-Marie CAVADA (EPP, FR) on the European Schools' system.

Members recall that the European Schools' way of operating, based from the outset on an intergovernmental convention, should be improved and the system will have to be given a legal basis that will allow it to be simplified and to become more transparent and effective.

The regret that the European Schools are often wrongly considered to be elitist schools, a luxury rather than a necessity, when their mission is in fact to provide mother-tongue education for students whose parents may be required to change their place of work.

The report makes a number of recommendations which may be summarised as follows:

Organisation and spread of the European baccalaureate system: Members considers that the European Schools should become an example of one of the best possible forms of schooling in Europe, based on the dissemination of European culture, values and languages, and European integration. They also consider that the European Schools should also function as promoters of multiculturalism and multilingualism, and as models for the protection and promotion of languages of lower international usage. Members believe that t**he small number of pupils requiring education in a given language should not lead to education in that particular language being discontinued**, bearing in mind that mother-tongue education constitutes the founding principle of the European Schools.

Members take the view that the **budgetary restrictions** that the Schools will have to accept must be accompanied by a real increase in their management autonomy – by, for example, allowing the schools to find other funding – and in the resources for exercising that autonomy.

The report emphasises that the European Schools are currently in a **legal limbo**, which manifests itself in the unclear legal and jurisdictional status of acts adopted by the Schools' bodies, insufficient possibilities to challenge those acts before national courts, no possibility of recourse to the European Ombudsman. The current intergovernmental legal status of the European Schools has reached its limits and requires **profound change**. Members consider that this change should be of such a nature as to allow Union action to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States, without superseding their competence, and to adopt legally binding acts to that end within the meaning of Articles 2 and 6 TFEU. They consider that the European Schools should be brought under the umbrella of the Union and that an appropriate legal basis in this regard could be Article 165 TFEU.

Member States are invited to cooperate when developing their **national syllabuses**, drawing on the educational experience of the European Schools, so as to bring the national systems and the European School system closer together. Members repeat their request to the Member States to promote the inclusion – in studies at baccalaureate level or equivalent – of a specific subject on the background, goals and functioning of the European Union and its institutions, which will help young people to feel more involved in the process of European integration.

The report calls on the Central Enrolment Authority to establish an **exchange forum for all parents** who have not secured a place for their children in their school of choice, so that they can be transferred to the desired school by means of exchanges with other pupils.

As regards the **European baccalaureate**, students who hold the European baccalaureate can apply to any university in the EU, with the same rights as nationals of the country in question who hold equivalent qualifications. Members urge the Member States to ensure that the relevant provisions are complied with, so that the **European baccalaureate is automatically recognised in all Member States**, thereby preventing discrimination of any kind between pupils of European Schools and those in possession of equivalent national qualifications.

The encourage the Member States and regional governments with legislative powers in education to homologate a relevant proportion of their public school system so that it can award students the European baccalaureate diploma when they finish secondary school.

On a more technical level, Members highlight two important aspects of European Schools which may be summarised as follows:

(1) Budgetary aspects: they call on the European Union to define its budget contribution so that these principles are respected, and so that there is adequate provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) or other learning difficulties which require specific support, and to provide a detailed breakdown of the funds allocated for students with SEN in order to ensure optimal use of those funds. They invite the Commission, before deciding on any budgetary changes, in cooperation with the Schools and parent/teacher associations, to draw up an impact assessment of the various options for rationalisation of the system, including examining the educational aspects. They emphasise that the Union's involvement in the European Schools is disproportionately little compared to the financial contribution from its budget and state that the proposed cuts in the budgets of the European Schools constitute a serious threat to the quality of education and the proper functioning of the European Schools, and therefore **oppose any budgetary cuts**. Stating that the current funding system places a disproportionate burden as regards secondment and supply of infrastructure on certain Member States, Members call on the Board of Governors to review the way in which the Schools are funded and the recruitment of teachers. According to Members, the European Schools must be financed on a sound and adequate basis so that the commitments made in the Convention and in the Staff Regulations of Officials and Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union can be fulfilled and the quality of the education provided. The report emphasises the long-term importance of making the European Union’s financial contribution more transparent and calls on the Commission to submit to it an update on implementation of the 2009 reform and on the financing requirements for the coming years, especially in respect of the buildings policy.

(2) Educational aspects: Members wish to see general use of the working languages for teaching all non-fundamental subjects, without this being detrimental to those whose mother tongue is not one of working languages. They stress the need for an external evaluation of the European Schools’ syllabuses and that the recruitment of local staff meets the excellence criteria. The report notes an abnormally high failure rate in the French language section. The Board of Governors is called upon to examine the educational and financial causes and consequences of this malfunction, of the failure rate in general and of the on-going high rates of children repeating a year. Members reaffirm that provision for students with special educational needs must continue to be a priority, particularly as the European Schools still offer only one type of school-leaving certificate.