European Schools' system

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the European Schools' system.

The resolution recalls that the preamble to the 1994 Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools states that the European Schools system is ‘sui generis’ and constitutes a form of cooperation between the Member States and between them and the European Communities while fully acknowledging the Member States' responsibility for the content of teaching and the organisation of their educational system, and for their cultural and linguistic diversity.

Parliament considers that the current intergovernmental legal status of the European Schools has reached its limits and requires profound change and the Commission report on the European Schools' system in 2009 pointed to persisting and worsening systemic problems, such as the lack of seconded teachers or delays in, or non-provision of, sufficient infrastructure at the schools' locations, which have a direct effect on the quality of education, enrolment policies, the quality of life of students, parents and teachers and financial aspects of the functioning of the Schools. The main aim of the 2009 reform of the European Schools was to open them up to a wider and more diverse intake, while at the same time ensuring the system's long-term viability.

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

Organisation and spread of the European baccalaureate system: Parliament 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. It also considers 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. The resolution draws attention to the need to make the European Schools' syllabus more compatible with national education systems in order to facilitate the swift reintegration of pupils returning to their countries of origin.

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. A greater degree of budgetary autonomy may be an effective way of improving the management of the resources allocated to them, following an assessment by the Commission on this issue.

Legal base of the system: the resolution 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**. 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. Parliament stresses the need to give the European Schools the foundation of an **adequate legal base**, within the EU's area of competence. It considers that the European Schools should be brought under the umbrella of the Union and considers that an appropriate legal basis in this regard could be Article 165 TFEU.

Opening up the system: Parliament invites the Member States to pursue collective consideration of how best to realise the aim of opening up the system. It also 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.

Automatic recognition of 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.

Parliament urges the Member States to ensure that all their universities and higher education institutions apply the same requirements when recognising the education of students from European Schools as for students from national schools and that these students receive the same credits for their education, in order to have equal chances and opportunities when applying for higher education.

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

(1) Budgetary aspects: it calls 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. Members 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**. Noting that the 2012 draft budget provides for a 1.7% increase in funding for the European Schools, at a time when budgetary difficulties have led the Commission to propose a freeze on its own administrative expenditure and a 1.3% increase in administrative expenditure for the European institutions generally, Parliament undertakes to scrutinise the appropriations on the budget lines in question in order for all budgetary needs to be met. According to the Parliament, 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 resolution 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: Parliament wishes 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. It stresses the need for an external evaluation of the European Schools’ syllabuses and that the recruitment of local staff meets the excellence criteria. The resolution 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.