The System of European Schools: State of play, Challenges and Perspectives

2022/2149(INI) - 12/09/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 515 votes to 74, with 44 abstentions, a resolution on the system of European Schools: state of play, challenges and perspectives.

State of affairs and vision

The European Schools System (ESS) is a unique system that has demonstrated its strengths and qualities since its creation in the 1950s, as shown, for example, by the recognition of the European Baccalaureate in all Member States and the continuous growth in the number of Accredited European Schools (AES).

Parliament stressed the need for a **critical, in-depth assessment** of all aspects of the ESS, and for reform to future-proof the system, expand its outreach activities and ensure that it serves as a model for the exchange of good practices across educational systems. It called on the European Schools' Board of Governors (BoG) to update the mission, principles and objectives of the ESS in the form of a new 'ESS Charter' to be introduced by the end of 2024.

The Commission is called on to:

- assess the role of the ESS in the establishment of the EEA, including with regard to language learning and a strong European dimension of learning, and in the automatic mutual recognition of diplomas across the EU, based on the established model of the European Baccalaureate;

- play a more integrated and active role, in particular in terms of interlinking the ESS and the EEA.

Parliament called for increased accountability and transparency, tighter parliamentary scrutiny and control, and improved communication to increase the visibility and understanding of the ESS and the European Baccalaureate at all levels. A closer relationship between the ESS and local, regional and national educational ecosystems is called for.

Governance, management and legal issues

Parliament called on the Commission to carry out, before the end of 2024, a thorough review of the governance and management structures of the EES as a whole and of each institution in particular. It asked that this review examine the missions, responsibilities and structures in place at all levels, assess the independence of functions and possible conflicts of interest, and identify the regulatory issues that hamper the EES.

Members stressed the need to **streamline the Board of Governors' decision-making process** and increase its flexibility. They called for all management staff to have clear responsibilities, transparent decision-making, performance reviews every two years and training and development plans.

The Board of Governors is invited to: (i) assess compliance with health, safety and security standards in the schools; (ii) ensure that the contractual and working conditions of locally recruited teachers comply with EU and national employment legislation; (iii) amend the Staff Regulations and the General Rules of the European Schools to explicitly clarify the competences of the Complaints Board vis-à-vis national courts, ensuring that there is no gap in legal protection; (iv) put in place an independent ombudsperson to

address complaints about maladministration and mediate in conflicts; and (v) develop a code of good administrative conduct for school management at all levels.

Resources, infrastructure and staff

Parliament urged the Member States to meet their obligations vis-à-vis the ESS in full, particularly with regard to the **secondment of qualified teachers** and other educational staff and the provision of adequate infrastructure and called for a binding system of direct financial contributions to ensure greater flexibility and security for both the ESS and the Member States.

The Board of Governors is called upon to **urgently address the ongoing teacher shortages** and to provide a stable and fair employment situation for all by retain staff and reducing turnover, thereby preventing the brain drain. In this regard, Members called for **additional resources and a strengthened and fair employment package** for seconded and locally recruited staff alike, with competitive remuneration, more equal salaries for nursery, primary and secondary teachers, clarity about employment status and stability, a system of continuous professional development and further career prospects in and beyond the ESS. They called for an urgent annual review of the enrolment policy and school fees.

Quality of education and teaching

Members advocated a series of measures to **strengthen educational and pedagogical standards**, for instance, by: (i) creating a task force, with relevant pedagogical expertise; (ii) undertaking open, transparent and regular consultations with stakeholders; (iii) introducing an enhanced and accountable inspection regime, and (iv) ensuring ESS participation in EU programmes and initiatives such as the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies and the EEA.

The Board of Governors is invited to:

- develop a **continuing professional development strategy** and induction programme for teachers and other education staff across the EES by the end of 2024;

- foster a **safe learning environment** in which no form of violence is allowed and to strengthen the fight against bullying and cyber-bulling;

- reinforce existing frameworks and implement a coherent, uniform and systematic **inclusion policy** across the ESS that provides quality inclusive education, avoids exclusion due to disabilities, ensures reasonable accommodation, adapts teacher-to-students ratios, uses a flexible curriculum, considerably increases the number of qualified educational and psychological support staff and provides orientation and mentoring services;

- boost **environmental learning and digital education** in the ESS.

Members stressed that it is essential to offer all pupils a full and high-quality educational experience, particularly in their mother tongue and for students without a language section. They called on the Boards of Governors to periodically review the teaching of a second and third language.

Outlook

Parliament called for the financial contributions from the EU to the ESS to feature as a **separate budget line** in future EU budgets. It wants the ESS to become a beacon for high-quality multilingual and multicultural education in Europe and beyond, demonstrating that being ‘united in diversity’ can also be a living reality in the educational sphere. They expressed the wish for the European Parliament to be represented on the Board of Governors.