The future financing of the European Schools

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PURPOSE: to present the first Annual report on the functioning of the European Schools system. CONTENT: Following a request from the European Parliament in the Bösch Report in 2002 on the future financing of the European Schools (ES), this report presents an overview of the principal aspects of the functioning of the ES today (with comparative figures to identify major trends), and focuses on an examination of the pupil population, the staffing, the main pedagogical issues and financing. The Report goes on to highlight the key challenges facing the ES: the consequences of enlargement, the need to take account of the creation of EU Agencies and widen the availability of the European Baccalaureate, the governance of the school system, the difficult conditions of the large ES in Brussels and Luxembourg and the future of the small schools, particularly in view of the very small number of cat 1 pupils in the latter.

The ES system has operated successfully for just over half a century, providing a high quality education primarily to the children of the staff of the European Union (i.e. about 51% of the ES total pupil population in 2004 were children of EU staff) The system operates on an intergovernmental-type basis under a Convention signed by all Member States (MS) and the European Commission. As the said intergovernmental Convention clearly specifies, the very purpose of the ES is “to educate together children of the staff of the European Communities”. Besides them, “other children may attend the Schools, within the limits set by the Board of Governors”. Because of their combined roles as providers of nearly 60% of the funding of the ES system and as responsible employers with an interest in ensuring the continuing good functioning of a system which remains a vital element in attracting and recruiting staff of the highest calibre, the EU institutions have in recent years taken a growing interest in the European Schools.

Following the Bösch Report adopted by the European Parliament in 2002, the Commission in 2004 put forward a discussion document on the future of the ES system, which raises a number of issues relating to their governance, financing and educational services. This has opened a wide debate on the issues and challenges facing the European Schools as they enter their second 50 years of operation, existing as they are in a context of considerable change. The continuing enlargement of the Union and the creation of new EU bodies across Europe, coupled with changing approaches to education, pose new challenges which the ES system should address if it is to remain as visionary over the coming 50 years as it has been over the past. This report presents an overview of the system today, and addresses a number of key challenges for the future:

-enlargement;

-decentralisation policy & Agency needs

-governance

-category 3 pupils and the question of the viability of the small schools.