

Proposing a future for the European Schools

A proposal to transform them into a competitive advantage for European education and integration

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present text is based on an earlier article entitled «European Schools – a new direction»¹. It should be considered a contribution to the Round Table on the Future of the European Schools organised by the Commission on the 7th of November 2002 in Brussels. In fact the text replies to all the issues raised in the context of this Round Table (see Annex 1). The author has no vested interests in the future of the schools but knows the system quite well – he has four children two of which graduated from the European Schools while two other are actually enrolled in the schools. Additionally, the author is a Commission official, well acquainted with the «Community method». He believes to the idea of closer European integration by simultaneously ensuring conservation of national and regional identities for the peoples of Europe.

2. MISSION OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS

According to the Convention of the European Schools, *the purpose of the Schools is to educate together children of the staff of the European Communities. Besides the children covered by the Agreements provided for in Articles 28 and 29, other children may attend the Schools within the limits set by the Board of Governors*².

The mission of the European Schools as prescribed above is of course always valid. However, several facts make the fulfilment of this mission more and more difficult. First of all the Schools offer high quality education but have never been subject of a thorough quality evaluation³. Additionally, the rapid expansion of the European Institutions (more students) and the successive adhesions of new Member States (more language sections) resulted in the soaring of the costs linked with the functioning of the Schools⁴. Take for example the upcoming enlargement. If the present model of the European Schools is maintained, ten new language sections will have to be created in Brussels and Luxembourg alone (Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, Slovene, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese and Turkish⁵). This will be a direct consequence of the fact that all

¹ Co-authored with Ms. Maria Chryssou former representative of Greece in the Board of Governors; available electronically in the English section of <http://users.skynet.be/p.alevantis/>.

² Article 1, Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools, OJ L 212 , 17/08/1994 p. 3.

³ See the European initiative on quality indicators available through the Commission's site at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/indic/backen.html>.

⁴ The yearly expenditure per pupil is considered very high - more than the double of expenditure in Member States (see Annex 2 for details).

⁵ Turkish (with Greek) is an official language of the Republic of Cyprus.

official languages of the Union are considered equal. However, the creation of so many language sections will necessitate the opening of new schools (i.e. new buildings) and the availability of additional budget (for teachers etc.) But Member States are more and more unwilling to increase the spending of public money for the education of a – rightly or wrongly – perceived as a well-paid minority elite.

Finally, European Schools constitute a significant legal and institutional aberration. They are established on the basis of an intergovernmental convention, which *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 organization of their educational system, and for their cultural and linguistic diversity*⁶. They are financed through the Community budget established on the basis of the Treaty, which also provides for *the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity* should be respected⁷. However, the European School system does not follow any of the established national educational systems but creates its own⁸ for all subject matters except languages. This is in direct violation of the Convention and the Treaty while it incurs additional costs to the Community budget. Additionally the Governing Board is not subject to the control of European Parliament⁹, the Court of Justice or the Court of Auditors of the European Communities.

Of course European Schools do present significant advantages. They offer a multicultural educational environment and graduates have a wider European perception with less prejudices about foreigners. According to their main objective, they offer an education to children of EU Institutions' officials in their mother tongue and in that way they allow them to return to their country of origin if they so decide. Finally they offer a very good environment for the learning of many European languages. This is possible because languages are taught by teachers who teach their mother tongue while several additional matters of the secondary cycle (e.g. History, Geography, Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry, Economy, Sociology) are taught in the foreign language as well.

The advantages mentioned above can certainly make European Schools an inspiration for national education systems. The European School model can be used for the education of multicultural, multilingual communities (e.g. expatriates' children) in view of integrating them better in a Member State while conserving strong links with their country of origin. Such education has been administered for years to high-income residents or expatriates in private (mostly “elitist”) schools (International Schools, Frères Maristes etc.). However, the European School model – if expanded to profit larger populations of students - can provide a competitive advantage for students of primary and secondary education in Europe and help European integration in education. In fact during recent years, European integration has been advancing rapidly in some areas and not in others. One of the main objectives of the Union is now to combat unemployment and help establish a well-educated work force able to take advantage of the free movement within a unified common market. Several Community programmes aim at this direction

⁶ Recitals of Convention on European Schools

⁷ Article 149 (ex-article 126).

⁸ European School programs are established by ad-hoc working groups of inspectors and teachers, are a mix of national programs, are not publicly available to parents and are quite difficult to implement given the fact that they do not correspond to any school book available in the market! For some subject matters special editions have been made for the use of European School students (Euromath).

⁹ See the replies to all Parliamentary Questions on the European Schools.

(Erasmus, Lingua, Leonardo, etc.). And special efforts are made to establish common European qualifications for University graduates¹⁰. The author thinks that the time has come to launch a similar effort in the area of primary and secondary education through the establishment of the New European School concept.

3. THE NEW EUROPEAN SCHOOL CONCEPT

All the issues raised in the context of the upcoming Round Table (see Annex 1) are resolved through the New European School concept. New European Schools will indeed be based on the experience gained from the existing European Schools. They will be established by competent authorities of the Member States (national, regional or local) or by private education establishments within any European Union country and should have the following *essential characteristics*:

- Offer a multi-cultural education of high quality and a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding.
- Offer at least two European languages in addition to the national language taught in the school. These languages should be taught by native speakers preferably originating from the Member State this language is spoken. The language lessons should start at the first primary and continue for at least one hour a day for the whole 12-year educational cycle.
- Offer several additional matters of the secondary cycle (e.g. History, Geography, Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry, Economy, Sociology) in the foreign languages and with accredited native speaker professors originating from the Member State this language is spoken.
- Organize at least one full language section for children of foreigners (or natives) that wish to offer to their children a 12-year education in this language (or a 9-year or a 6-year cycle depending from the number of children). Pupils of this section will be taught in the secondary cycle at least 3 main subjects in their own language and the rest in one of the other languages taught in the school.
- Organize teaching of a minimum of subject matters through modern computer technologies and networks in collaboration with other European schools in other Member States.

Furthermore the New European School will be based on the following *organizational aspects*:

- European schools will be the subject of a Community wide program. Criteria and other practical details will be laid down in a Decision of the Council and the European Parliament. The program concerning European schools will be governed by normal (first pillar) Community law (involvement of European Parliament, Court of Justice, Court of Auditors). The actual intergovernmental structure can thus expire.
- Under the new scheme, the European school is in principle a normal public (or private) school that decides to offer a European education as described above.
- The title «European School» will be attributed by the European Commission with the help of a Management and regulatory Committee constituted by representatives of the Member States (compare with the attribution of «blue flags» to clean beaches).

¹⁰ Bologna declaration available through <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/higher.html>.

- The schools will be public (or private) educational establishments under the jurisdiction of the host country. They will submit a full proposal to the Commission in the context of a call for proposals and they will be selected on the basis of previously defined and transparent criteria. Cost-benefit considerations will be taken into account for attributing the title. Schools that wish to get the title without requesting Community financial contribution should be able to do so but they will be subject to evaluation and inspections as the rest of the European schools on the basis of the same high quality criteria.
- The new-type European schools will all follow a similar curriculum for all subject matters taught. This curriculum will be the basis of the quality control assessment by independent evaluators and inspectors. Pupils will get a European baccalaureate with subjects and criteria established at European level.
- Independent evaluators and inspectors from Member States will regularly inspect European schools in other Member States to ensure application of commonly agreed quality criteria.
- Community budget will cover the differential cost of establishing and operating a European School¹¹. For children of Community officials a special allowance will be paid as is the case today. For extremely small sections the differential cost may be covered by other means (host Member State, Member State of the proposed language section, additional parent contributions, private funds-*mecénat*, special Community contribution, etc.). Categories should be abolished – the cost for each pupil should be established and then covered either via the normal funding of the school or via the European school project. The establishment of innovative tools using projects in new technologies may be financed within other National or Community initiatives.
- Teachers from one Member State called to work in a European school in another Member State will be selected by the inviting country in collaboration with their country of origin on the basis of commonly agreed and transparent procedures and criteria. They will be part of the staff of the European school for a given period of time (to be provided in the Council decision). They will be subject to the same work conditions (including salary, insurance and pension rights) as the rest of the teachers of the host country (free movement of persons legislation should apply). They need not necessarily come from the public educational system of their country of origin.

4. ADVANTAGES AND POINTS OF CONCERN

The New European School concept present the following advantages:

- More Schools will benefit from the solution. The idea of the European schools will thus expand. Politically this may be very significant in view of the promotion of a new policy in the field of education. The principle of subsidiarity is respected. The new European schools do not benefit only the children of EU officials but the local school community as well.
- Member States hosting major European Institutions can use the new concept to better integrate EU officials while at the same time financing and developing their educational system and facilities to take care of large communities of expatriates. In fact Member States hosting European Institutions have an obligation to provide education for all the personnel residing on their territory. If, in theory, European

¹¹ Financial details on the proposal are available in Annex 3.

Schools were suddenly abolished, these Member States will face the obligation to absorb in their national educational systems the children of the officials residing in their territory, normally without any extra funding. The proposed new scheme can also be combined with land use planning considerations to permit development of specific sites and schools.

- The New European School is a first step for the creation of a truly European-wide baccalaureate to correspond – in due time – with a European space of secondary education (parallel with the European space of Higher education). Any educational establishment with the official label of «European School» will be entitled to deliver the new European BAC.
- Foreign pupils will be better integrated into the society of the host country while maintaining strong links with their country of origin.
- Language sections will be easier to set up as the differential cost will not be too difficult to cover.
- Language teaching will be enhanced even for less spoken Community languages.
- Administration through well-established and fairly transparent procedures that are subject to democratic control (European Parliament, Court of Justice, Court of Auditors). Establishment of a correct balance between the Community and Member States on the basis of well-established procedures already tested in the context of other policies. This balance is reflected on financing and decision-making alike.
- Additionally decisions with important budgetary implications (creation of new schools, implementation of the enlargement etc.) are subject to normal budgetary procedures in the context of the annual Community budget and on the basis of a normal multi-annual planning and reporting under the responsibility of the European Commission.
- Financing of the European Schools will continue being a shared responsibility between the Community and Member States. However, only the additional costs will be covered by the Community budget on the basis of open calls for proposals. This will certainly benefit many more schools in more regions within the EU than is actually the case. A revised *minerval* will also ensure that schools can accept outside students practically without restrictions.
- The functioning of small schools will be ensured in a more effective way while the proposal ensures that European schools can be established near sites with small numbers of Community personnel.
- Fewer overheads for management of the schools (Board of Governors, sub-committees, Directors and Assistant Directors, Education Counsellors, administrative personnel, informatics and other infrastructure): normally most of this is already available for the national school that will decide to become European.

Possible *points of concern*:

- The existing structures will certainly react to any change of their privileged status. Change is always difficult to accept – especially by people who are accustomed with a certain status quo. This is why the discussion on this issue should take place outside the context of the existing European School system. It requires above all a political engagement at the highest level possible (Commissioners, Ministers of Education).
- The establishment of the New European School concept should be the subject of a large and coordinated discussion with the different actors concerned. Consultation

should be ensured with the educational establishments of Member States (both public and private), the associations of teachers and parents, the representatives of the civil society and finally with the representatives of employers and workers. An information campaign before the launching of the concept should be organised.

- The new concept must be better understood and endorsed by a large number of people – largely beyond the populations of parents and teachers of the actual European Schools. This is absolutely necessary in order that local communities with large populations of expatriate students understand the concept and make it their own.
- The exact financial impact for each Member State and for the Community should be carefully analysed on the basis of the assumptions that will be finally made. A first analysis is given in Annex 3.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The New European School concept already presented in 2000 replies to all the issues raised in the context of the Round Table on the Future of the European Schools. The concept goes even beyond and provides for further European integration in the field of primary and secondary education as well as for the combat of unemployment and social exclusion.

It is hoped that the Commission will realise the true potential of the proposal and will launch a debate along these lines in view of coming up with a well-founded proposal. Meanwhile all decisions within the actual framework of the European Schools about their future should be postponed.

Annex 1: Issues raised in the context of the Round Table

1. Mission of European Schools
 - 1.1. Is the mission always valid or it should be modified?
 - 1.2. Can the model developed by the Schools, or at least a part of it, inspire national education systems, especially for the education of expatriates' children residing in their territory?
 - 1.3. Should the future enlargement imply for Brussels and Luxembourg in addition to the opening of two new schools, the creation of so many language sections as the new official languages of the Union?
2. The decision-making structure and the financing of European Schools i.e.
 - 2.1. Should the present lack of equilibrium in terms of financial contributions and institutional representation between the Community and the Member States in the context of the Board of Governors lead to a reinforcement of the Community weight in the decision-making structure of this body or to an increase of the financing by the Member States? If the answer is yes, how?
 - 2.2. Should the Board of Governors ask for prior authorisation to the Community budgetary authority for its multi-annual activities with important budgetary implications (creation of new schools, implementation of the enlargement etc.)?
 - 2.3. The financing of European Schools should be the exclusive responsibility of Member States, of the Community budget or should it continue to be shared between Member States and the Community? Should the «minerval» be revised? How is it possible to ensure keeping and improving the quality of education in the context of a policy of budgetary restrictions?
3. Situation of small Schools and Community sites without European School i.e.
 - 3.1. Are small Schools, mainly the ones linked with the activities of the Joint Research centre with few category I pupils, considered indispensables for the smooth functioning of these activities? Should the equalisation subsidy given to these Schools from the Community budget, on the basis of Community engagements, be proportional to the number of category I pupils with the contribution of competent authorities of Member States increased?
 - 3.2. Should pupils of these small Schools, following language sections other than the ones corresponding to their mother tongues, be subject to special attention within the respect of budgetary constraints?
 - 3.3. How is it possible to ensure education of children of Community personnel in the existing and future sites with small numbers of personnel? Should additional/alternative models be considered, mainly agreements with national or international educational establishments, in places where the small numbers do not justify the existence of a European School? Could the European BAC be delivered by educational establishments other than the European Schools, on the basis of the respect of certain conditions?

Annex 2: Some numbers concerning European schools and normal schools in Europe¹²

Table 1: General structure of the budget of the European Schools (1999)¹³

	1999 budget	%	No of pupils	€/pupil
Member States	35.042.865	22	16.482	2.126
Institutions	114.550.462	71	16.482	6.950
School contributions	10.299.200	6	16.482	625
Temporary contributions	2.076.348	1	16.482	126
TOTAL	161.968.875		16.482	9.827

It is evident that Member States cover only 22% of the total budget – mostly by paying their own teachers.

Table 2: Contribution of Member States to the budget of the European schools in € Member States in bold support the establishment of new rules for reducing language sections (1999)¹.

DE	8.141.142
UK	6.091.183
BE	5.140.683
FR	3.832.371
NL	2.604.789
IT	2.056.075
LU	1.632.855
IRL	1.397.444
DK	1.197.608
ES	707.205
PT	668.968
SW	571.920
FIN	407.993
GR	394.876
AT	94.575
	34.939.687

The costs are high in the four first contributors mainly because:

- There are English, French and German sections in all European Schools as these are the main languages (first foreign languages, languages in which are taught History, Geography, Economy in five of the secondary cycle classes). Closing the Greek or Portuguese sections and establishing only four language sections as proposed by the working group will make the German, British and French contribution higher.
- The Belgians insist in keeping a second Dutch speaking section in Brussels for purely political reasons although there are not enough pupils.
- The Belgians are paying infrastructure, maintenance and operating costs for the schools. Abolishing some sections will not necessarily diminish these costs – pupils will still go to school in Belgium either European or Belgian. However the positive impact of the presence of the EU institutions in Brussels has been estimated to be 300 billions BF.
- It is a fact that salaries are higher in Germany, the UK and France in comparison with Greece and Portugal.

Table 3: Expenditure in € per pupil/student in European schools (1999)¹

¹² The Tables in this Annex are based on older data but the relative value of the conclusions is still valid.

¹³ Work Document PE 227.940 of the European Parliament, Budgets Committee, Author Herbert Bösch.

Type of European School	Expenditure per pupil (€)
Large (Brussels, Luxembourg > 3.000 pupils)	8.403
Medium (Varese, Munchen, Kalshrue) ~ 1.200 pupils	10.058
Small (Culham, Bergen, Mol) 700-900 pupils	13.435

Table 4 : Expenditure in € per pupil/student in public institutions by level of education, PPS (1995)¹⁴

	Primary education (ISCED1)	Total secondary (ISCED 2,3)	Tertiary education (ISCED 5,6,7)
EU-15	3324	4579	6377
B	3808	6592	6029
DK	5533	6063	8250
D	3127	4059	8277
EL	1601	1843	2526
E	2817	3638	4656
F	3250	6179	5993
IRL	2026	3172	6546
I	4348	4976	4751
L	:	:	:
NL	3098	4360	8504
A	5184	6623	7390
P	2710	2945	5650
FIN	3965	4498	6707
S	4825	5226	12407
UK	3089	4288	6571

Annex 3: The New European school – some financial considerations

1. *Basic assumptions*

- i) Number of pupils per class: Minimum 10; Maximum 27 (new class created when 28 pupils are enrolled)
- ii) Each language section is made up of the following classes: One kindergarten; 5 primary and 7 secondary.
- iii) This means that the total number of pupils per language section will be: Minimum 130; Maximum 500: at this number the creation of a new section should be considered within another school. Average 350
- iv) Each language section will have the following staff: Minimum 12 (i.e. 6 teachers for kindergarten and primary; 6 high-school professors for language I, mathematics, Physical sciences, History/Geography. It is supposed that several subject matters are taught in another language and that foreign language teachers are available across language sections); Maximum 20.
- v) Language sections per school: Minimum 2 (maximum 1.000 pupils); Maximum 3 (maximum 1.500 pupils) only in special cases, schools could have 4 language sections i.e. maximum 2.000 pupils.

¹⁴ Source: EUROSTAT.

vi) Each school will have horizontal staff of: Teachers 5 (arts, gymnastics, religion, additional activities especially informatics); Management and logistics 7 (Director, 2 Assistant directors, 2 secretaries, accountant, information technology personnel).

2. Differential costs per language section

- i) Estimated at 2 to 2,5 M€ per year
 - Personnel: 15 profs, 3 management @ 70.000¹⁵ €/year = 1.260.000 €/year¹⁶
 - Other costs : maintenance, heat, electricity etc. 740.000 €/year
- ii) A lump sum of 1 M€ per year for a maximum of 5 years may be given to a new European school to co-finance infrastructure adaptation.

3. Other considerations:

- i) Categories of pupils (I, II, III) should be abolished.
- ii) As differential costs for European schools will be covered by the EU budget, EU officials will continue to receive the actual education allowance.
- iii) European schools near EU institutions will have to accept a maximum of 60% of EU officials' children.
- iv) Charges for children should be imposed only if national legislation provides for such charges in public-funded schools.
- v) Private companies and other organisations that want to finance European schools to benefit the children of their employees may do so but the school will have to present this source of financing in the plan that will be submitted to the Commission for funding. Corresponding percentages of pupils will then be allowed from these organisations.

4. Annual budget:

Receipts		Expenses	
EU	100	Management, evaluation, inspection 5%	5
Private financing ¹⁷	20	10 schools with infrastructure subsidy (max 5 years)	10
		42 to 52 language sections in New type European schools	105
<i>Total receipts</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>Total expenses</i>	<i>120</i>

An eventual financial contribution of EU officials with a symbolic annual sum of 1.500 €/pupil (less than half of the EU average) could increase receipts by 13,5 M€ and help pay for 5 to 7 additional language sections.

If Member States want to contribute additionally (i.e. by paying national salaries of seconded personnel) their contribution will be added to the general budget as a receipt and this could further increase the language sections supported.

¹⁵ Covers all salary costs (in host country as well in country of origin).

¹⁶ Special arrangements should be made for transfer of pension rights for seconded personnel.

¹⁷ Private enterprises, individual parents.