

Brussels, 05 AVR. 2011
Ares (2011)

Dear Mr Torrekens,

Thank you for the letter of 2 March addressed to President Barroso and myself concerning the budgetary situation of the European Schools in 2011 and 2012. I am also replying on behalf of the President.

Your letter provides me the opportunity to clarify the Commission position on several issues you raise.

Regarding the budgetary situation, there has been no cut in the European Union contribution to the European Schools. On the contrary, the EU contribution decided by the Budgetary Authority in December 2010 has increased from 154 M€ in 2010 to 164 M€ in 2011, which represents an increase of 6.5% on a yearly basis (the teachers' salary indexation increase of 1.85% is included), whereas all other Commission administrative expenditure increased only by 2.9%.

This increase is less than the 11% increase that the European Schools had asked for and which the Board of Governors had approved in April 2010, which would have meant increasing the EU contribution to 171 M€.

Since then a number of elements have had an impact on the 2011 budget. These include:

- the salary adjustment taken into consideration was originally estimated at 2.5%, the adjustment from July 2010 will now only amount to 0.1%;*
- the Board's decision to adopt a new salary grid for seconded teachers to make it consistent with the grid which has been applicable to EU officials since the 2004 reform of the EU Staff Regulations;*
- a reduction in weightings for the locations outside Belgium and Luxembourg;*
- an increase due to the pound sterling exchange rate (European school in Culham); and*
- the 2010 budget surplus, of which 1 M€ has been included in the 2011 budget.*

The net result is that a balanced revised budget for 2011 could be achieved with an EU contribution of 164 M€.

The Secretary-General of the European Schools has now presented a balanced budget for 2011 in line with the new figure provided by the Budgetary Authority for the EU contribution. Considering the current economic climate in Europe, the Commission considers this a good outcome.

As for the year 2012, the Commission, taking into account the savings measures already adopted by the Board of Governors and the rationalisation measures due to be adopted, considers that a stable EU contribution is a reasonable and attainable goal, which will ensure the long-term sustainability of the European Schools in the current economic climate. Following the European Schools Budgetary Committee's meeting in March, the current overall budgetary situation for the European Schools would lead to an EU contribution of 165.4 M€. This presumes that the proposed reform measures are accepted in April by the Board of Governors. The schools and the Secretary-General have made considerable efforts, and this relative stabilisation of the EU contribution is sensible.

Regarding the educational offer, the Commission shares your concerns about preserving the core curriculum and the absolute necessity for pupils to receive the education required for access to higher education after the European Baccalaureate. In this context, it is important to differentiate between what is essential (i.e. the core curriculum) and what can be reconsidered in the current budgetary context. The Commission is against any cuts to the "core curriculum". The minimum number of pupils necessary to create an option in the two years preceding the Baccalaureate remains unchanged (5 pupils) in the current version of the proposal before the Board of Governors.

Exceptions to the proposed rules concerning the minimum number of pupils necessary to create an option will still be possible in duly justified cases, and the Commission is in favour of transparency and open discussion in the European Schools Budgetary Committee when examining the requests for exceptions by the schools.

Regarding the issue of teaching delivered by non-native speakers¹, this measure, which has been in place for several years, allows some Member States which do not have a language section and which would not otherwise contribute financially to the system, to second teachers able to give lessons in another language. The Board of Governors have defined quality control criteria in order to guarantee the level of linguistic competence and quality. Non-native speakers do not teach courses related to language or literature which should always be given by native speakers.

Allowing pupils to use the second language for some scientific options is a practical solution, offering them the opportunity to follow their desired option even when there are not enough pupils with the same mother tongue to create the course. At the end of the secondary cycle, pupils in European Schools are able to work in their second language (taught from the age of 6), and priority should be given to solutions which allow pupils to follow their preferred educational orientation.

Regarding results, the average baccalaureate success rate in 2010 was 98.54 %, the highest rate in the last six years. For the Brussels I, II and III schools, in 2010, the success rate was respectively 99.04 %, 99.55 %, and 99.49%.

¹ Teachers giving lessons in a language that is not their mother tongue

As far as the replacement of teachers is concerned, the Schools' Directors have a budget line at their disposal to pay teachers to replace absent colleagues². The schools are able to reallocate more budget resources for replacement of teachers, if necessary, and manage this in full autonomy. Moreover, the Staff Regulations for seconded teachers stipulate that they can be asked to replace an absent colleague without additional payment. This is part of the duties of seconded teachers, just like EU staff can also be asked to temporarily replace absent colleagues.

Regarding the services the parents associations provide, it is important to recall that the provision of lunches, school transport and after-school activities are not included in the European Schools' budgets. They are solely the responsibility of the parents' associations (APEEEs) and are based on a fee-paying structure. The EU contribution to the Schools' budget provides - in line with the Board of Governors' decision³ - for the maintenance, repair of equipment and, unless otherwise specified in the host country agreement, its replacement. In times of budgetary constraints, this budget item might also be subject to restrictions, especially since it does not have a direct pedagogical impact.

Safety and security measures fall under the responsibility of the European Schools' System and each School's Directors in particular. Each Director is well aware of the security and safety measures specific to his/her School. In times of budgetary restraint, we must trust the Directors to set the priorities for their schools, and I have no evidence this has not been done.

I can assure you that the Commission takes all these matters very seriously. I was happy to be able to discuss some of these issues directly with representatives of the APEEEs and the Staff Committees on 14 March. I believe that a clear and transparent dialogue will allow us to better understand the measures under consideration and to convey a clear message to all the staff concerned.

Yours sincerely,



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² The amount foreseen in the budgets is 1,15% of the total teachers salaries. Nevertheless, the real need is higher and in practice, the expenses made by the schools for replacement are more that 2,2 % of the total amount of teachers salaries.

³ Decision of the BoG 21-23 2008