

ASSOCIATIONS DES PARENTS D'ÉLÈVES DES ÉCOLES EUROPÉENNES BRUXELLES I - II - III - IV
PARENTS ASSOCIATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS BRUSSELS I - II - III - IV
ELTERNVEREINIGUNGEN DER EUROPÄISCHEN SCHULE BRÜSSEL I - II - III - IV

Brussels, 12 March 2012

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Attn. Commissioner Šefčovič
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

Dear Commissioner Šefčovič,

The school budget for 2013 is now being finalized and will be agreed at the forthcoming Board of Governors meeting on 18-20 April. As you will recall, the budget was cut drastically last year, and is to be maintained at this level for 2013. We were told that lower salary grades for new teachers would generate sufficient savings for this budget level to be sufficient.

We have now been informed that this is not correct. The running costs of the school system will be €12m higher than the budget allocated for 2013. Given that the Board of Governors has said there is no more money available, this amount will need to be found by making additional cuts in the education of our children. There is nothing further to cut in the areas running costs or equipment; these were already slashed to the bone last year. As 91% of all the school costs are personnel costs, principally teaching staff, the only way that the budget can be balanced is by reducing further the amount that goes into teaching our children; by for example restricting options even more, reducing numbers of classes in mother tongue, learning support etc. This is very serious.

How then could the European Commission and the Board of Governors have got the budget so wrong?

There key factors driving up costs in the School system are:

- 1000 extra pupils coming into the system and two new schools – they need teaching resources besides the infrastructure
- Member states are sending fewer of their required quota of teachers; this means the European Commission has to recruit chargé de cours locally, paid for out of the Schools budget, to cover the cost that the MS would normally pay
- New replacement teachers are arriving on a lower salary scale than those they replace whose 9 year contracts have reached the end, but this saving is more than wiped out by the combination of their relocation expenses and the severance packages for the teachers they replace. Costs of teachers are higher therefore this year
- Index linked (legally mandated) pay increases for all staff

These costs were entirely predictable, and should have been predicted by the Commission and the Budget Committee of the Board of Governors last year. They are non-discretionary costs that arise simply from the rules for how the system works. The budgetary authorities refuse to provide the schools with the financial means to cover the costs caused by their own rules that they imposed on the schools. Additionally, Member States encourage the Commission to breach the Convention governing the school's system which clearly states that the contribution of the European budget will be such as to "cover the difference between the total amount of expenditure by the schools and the total of other revenue". The APEEEs are ready to support savings but not when the core curriculum is negatively affected. We reiterate that parents are not against gaining efficiency in the entire school system.

The parent's representatives argued strongly both at the Board of Governors level and with the Commission last year that school budgets should be set based upon the number of pupils, and taking into account the legally required wage indexation, as these are the critical cost drivers in the education system. In other words, if the Commission is going to recruit additional staff, who has a right to education for their children at the European Schools, it must also make the funds available to pay for this education. We also argued that there needed to be a proper joined-up link between the decisions the Board of Governors takes on issues like curriculum, and the budget it makes available to institute these decisions. We were told by the Commission however that they had no appetite for either reforming the Governance or funding formula for the school system. We also argued that we parents are not against gaining efficiency in the school system. Now we see where this has brought us; a lack of proper planning again creates a crisis for our children's education.

Therefore, we urge you first and foremost to ensure that this €12m budget shortfall must be covered by additional money from the European budget and not by cuts to the teaching curriculum. Secondly, we want you to take the appropriate measures leading to budgets based on the real number of children to be educated rather than to be imposed far from reality and in a top down non participatory manner. We look forward to your cooperation in this matter so that the education of our children, defined as a key objective by the European Council, is not put at risk.

Yours sincerely,

APEEE BXL I - Uccle
Richard Frizon,
President

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