



Reform of the European Schools and the ESM

ESM and EPO

The EPO is undoubtedly a success European story in its 35 years of existence. One of the elements that make it unique among other European and International organisations is the very low turnover of its employees. The EPO has succeeded in attracting and keeping highly qualified employees from all around Europe, who come to the office to stay, usually until their retirement. These employees and their families arrive in Munich with the prospect of a long-term settlement and one of the problems they have to resolve is the education of their children.

The European School with the high level of education it provides in several European languages has always been one of the decisive arguments in favor of a relocation and settlement of such families in Munich. It has also been one of the factors that contribute positively to the good work-life balance of the EPO staff.

The EPO has recognised the importance of the European School Munich (ESM) for its staff and has supported its establishment and operation from the very beginning. Today, the EPO is the main contributor to the budget of ESM (ca. 20M Euros – about 1.1% of the EPO budget). The President of the EPO has committed to support the high level of education offered to all pupils of the ESM by guaranteeing the maintenance of the existing language sections and safeguarding, thus, its multi-lingual educational environment.

It is further to be stressed that the cooperation between the EPO officials who deal with ESM matters and the representatives of the Parents' Association is constructive and takes place in the framework of regular meetings and unofficial information exchange. It is commonly acknowledged that both parties exhibit a very strong interest in the maintenance of the high level of education which is currently offered by the ESM to its pupils.

ESM and Brussels

The European Schools System, a member of which is the ESM, is currently being struck by a series of budget cut measures imposed by the European Commission.

The reform of the secondary cycle, which is currently being discussed in the framework of a working group and will be submitted to the Board of Governors for approval soon,

seems to be driven rather by financial than by educational arguments and has caused deep worries in both the parents' and the teachers' communities of the European Schools. The short- and midterm outcome of this reform is feared to be **a)** a deterioration of the level of the European Baccalaureate, at least regarding specific subjects, to such an extent that it will no longer suffice for its holders to accede to universities which have been accessible so far and **b)** a dramatic deterioration of the quality of teaching for most of the called "SWALS" languages in the secondary school.

In the recent months the ESM has also suffered specific budget cuts imposed by the general secretariat of the European Schools when there was no real need for them. A telling example occurred during a recent meeting of the Administrative Council of the school when a budget cut was imposed by the Secretary General while the representative of the major contributor to this budget (i.e. EPO) was initially against it.

In view of the above, the Parents' Association of the ESM sees no reason why the EPO should consent to a "lowering-the-bar operation" for the ESM forced by Brussels, an operation which is against its own interests and the interests of its employees, in particular when its financial condition is rather healthy. It would sound paradox that the EPO consents to a lowering of the level of education for its employees' children, while it still aims at the highest possible educational standard for its own employees.

The EPO employees, who are the parents of the vast majority of the pupils concerned, not only possess themselves university degrees from all around the world, but also value and prioritize high standard university education for their children. **It is highly probable that such deterioration would lead them to reconsider whether the ESM still fulfills their expectations in terms of sufficient preparation for university studies and to look for more competitive alternatives in the Munich area or even at their home countries. A lower educational level of the ESM would also affect negatively the attractiveness of the EPO as an employer rendering the recruitment of highly qualified people more difficult.**

The Parents' Association invites therefore the EPO delegates in the fora of the European School System to a common action with the objective to achieve an exceptional status for the ESM with regard to the Reform of the Secondary cycle currently being discussed. As a preliminary action the Parents' Association of the ESM has already expressed its reasoned negative opinion in the framework of the working group of the discussed reform through its Interparents representative.

Moreover, the EPO should show more determination in issues concerning the ESM budget, since it contributes its major part (ca 85%) and work with the school in defending the commonly set financial objectives against any externally imposed cuts.

The status of the ESM

The ESM has already a particular status within the European schools' system:

- it was established under a special protocol, separately from the rest of the European schools;
- the bulk of its pupils are not children of employees of EU institutions but of those of the EPO, an independent European organisation;

- its main financial contributor is the EPO instead of the European Commission;
- the salaries of the teaching staff are completely financed by the budget of the school, contrary to the staff of other European schools where a part of the salaries is paid by the sending countries.

There are also other particularities regarding the ESM when it is compared to other European schools:

- the pupils usually attend the school from beginning (Kindergarten) to the end (Baccalaureate) due to the permanent employment of their parents at the EPO;
- it is relatively streamlined with only 5 language sections in the secondary school (7 in the primary), especially when compared to the big schools of Brussels or Luxembourg.

It is believed that with a combined action by the School, the EPO and the Parents' Association the special status of the ESM within the European Schools System could be asserted and even enhanced, especially in view of the coming reform of the secondary cycle.

References:

- [Convention defining the Statute of the European Schools](#)
(as amended in 1994, Of. Journal L 212, 17/08/1994 P. 0003 - 00014)
- [Protocol on the setting up of European Schools with Reference to the statute of the European School, part. 3.2](#) (setting up of ESM) of 13.04.1962
- Agreement between EPO and BoG of the European School on the operation of ESM
(EPO Service Regulations, part 11)
- "Organisation of Studies in the Secondary Cycle" - Working group Interim report and proposals (ref. 2013-D-1-78)