



The Brussels Local Staff Committee of the European Commission and the Parents' Association of the European School Brussels

with the support of:

The Central Staff Committee of the European Commission; the Karlsruhe Local Staff Committee of the European Commission; the College of Staff Representatives of the European Investment Bank; the Staff Committee of the European Committee of the Regions; The Staff Committee of the European Parliament; and the European Commission's trade unions: FFPE; R&D; SE; SFE; TAO-AFI; US; and U4U herewith transmit an

**open letter to Ms Ursula Von der Leyen, President
of the European Commission; Mr Charles Michel,
President of the Council of the European Union;
and Mr David Maria Sassoli, President of the
European Parliament.**

An appeal for the children at the European Schools

**Subject: The continuing critical state of the European Schools in
Brussels**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The European Schools in Brussels are experiencing an extended crisis even though their educational model is an asset as witnessed by the rapid growth in the number of accredited schools. These schools are also one of the elements that attract people to work in the European civil service. Finally, they foster European integration through education and the development of a European identity.

Brussels has four European schools. These schools have long reached and even greatly exceeded their capacity in terms of the number of pupils. The provisional Berkendael site (EEB1) has absorbed a number of children in the nursery and primary cycles, but these children must continue their education up to the baccalaureate at one of the other four European



school sites in Brussels. Overcrowding in the secondary school cycle has therefore increased.

The number of children enrolled in these schools is already 1,030 in excess of the official capacity. This situation is all the more worrying in that:

Only one of every two eligible children are enrolled in our schools, due to a registration policy that gives families limited choice and a reduction in the educational provision, due to lack of space and adequate budget,

Between 300 and 450 new pupils wish to be educated each year in the European schools. Forecasts for the period 2020 to 2025 predict the arrival of 2000 new students.

These data are concerning, because the school conditions of our children are deteriorating: the educational project is undermined, no more space is available, lesson planning consumes break times and the pupils - often very young - wait long hours for their next classes. In addition, security conditions are not always met. Thus the various services that are vital for school life - canteen, transport, extracurricular activities - are provided in increasingly difficult, even impossible conditions.

Finally, let us keep in mind that the solutions to this problem of under capacity, which should be put in place by the host Member State, are not swift, as past experience has shown.

The Belgian authorities are dithering. For the record, they had promised in 2015, five years after an official request from the Board of Governors of the European Schools, a fifth school of 2,500 students by September 2019. That promise was not kept. Following proposals for unsuitable sites, Belgium is finally proposing the former NATO site, which is suitable. This site could accommodate a full school. Given the urgency, a quick decision on the allocation of a site is essential; it would then be necessary to quickly build a basic school structure with prefabricated classrooms by September 2021 at the latest. Having previously resisted, the Belgian Régie des Bâtiments now agrees on the urgent need for additional places at secondary school level, where overcrowding is the most significant.

However, the final political decision is well overdue and will not be taken if things continue in this way in 2020. This delay awakens fears that this school in its second phase of construction will not be completed until the end of 2026 at the very earliest. If a political decision is not taken in the near future, the risk of a total refusal of new enrolments for the 2020-2021 school year cannot be excluded. According to the latest forecasts,



this new school will already be fully subscribed by the time of its inauguration without actually resolving the general problem of overcrowding. As a result, the Belgian federal government will have to plan a 6th school in Brussels to accommodate registrations from 2027.

Overcrowding is not the only problem faced by the European schools in Brussels. Some Member States do not provide enough seconded teachers. A worrying lack of psychologists should also be noted. Budgets for European schools are notoriously insufficient in several educational and administrative areas.

The Institutions that you preside over must position themselves clearly and openly, given their importance and their legal and political roles for the future of our schools. The schools account for more than 13,400 children, a number that is constantly increasing. These same Member States have, since the reforms of 2004 and 2014, made large savings on the salaries of the employees of the European Union. However, we cannot accept that our children be victims of restrictive policies. A political agenda is needed for these schools for the coming years, which must, above all, guarantee their infrastructure and adequate long-term funding. In addition, the existence and proper functioning of European schools is a very important element of the framework for employment in the European Institutions and for their work-life balance policy – that of well-being at work.

The signatories of this appeal request a meeting as soon as possible in order to explain the current critical situation to you. We request that Belgium, the host State of the EU Institutions and European schools in Brussels, be reminded in a clear and concise manner, of its obligations under the Treaties and the Convention on these schools, by addressing ourselves to the appropriate level to be heard:

That the Belgian Council of Ministers should decide by summer 2020, in a definitive manner, on a final site to allow the problems of overcrowding to be remedied while also taking into account the environmental impact of this choice.

Starting in 2020, to put in place a project for a provisional and permanent building on the final chosen site, which could accommodate children for the start of the 2021-22 academic year in the first phase and in 2026 for the second phase.

To give permanent status to the Berkendael site, in order to keep this nursery and primary school going, as, according to forecasts, the new school will be full as soon as it has been completed.



Finally, the signatories of this letter ask you to ensure adequate budgets for the European schools in the future European multiannual budget in order to guarantee the quality of teaching and schooling in the long term and thus prevent our schools from continuing in an ever-deepening crisis.

The APEEEs and the Association of Parents of kindergartens and nurseries in Brussels, the Staff Committees of all European Institutions, Trade Union Organizations, Teaching Staff Committees.

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President

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- President of the Board of Governors – Ms Cristina GALACHE
- Members of the Board of Governors
- Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium – Ms Sophie WILMÉS
- Commissioner for Budget and Administration – Mr Johannes HAHN
- Education and Culture Presidency of the EP – Ms Sabine VERHEYEN
- Director General of DG HR – Ms Irene SOUKA

Annex: statement by the Board of Governors