

# Au Quotidien

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Commissioner Oettinger with the Directors of the European Schools

## European Schools: more than ever, a must

### Commissioner Oettinger pledges support to school Directors

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**Commissioner Günther H. Oettinger has met the Directors of all the European Schools to stress his support for their work, and hear their perspectives on key issues for the system.**

Speaking to the Directors last week, he said: *"The European institutions aim at attracting the best lawyers, engineers, specialists. What you are doing, in the European Schools, is an important part of this process. Families' decisions on the future employment and location depend also on the presence of the European Schools. More than ever your service is a must in particular as the pupils will be raised in a European spirit based on our values which is more important than ever."*

Pledging to visit more European Schools in the first half of next year, he added: *"I want to ask what we can do - within the current budgetary limits and in view of the Commission's competencies- to help you optimise your offer to the families further."*

The Secretary-General of the European Schools, Giancarlo Marcheggiano, thanked the Commissioner for calling the meeting, singling out the Commissioner's video message to graduating students as a much-appreciated signal of his commitment.

He went on to highlight two key general issues for the schools: pressure to be even more professional, but with no new resources, and the increasing difficulty in attracting staff – both teachers and administrative staff.

Other Directors flagged issues like the uneven application of the correction coefficient, which according to them does not always reflect the actual cost of living conditions, making it harder to attract and retain staff; delays with the fifth European School in Brussels; overcrowding in Brussels and Frankfurt; safety and security issues; and Brexit concerns.

There are positive signs, too: no Category I pupil (children of EU staff) has ever been refused a place in the system; outside of Brussels and Frankfurt there is no overcrowding; pupils benefitting from intensive educational support increased by 24% from 2013 to 2016; and new rules for locally recruited teachers are in place, offering a career perspective and better working conditions.

In response to the concerns expressed, Commissioner Oettinger highlighted the next MFF, which could be an opportunity to put the schools on a firmer financial footing, and committed to writing to national authorities whenever the facts required it.

Already in July he wrote to Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Jan Jambon to insist on the importance of a fifth school in Brussels, and security-related issues. And in recent weeks he met another Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Didier Reynders, to discuss the general situation of European Schools in Belgium, he added.

The Commissioner also launched the idea of creating an alumni association for the European Schools that would bring together all students leaving the system. He asked the Directors to keep contact details of the alumni, in order to bring them together at the European level, possibly also to discuss the future perspectives of the schools.

Closing the meeting, Commissioner Oettinger announced he would follow up this listening exercise with a longer meeting with the Directors and other stakeholders, before next summer.

### **More than 60 years of history**

The European Schools were created more than 60 years ago to accommodate the schooling of children of staff of the Institutions in their mother tongue, based on a common curriculum.

The system is governed by an intergovernmental convention, with a decision-making body (the Board of Governors) bringing together Members States, the European Commission, and representatives of parents, teachers and staff. The European Patent Office, European Investment Bank/ European Investment Fund and EU Intellectual Property Office are also represented.

The Presidency rotates among the EU Member States every school year - in alphabetic order rather than following the EU Presidency. For the school year 2017-2018, Estonia holds the Presidency.

### **European Schools in figures**

Number of European Schools: 13 in six countries

Total number of pupils: 26,690

Number of Category I pupils (children of EU staff): 21,310

Number of teachers: 2,193 (1,282 seconded by Member States)

Biggest European School: Brussels (Uccle) with 3,344 pupils

Oldest European School: Luxembourg I, founded in 1953

Number of accredited European Schools: 13

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Commission President Hallstein greets Belgian King Baudouin, inaugurating new buildings at the Brussels (Uccle) school, 1964