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ORAL COMMUNICATION

Situation of the European schools in Brussels

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**

Meeting from 4 to 7 December 2018 in Brussels

1. **HISTORY**

On 2010, by written procedure, the Board of Governors has approved the setting-up of a fifth European School in Brussels and has requesed the Belgian Government to make the necessary arrangements for a school with a capacity of 2500 pupils to be made available in September 2015, requesting the European Commission to keep the Budgetary Authorities (Council and European Parliament) informed of this proposal.

On 18 December 2015, the Council of Ministers of Belgium’s Federal Government agreed to make a fifth European School available by 2019-2020, with the temporary Berkendael site continuing to operate until the new school opens.

At its meeting of 1-3 December 2015, the Board of Governors approved temporary use of the Berkendael site as an extension to the European School, Brussels I, pending opening of the European School, Brussels V, its intake ultimately comprising the nursery and primary cycles in their entirety, starting with the nursery classes and the first two primary years as from the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year in September 2016.

The Berkendael site’s intake consists of French language section pupils and of Latvian and Slovakian language section pupils, the creation of the latter two sections in the nursery and primary cycles also having been approved by the Board of Governors at its December 2015 meeting.

**II. The infrastructure and the current pupil population of the Brussels Schools**

There are currently four European Schools (ES) in Brussels: the ES, Brussels I, the ES, Brussels II, the ES, Brussels III and the ES, Brussels IV, in addition to which there is the Berkendael temporary site as an extension to the ES, Brussels I.

For some years now, the total pupil population in Brussels has been regularly increasing, at a rate of around 400 pupils per year; this year, for the first time, the increase is less than 300 pupils.

It can thus be seen that on 15 October 2018, the pupil population of the Brussels European Schools is continuing to grow, even though this increase is lower than in previous years, as attested by the following data:



This overall situation also needs to be taken into consideration in relation to the theoretical capacity of each school and their respective pupil numbers on 15 October to 2018, appearing below:

 

At the level of each school, the situation is as follows:

* At the **Brussels I** School, on the **Uccle** site, the total number of pupils – 3 390 – is still as large, despite a slight fall of 31 pupils on 2017 (for the record, the school’s theoretical capacity is 3 100 pupils).

On the **Berkendael** site, whose capacity is 1 000, the number of pupils is up from 323 on 15 October 2017 to 559 on 15 October 2018. On that site, the French language section accounts for 71% of pupil numbers, i.e. 10% less than last year, this being due to the new satellite classes opened. The German satellite classes are steadily developing, especially as a new nursery class was created at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year in September 2018. In addition, 4 new nursery satellite classes were opened: EL, EN, ES and IT.

* The number of pupils on roll at the **Brussels II** School (3 075 pupils on 15 October 2018 / theoretical capacity of 2 850 pupils) has fallen slightly (by 26 pupils), mainly in the nursery and primary cycles Pupil numbers in the secondary cycle, on the other hands, are up.
* The overcrowding of the **Brussels III** School has worsened, with 31 more pupils on roll (3 099 pupils on 15 October 2018 / theoretical capacity of 2 650 pupils). While a decrease is to be noted in the nursery, the population of the primary and secondary cycles is continuing to rise. The distribution of pupil numbers in the different sections is comparatively well balanced, although the number of pupils in the EL language section is still very large compared with numbers in the other sections (584 pupils in 2018 as compared with 581 in 2017).
* The **Brussels IV** School has reached its capacity of 2 800 pupil (2 835 pupils on 15 October 2018) with 57 more pupils than last year. The secondary cycle is continuing to develop.

It should be noted that on 15 October 2018,  the overcrowding of the Brussels Schools already corresponded to more than 550 pupils. This situation is not in the least ideal, particularly at a time when a great deal of attention is being paid to the safety and security of the Schools’ sites. A few place remain available in the secondary cycle of the ES, Brussels IV, but they need to be used for development of the existing sections, the year groups in which are gradually being opened each year.

The figures on pupil numbers in the four schools show that it is absolutely essential to have additional infrastructure available as soon as possible.

**III. Communications from the Belgian Authorities on the provision of the fifth European School in Brussels**

During the meeting held on February of the Task Force, organised and Presided by the Ambassador Monsieur Martin of the Interministerial Committee for Host Nation Policy, the Delegation from the European Schools has been informed that there would have been a delay of minimum 5 years on the provision of the fifth European School, with respect to the engagement formulated by the Belgian Council of Ministers to make the school available by September 2019.

The delay in the provision and the growing population of the Brussels schools considered, the need for a temporary solution has been expressed.

During the meeting organised in September the following information have then been received:

As for the location of the 5th school, the Ministry of Defence would have submitted a note to the Council of Ministers in mid-October (originally scheduled for the end of July). The grounds of the new school have been identified by the Defence; they are located along Boulevard Léopold III and are partially occupied by few buildings, deemed unusable for the new school. The Defence plans to make the grounds available around mid-2019. The Defence intends to have its note validated by the Council of Ministers, including the proposal to implement the 5th European School at the Evere site in mid-October.

The Régie des Bâtiments would have expected to submit its note to the Council of Ministers before the end of the year.

The Régie intends to demolish the existing buildings; no change in the use of the land would be necessary.

The question of the perennization of the Berkendael site should have been presented and answered at the same time.

Following the recent meeting between Minister Mr Jambon and the Commissioner Mr Oettinger, the Mr Jambon Cabinet is preparing a Memorandum of Understanding, which should also be presented to the same Council of Ministers.

As for the temporary solutions, only one possibility has been proposed, indicated in "La trésorerie" building (Rue du Commerce), currently rented by Régie des Bâtiments until 2027 and well located in relation to the European institutions. Since the building hosts at present offices, studies would need to be conducted in order to transform this building into a school, also a change of use is necessary. According to the Brussels-Capital Region, this would not be a problem, provided that the building was reassigned to offices after the departure of the European Schools. The owner of the building would have given his informal agreement, but it has not yet been formalized.

The availability would be expected by June 2020, at the latest. The necessary adjustments for the use of the buildings for the organisation of courses by the European Schools, would have been completed by that date. The objective is to organise the start of the school year on 1 September 2020 also in these buildings.

The Security Directorate of the European Commission had advanced several questions about security measures and asked to be able to visit the site; the Régie des Bâtiments ensures that security measures will be taken into account in the planning of the work and that an on-site visit by the Commission's security experts would be organised.

At the subsequent meeting of the Task Force organised on November 22nd, it has been confirmed that the Belgian Federal Council of Ministers, during the meeting on October 5th and on a proposal from the Minister of Defence, had approved a note providing for the assignement of a 4ha plot of land on the site of the former NATO Headquarters, for the construction of a 5th European School.

On a proposal from the Minister in charge of the Régie des Bâtiments, the Council of Ministers would be asked to approve:

- The project to build a 5th European School on the above-mentioned plot;

- The definitive availability of the Berkendael site for the European Schools;

- the approval of the memorandum of understanding between the Commissioner Mr. Oettinger and the Minister Mr. Jambon

- The provision of a transitional solution pending the construction of the 5th European School.

As for the transitional solution, again it has been confirmed that the only solution studied is the one of the “La Tresorerie” buildings.

At the request of the Secretary General, the Régie des Bâtiments has answered that the idea to have a prefabricated temporary solution on the same plot of land where the 5th schools should be built would not be practicable for at least two reasons:

* Costs for the provision of a prefabricated school equal the cost of the construction of a school
* The delay for the provision would not less than three years