



## **General Assembly of the Parents Association of the European School Brussels IV, 11 December 2007**

### **MINUTES**

The meeting is opened by the President of the Parents Association of the European School in Brussels IV (BRU IV), Mrs. Streul, at 20.15 with approximately 40 parents present and seven observers from other Parents Associations attending. The headmistress, Mrs. Bustorff, did not attend the Assembly. Translation to and from English and French was provided.

#### **1. Approval of the agenda**

The agenda was approved with a modification proposed by Mr. Guido Ricci, member of the Board, to switch the order of items 5 and 6. Thus, the elections to the Board were postponed until after the debate and decisions on the budget. The change was adopted after voting, 22 votes for a change and 1 vote against.

It was clarified by Mrs. Streul that only the class representatives had the right to vote but that everyone present at the meeting had the right to address the General Assembly.

#### **2. Short address by Madame Christmann and Madame Bardoux**

Mrs. Christmann, Secretary-General of the European Schools, expressed her thanks to the parents who accepted to be the pioneers for the European School Brussels IV and the transitional site of Berkendael. She was aware that things were not always easy and was grateful to the Parents Association which contributed so that the school could open in the best possible way and confirmed the full support of the Board of Governors. She informed us that the Laken site which should have been delivered by the Belgian state in 2009 would not be ready in time. She was not able to say exactly when the site would be finished and due to the political situation in Belgium it was difficult to have precise information in this regard but the Board of Governors was trying to obtain this information. The plan for the next school year is to open the fourth primary level in the existing classes given that there are students. She hoped that the functioning of the school and the satisfaction of the present parents may

encourage other families to join the school. The inscription policy for next year, even though not yet finalized, will not be very different from the one of this year and this will allow other families to join BRU IV.

Mrs. Christmann said that she was aware that not all conditions at the new school have been satisfactory, in particular with regard to certain services but the Board of Governors has given financial support, for example, for the transport and recently they were also assured by "Regie des Bâtiments" that a kitchen will be installed, probably in January. With regard to the kitchen information had been given that the funds have been engaged and she hoped that with a new kitchen in place in January the daily life of the school during 2008 will be easier. Finally she hoped that other activities parents might expect, such as extra curriculum activities, will be put in place.

Mrs. Bardoux from the European Commission also thanked the pioneer parents for all they are doing for the school, for showing their confidence in the fourth European School and putting up with all initial difficulties and she confirmed the full support from the European Commission. She said that the start of a new school was not easy and she would like to underline the solidarity that the other European Schools have shown and that there has been a good cooperation between the Commission, the Board of Governors and the Parents Associations to face the initial difficulties. This meant that the school could open under the best possible conditions. Mrs. Bardoux explained the role of the European Commission, saying that the European Schools are managed through an inter-governmental system with the Board of Governors and its general secretariat coordinating the work. All the member states as well as the Commission, representing all the European institutions, are represented. The Commission also has an important role in informing colleagues and parents which is even more important in the time of uncertainty regarding the opening date of the site in Laken. There is also a site on the intranet of the Commission and she recalls that her unit welcomes and will try to reply to any question that might arise.

Mrs. Streul said that the Parents Association were grateful for the funds, 70.000€, from the Board of Governors which allowed the Parents Association to offer lower prices for transport in a situation with a low number of pupils spread all over the city. In this way the parents pay the amount applicable at other European Schools. Mrs. Streul wanted to know if it would be possible to obtain financial support for other services such as the canteen or extra curriculum activities or if it would be possible to prolong the financial support for transport for next year also since it is difficult to foresee how many pupils there will be next year.

After communication via telephone with the invited director of BRU IV Mrs. Bustorff, Mrs. Christmann tells the General Assembly that Mrs. Bustorff was not present because she claimed not to have received an invitation. Mrs. Streul explained that Mrs. Bustorff had been invited as had all the other guests present. The absence of Mrs. Bustorff provoked several interventions from the parents as an occasion to talk with the management of the school, (something which has not been offered since the start of the school) would have been appreciated. A meeting with Mrs. Bustorff was proposed and a resolution will be dealt with under point 8 of the agenda "Any other business".



Mrs. Streul underlined the need for maintaining pressure on the Belgian State regarding the delivery of Laken since the Berkendael site is too small to host a proper secondary school.

### 3. Discussion

The question was raised whether the fact that there was no government in Belgium for the moment had led to no work being carried out at the site of Laken. Mrs. Christmann replied that the architects had presented their project and that the problem for the moment was financial as expressed in a letter sent by the Belgian Ministry of Finance announcing a delay of at least one year in the delivery of the site of Laken. The problem is that this financial problem can not be dealt with by the government at present in place. The government has to decide upon the amount dedicated to this project. The project initially had a budget and this amount has increased since then and the financial inspection has not approved the new amount. It is important to have a government in place which could take a decision in this regard. As to architecture and structure Mrs. Christmann said that everything is ready.

Mr. Ricci from the Board wanted to know why, given the delay for Laken and the provision of an unsuitable transitory site and with the host country not fulfilling its obligations deriving from the convention establishing the European Schools, the Commission was not using the opportunity foreseen by the same Convention to apply to the Court of Justice in order to have these obligations clearly stated and the State condemned? Ms Bardoux replied that the question deals with the general issue of a member state not respecting its obligations set out in the convention. This is unfortunately becoming the case more often not only in Belgium but also in Italy and Luxemburg and countries such as the United Kingdom which does not detach teachers. This is very serious since the respect of the convention is the basis for the whole system. For the moment the Commission is taking legal action against Belgium because they have not fulfilled their obligation to pay for the initial equipment of the schools, for example for the school in Ixelles and the Commission had to pay in their place. In this case the Commission could take action because it regarded community funds. When it is about infrastructure the Commission cannot follow the same procedure because it is a community interest at stake and it is the Board of Governors, if they find it politically motivated to do so, which has to take action because the system as such is challenged.

The question was raised why the site of Berkendael which functions well and which could host many children could not remain as a European school. Mrs. Bardoux replied that the site that was been proposed by the Belgian state and which had been accepted by the Board of Governors was Laken. The overpopulation of the other European schools did not made it possible to wait for the delivery of the site of Laken and Berkendael was proposed as a transitory site. In the letter from the Belgian state announcing the delay of Laken it was clearly written that the site of Berkendael would remain as long as needed but even if the building is convenient etc the site has been given as a transitory site. She said that the Commission wishes to already launch the discussions of the fifth European school because there are certain factors indicating that Laken could also be overpopulated and given the time needed, more or less ten years to obtain results, it is important to start negotiating now. Finally Mrs. Bardoux



said that she understands from the interventions that Berkendael is an appropriate site.

Mrs. Streul said that it is true that for the moment Berkendael is a convenient site for many parents but that the children will grow up and there will be a need for a secondary school. In this regard the possibilities at the Berkendael site are limited and maybe not even possible even if other buildings nearby would be at the disposal to host a total capacity of 900 pupils. A secondary school needed other premises such as laboratories etc and the best thing for the children would be for the Board of Governors to maintain the pressure on the Belgian state to finish Laken as quickly as possible and maybe even finish the secondary school first.

A parent wanted to know if there were any measures foreseen for a change in the inscription policy in order to increase the number of pupils and reach an appropriate number of students per class. This would also improve the school's budget and the possibility of reaching reasonable levels of cost for transport and canteen which for the moment are expensive. Mrs. Streul added that this is interesting at this moment since there are discussions going on regarding the possibility to open up BRU IV for category 3 pupils but the opinions are divided.

Mrs. Christmann replied that the question of category 3 children will have to be considered carefully. Many parents belonging to category 1 have children outside the European schools system but can, at a later time, ask to join when the children get older. It is therefore too early to open up the system to category 3 children and before modifying the inscription policy the inscriptions of this year will be carefully evaluated.

A parent from the Dutch speaking section where there are only four children for the moment wanted to know if there was a risk that sections with a small number of children would disappear since there will be no children from category 3 increasing the number of pupils per section or if it is certain that sections with a low number of pupils would remain. Mrs. Bardoux replied that it was known from the beginning that the Dutch speaking population within the institutions was not big enough to justify three Dutch speaking sections. That is why the Commission urged the Board of Governors to wait until Laken before open the Dutch speaking section at BRU IV but this advice was not followed. Now the Dutch speaking section is at Berkendael with a low number of pupils but the Commission has to keep its position that it should not be opened up to category 3 pupils in order to not create a problem of overpopulation in the future. Mrs. Bardoux said that the Commission was concerned about being able to offer places for category 1 children since it is a fact that many families wait until secondary school before they send their children to the European school system. It is therefore important to have the capacity to host those children. She also added that about 200 families did not accept to come to Berkendael and those families are likely to join the European school system for secondary school.

Mrs. Streul said that it could be difficult for the parents at Berkendael to accept small classes in order to guarantee places for other pupils later on and that the Parents Association will have to deal with a budgetary deficit due to the low number of pupils.

A parent said that he thought that the system was open for category 3 children and that this could create problem for parents changing statute after the child started



school. Mrs. Christmann stated that a child who started the European school had the right to remain even if the parents leave the institutions, the only difference is regarding the payment for the school. She added that it is correct that the first article of the convention says that the European schools can be opened up but it is the Board of Governors who decides the modalities. For the moment the situation for the schools in Brussels is that the number of category 3 children should be strictly limited.

A parent from the Dutch speaking section asked why the European school, being a new school does not have the possibility to financial support in the same way that the Belgian state gives support to new schools and he is surprised that the school budget has a deficit. The institutions should take its responsibility to take on board the costs, including losses for this new school. He also wondered why the school had not been advertised better with all positive aspects that it has. There were ways to sell the school and to fill it with more pupils but this had not been done. Mrs. Christmann said that the loss is actually taken onboard since the cost for a pupil at Berkendael is almost four times higher than at the primary sections at the European schools. This deficit is paid by the Commission and the Board of Governors and extra funds have even been given for transport.

Mrs. Christmann added that the inscription policy applied last year effectively had a negative impact on some parents. The objective with the inscription policy was to avoid overpopulation of the other European schools and it should be kept in mind that more than 200 more pupils were welcomed to Berkendael but the parents did not accept the offer. The Board of Governors will do its best to market BRU IV better with the help of the parents presently at Berkendael.

Mrs. Christmann answered the question posed earlier by Mrs. Streul that any financial support in this regard would have to be approved by the Board of Governors but if the problem of low numbers would remain next year she encouraged the Parents Association to introduce a demand for financial support and she would then personally present it to the Board of Governors. She assured the General Assembly that the Board of Governors had no interest in making the situation for BRU IV more difficult.

Mr. Navarre, vice president for the Parents Association in Ixelles, said that good running of the services such as transport and canteen was the best publicity for the school and the fact that financial support for transport came late might have hindered some families in enrolling their children at BRU IV. Regarding financial support to the canteen Mrs. Christmann also replied that she had personally attended meetings together with Mr. Stenger with the objective to obtain a kitchen and with reference to a recent e-mail she confirmed that the funding is now available and that it has been promised that for the beginning of January the works would be finished. She is confident that the "Regie des Bâtiments" would keep their promise. If there were problems in this regard Mrs. Christmann would be ready to go back to discuss but she was sure that the problem with the kitchen will be solved. Finally she said that it is in everybody's interest that BRU IV develops.

With reference to one of the questions raised earlier, Mr. Torre, the Treasurer of the Parents Association of BRU IV, stressed that for the moment at present there is no



common position within the Administrative Board of the Parents Association as regards category 3 pupils. He also regretted that the inscription policy applied by the Board of Governors resulted in the refusal of 50 percent of the children offered a place at BRU IV. Thanks to the loan given by the Parents Associations at the other European schools things could still get started. The initial budget for the Parents Association was based on a higher number of children and this has caused several difficulties and it should also be underlined that the costs are not in relation to the number of children. He also added that he was happy to hear Mrs. Christmann, making the link between the number of enrolments at BRU IV, the possibility of distributing fixed costs on few parents and thus the need to request further subsidy until reaching a break-even point. Mrs. Christmann replied that they are aware of the fact that BRU IV is a new school and that it implies a number of difficulties and high costs.

The question was raised as to when there would be an occasion to discuss the serious problems of security at the Berkendael site and a parent wanted to know if the school management had a plan to address this issue. Another parent added that for example a child went out through the gate on his own in the morning and this had happened before, the situation in the afternoon is chaotic with parents and staff all together and the responsibilities regarding security was not clear. The need for additional staff at the entrance was stressed and concrete measures were asked for. Mrs. Streul says the Parents Association has proposed a number of measures in line with what is applicable at the other European schools. She added that the other European schools had better systems in place and that at Berkendael the infrastructure is missing for security. She repeated that a meeting with Mrs. Bustorff would be requested in order to discuss this and other issues.

The following question regarding the fact that the Belgian State had not paid what it should have for (as mentioned earlier), could influence the construction of Laken. Mrs. Christmann clarified that in the case of Ixelles the Belgian state did not pay for the furniture. With regard to Laken the main problem is the budget for the construction of the site as the Belgian state say it is too high. The budget for furniture is not yet known. She once again confirmed that the work on the site of Laken is ongoing and that there is a team of architects and other people working for moment.

The deputy Secretary-General of the European Schools, Mr. Feix, addressed the General Assembly and presented apologies from Mrs. Bustorff for the misunderstanding. He underlined the need for parents to get involved in the Parents Association and that the school needed the partnership with the Parents Association. He was confident that Mrs. Bustorff would be happy to talk to the parents on another occasion.

Mr. Antonio Cenini, member of the Board of the Parents Association, addressed the invited guests and raised the problem of communication which the absence of Mrs. Bustorff showed. There were also other examples such as the school timetable and the extra-curriculum activities and security. This does not improve the school's reputation. He said also that the parents presently at Berkendael do not receive clear information about the future of the school and that makes the Parents Association's work more difficult. He underlined the need for starting the discussions for the fifth European School.



Mrs. Christmann said that she was not in a position to answer in the name of Mrs. Bustorff regarding the communication problems. She repeated that she had no further information to give regarding the exact date for the opening of Laken and she regretted not being able to do so. She underlined that there is no hidden agenda in this regard. She stressed that no one thinks that it is the fault of the Parents Association if things do not run perfectly and that she will do anything in her power to help out. Regarding the fifth European school the issue was raised at a meeting in October and in a letter sent to the Belgian state this has also been mentioned and the discussion will be initiated in the near future.

Mrs. Streul thanked the invited guests for their support and their interest in BRU IV.

Mr. Navarre from the European School in Ixelles advised the Parents Association of BRU IV that given the problem of communication between the school and the Parents Association any problem or question could be dealt with at the Board meeting of the school.

#### **4. Half year report including financial report: Approval of reports**

In presenting the half year report of the Parents Association at BRU IV Mrs. Streul addressed the General Assembly to give a brief summary of the work performed during the first six months.

She started by saying that the Parents Association has a number of platforms where it can express its opinions such as Interparent which gathers all parents' associations of European schools also in other countries and has a permanent seat in the Assemblies of the Board of Governors. So far, the Parents Association did not have time to get involved but Mrs. Streul announced that the next Interparent meeting will be held at Berkendael on the 21 January 2008. Mrs. Streul further reported on attending the CEA (Central Enrolment Authority) meetings where the four Brussels' Parents Associations share one vote. She also attended the meetings of the school administration Board (CA) where the association has a permanent seat.

Mrs. Streul also informed that the Parents Association is represented in the Pedagogical committee of the school where not only educational issues are discussed but also other important questions such as the security. Ms Streul also said that a representative from the Dutch section is needed for the Educational Committee and she encouraged parents present to put themselves forward as candidates.

In the framework of the Pedagogical committee it was announced that any eventual change in the school time table would come into force only from the next school year. She reported that the school's headmistress had announced her intention to introduce a "flexible" Friday. A resolution regarding a referendum would be discussed since it is important for the parents to understand all the consequences that a change would imply. It could also be interesting to discuss if shorter days would be an alternative to avoid that children get stuck in the traffic on their way home. Mrs. Streul said that she had given a text proposal for the referendum to Mrs. Bustorff one month ago for discussion. The text is in a format allowing both sides to express their



opinions. Mrs. Bustorff has agreed to a referendum a bit later this year. A parent present doubted that the school management would respect the outcome of the referendum given previous experiences. Other parents intervened regarding the school schedule and that it is not perfectly adapted to the needs of the children and their biological rhythm and this has also been confirmed by some teachers. Mrs. Streul said that all those reflections would be integrated into the document of the referendum. A meeting was proposed with Mrs. Bustorff in order to discuss the text of the referendum and the different proposals.

Resolution number 6 was adopted with 19 votes for and 2 abstentions after a modification.

#### Resolution # 6

The GENERAL MEETING mandates the Administrative Board to organise in collaboration with the school administration a referendum on a future school schedule. The referendum sheet will show the different options and modifications with their pedagogical and financial consequences and the respective implications on the APEEE services (such as canteen, transport, extracurricular).

#### Transport

The different service groups gave their reports. Mr. Ricci, coordinator of the transport committee, reported back from the set up of the transport service. For the moment there are four minibuses in the morning and three minibuses and one big bus in the afternoon involved in the transport of the app.70 children travelling from home and back and to the garderies with an average of 10 stops per route (except for the garderie bus).

Mr. Ricci informed the General Assembly that the first bus stops are without accompanying staff but he underlines that all staff involved in the transportation of children have been checked for criminal records. He further stated that the assistants accompanying the children on the buses guide the children to the door of the school and that it then is the responsibility of the school to look after the children. In the afternoon the teachers bring the children to the bus where the accompanying staff takes over. Mr Ricci gave information on the staff saying that the accompanying staff and the parking staff are employed by the Parents Association and they are unemployed people participating in a programme run by the commune. All the staff employed by the Parents Association have received a training course on first aid organised by the Red Cross in November and offered by the colleagues at the European school in Ixelles.

Every week modifications are made and this is due to the fact that new children join the transport service. The transport committee does its best to shorten the journeys and since 20 September 2007 the journeys have been reduced with a total of 39 minutes but there are still seven children with a journey lasting more than one hour. There is no bus for the south of Brussels (route 5) because for the moment there are only a few children interested. The General Assembly could adopt a resolution that a route would be added even if the cost would be higher than for the other routes.



Mr. Ricci explained that the buses often encounter difficulties entering the school due to cars parked on Rue Berkendael and that cooperation with the police and the commune of Vorst/Foret must be improved. A plan on how to act when the school closes because of bad weather conditions (for example snow) will be prepared in the near future.

Mr. Ricci reminded the meeting that a map with all the routes and the stops is available on the website. Mrs. Streul thanked Mr Ricci for the work done in this context.

### Extra curriculum activities

Mrs. Streul said that she had received an interesting proposal from a person working in Uccle for setting up extra curriculum activities at Berkendael. This will be discussed in the Board. Mrs. Streul regretted that some of the efforts of the working group for the extra-curriculum activities were made in vain. However, she emphasises that the form circulated before the All saints holidays had not been approved by the Board because the matters of management and finances had not been secured. With the limited programme prepared recently things could get started. This programme has a few sport activities, music, dance etc for primary school children and could start in January next year.

A parent would like to know if the original programme had been abandoned and Mrs. Streul said that some of the activities in the original programme had been taken onboard in the new one. The Parents Association in Uccle had been asked to do the work for BRU IV since at the starting up of the Parents Association at BRU IV the Parents Association in Uccle was assigned to help out in this regard like Ixelles has helped for the transport and Woluwe for the canteen. The only member of staff that the Parents Association has does not have the time to do the administration for the extra curriculum activities.

A member of the working group explained that a series of communication problems led to misleading messages to parents and that in future the information flows must be clarified. Mrs. Streul encouraged the members of the working group to continue their engagement.

Another member of the working group present at the meeting questioned the way that the issue has been dealt with within the Board and that there was a lack of information to parents wanting to join the Board to work with the extra curriculum activities. She also thought that the fact that the registration process was cancelled by Mrs. Streul now meant that it was not known what kind of activities the parents actually wanted for their children.

Mrs. Streul answered that the programme presented by the working group was too difficult to implement, there were no financial and administrative proposal presented alongside, therefore it would not have been possible to endorse the form and programme. She further added that for the moment it was not possible for a small parents association like the one at BRU IV to dedicate time and money to extra curriculum activities with so many other important services to take care of such as transport and the canteen.



### Canteen

Mrs. Wikstedt-Gaudina introduced the canteen team present at the General Assembly consisting of Mr. Goblet the chef, Mr. Vincent the canteen-coordinator from the European School in Woluwe, Michael Stenger who has been negotiating to obtain a kitchen and Mrs. Priebe the dietician from Woluwe. Ms Wikstedt-Gaudina gave a summary of the situation in the canteen and stressed that it was known to the Parents Association only this summer that the kitchen at the Berkendael site was not equipped for preparing hot meals on site. Luckily the European School in Woluwe stepped in to assist BRU IV and the food is now prepared in Woluwe and heated up and served at Berkendael and the Parents Association can therefore serve hot quality meals to the children at BRU IV as is the case in the other European Schools.

Mrs. Wikstedt-Gaudina said that the fact that food is transported puts some limitations on the choice of menus. For the moment approximately 140 children have lunch three to four times a week and 60 children on Wednesday afternoon. Tickets are sold to teaching and administrative staff and visitors. Mrs. Wikstedt-Gaudina encouraged the parents to come and eat with the children. She also said that the canteen regulation has been adapted to the needs of the Berkendael canteen and the new version was published on the website.

As announced by Mrs. Christmann a new kitchen will be installed at the Berkendael site. Mrs. Wikstedt-Gaudina expressed her gratitude to Mr. Stenger on behalf of the Parents Association for his work done in this regard. A new kitchen will have many positive implications for the canteen. She also said that a new version of the canteen regulation is available on the website.

Due to the reconstruction of the kitchen the canteen will have to close for a period of time, probably two weeks but this cannot be guaranteed. Other things which need intervention such as fixing the washing machine and the installation of a fax have still not been done so time must be taken into consideration.

Resolution number 7 was adopted with unanimity.

#### Resolution # 7

The GENERAL MEETING approves that during the closure of the kitchen for renovation and set-up works, the children will bring their own lunch packs to school. The timetable and the accompanying measures should be maintained. The children will not be charged for hot meals not received during the closure period.

Mrs. Wikstedt Gaudina said that the prices have been based upon what was written in the budget approved at the General Assembly in June and which are in line with the prices applicable at other European schools. At present the price for three months is for nursery school pupils 168€ for three meals per week and 224€ for 4 meals per week. For primary school pupils the price is 197.4€ for three meals per week and 263.2€ for four meals per week. The prices are provisional and have to be decided by the General Assembly.



Mr. Stenger explained that the situation will improve with more children joining the school and when the kitchen is up and running some savings could be made. He said that for the moment that Parents Association has a deficit which was foreseen. The longer this deficit remained the more difficult it would be to deal with and the only one that can change it was the Parents Association itself. He said that it was not impossible that the Board of Governors could give some more financial help or that a part of the funds for transport could be used for the canteen, but even if this happened there would still be a deficit that has to be reimbursed sooner or later. Mr. Stenger's advice was not to wait too long to start to deal with the deficit. The parents entering next year might not be happy to pay for a deficit created by the previous parents and they might refuse to pay. He encouraged the Parents Association to ask the Board of Governors for further subsidies and to apply a canteen tariff which is close to the real cost.

A parent wanted to have clarifications regarding the different options. Mr. Torre explained that there are other elements and rules to be taken into consideration. It should also be discussed from when the price increase should come into force and if it should be retroactive. He agreed that there is a problem of deficit and this will be discussed later on. Mr. Torre adds that he was happy to hear that the Board of Governors realises that there is a link between their recruitment policy, the number of the children at school and the increased costs which this means.

A parent asked for the exact size of the deficit for the canteen and Mrs. Streul said that with the current prices of 4€ and 4.70€ per meal the loss is about 30.000€. If the prices are raised with 1€ the deficit would decrease to 5.000€. Mr. Torre added that the calculations have to be seen in the light of that there are two different budget options proposed, one of the options including a second administrative employee from Mars 2008 and an external audit. A share of those costs would make the deficit higher to a total of 46.000€. In the last option the canteen prices remain at the present level based upon the budget approved at the General Assembly of 7 June 2007.

A parent wanted to know if it would be legal to introduce a retroactive increase of prices. Mr Torre replied that it is up to the General Assembly to decide on this matter.

Another parent wanted to postpone the voting until another occasion since the matter is complicated and a proposal for a meeting dealing only with the canteen issue was presented. Another parent stated that the debate should not be misunderstood as to be about setting prices but that in fact it would be about how to deal with a deficit.

Mr. Stenger reminded the parents present about that tonight's meeting is a General Assembly implying a certain number of formalities and if the voting is postponed another General Assembly following the same formalities will have to be organised and the present General Assembly should decide to call another General Assembly after voting. He advised the parents to go ahead with the voting and even if the difference in the budget is a bit sad the main difference is that in one budget there is an extra member of staff added and in the other there is not. However, in case of a reduced deficit he would be ready to ask for funding from the Board of Governors. He added that the opinion of the English section was not expressed in a spirit of solidarity and that a boycott because of higher prices would harm the service. The



parent concerned replied that she only expressed the opinion of the parents that she represents.

Another parent said that the Board of Governors should give funds to the service given the low number of pupils. Another parent added that if the calculation for the canteen subvention was based upon 400 pupils and because of bad publicity for school only 170 came, it was up to the Board of Governors to cover the loss. This possibility was also positively received by Mrs. Christmann.

Mr. Stenger said that there was not subvention for the canteen and that the one for transport was given on a very exceptional basis and it is difficult to obtain. He said that the Parents Association of BRU IV should not expect to receive funding for the canteen deficit since it would be unlikely to happen. He reminded the General Assembly that the other European schools started up without extra funding.

Mr Navarre from the parents' association of the European school in Ixelles informed the General Assembly that in Ixelles the prices for meals had to be increased as well due to the general rise in food costs (present cost 4.30 €/meal).

A parent wanted to know on which figures the estimation for meals has been based and he also thought that the decisions should not be taken by others than the members of the Parents Association of BRU IV.

Mr. Vincent added that the initial budget which was made before the school was opened had to be based on estimates following official figures on expected subscriptions which then turned out to be far lower.

Mrs. Streul proposed a vote regarding the principles for the price increase or not. Mr. Stenger added that the real cost is 6€/meal including food, staff costs, electricity etc. He proposed to keep the present prices until the end of the running trimester. After that the price would be increased by 1€. This would be a positive step towards reducing the deficit and give 140€ more per day.

A parent intervened and said that it is normal that a new school has a deficit and especially a school where transport, canteen and extra curriculum activities are managed by the parents. He also regretted that the tone from the other Parents Association is getting increasingly sarcastic in the on-going discussions. He also wondered why the few parents who had the courage to join BRU IV in the initial phase should take onboard the costs and added that the member states have a responsibility in this respect. Even if the school budget and the budget of the parents associations are separated practically they should not be separated ethically.

Finally three different proposals were presented for voting.

1. Prices remain as they are
2. An increase of 0.30€/meal as from the second trimester.
3. An increase of 1€/meal as from the second trimester.

In the first round there were 16 votes against a price increase, 11 for an increase of 0.30€ and 5 votes for an increase of 1€. Proposal 1 and 2 are voted again and there



were 16 votes against a price increase and 15 for an increase of 0.30€. In conclusion, there will be no raise of canteen prices for the moment.

## **5. Election of Board Members**

After the vote the agenda was changed again and the debate on the activity report was interrupted in order to proceed with the elections due to the very late hour. The General Assembly agreed and the election took place. Since there were less candidates (11) than places available (21) in the Board the General Assembly proclaimed all candidates as being elected. The elected candidates are: Remo Bettiol, Antonio Cenini, Antonella Bambagini, Hilary Crowder, Anke Held, Yves Herman, Aedin O'Byrne, Isabelle Perignon, Guido Ricci, Carola Streul and Ivan Torre.

Before the elections were finished the translators had to leave since it was 23.55 and they were applauded by the General Assembly.

### **4 bis. Half year report including financial report: Approval of reports**

The discussions on the report were taken up and Mr. Torre asked for the removal of the paragraph on page 13 in the French version of the report of activities stating "The additional needs are to be investigated more closely and different possible solutions should be set up with the advice and assistance of the other APEEES. Volunteering by parents, training and assistance by the other APEEES and additional staff paid by the hour should have priority for the future direction: in case there measure are no satisfactory, engagement of additional permanent staff should be possible. The forecasted additional costs are to be seen as a reserve."

He says that a decision on the report at this stage would prejudice the debate and decision on the budget. Ms Streul proposes to only vote at this stage on the moral report by explicitly excluding the final chapter which is the financial report. Thus, one item could be closed and the debate on the budget with vote on the financial report and resolution 4 could follow. The moral report is accordingly voted for, without the chapter "3. Report on the financial situation as of 11 December 2007" and resolution number 3 is approved with 26 votes for, 2 votes against and 3 abstentions.

#### Resolution # 3

The GENERAL MEETING approved the activity report (moral report) for the year 2007.
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## **6. Amended Budget 2007-2008 and principle for draft budget 2008-2009 – Adoption**

Mrs. Streul introduced the point saying that there are two proposals for budget one presented by the Treasurer Mr. Torre contracting additional staff and the other proposed by herself without additional staff included. Mrs. Streul would like to first carefully examine the situation and to identify which tasks and additional staff would be doing and to first find out which help the other Parents Associations could give. She did not exclude that extra staff might be needed during the coming years.



The Treasurer of the Parents Association BRU IV, Mr. Torre, regretted that there is no longer possibility for translations and presentations on the big screen. He confirmed the difference between the budget as explained by Mrs. Streul and also added that there is a difference regarding costs for an external auditor which should be added in order to comply with a decision of the General Assembly in June stating that an accountancy firm should be appointed before 31 December 2007 to deal with the accounts for the financial year 2007/2008.

Mr. Torre further explained that there is a need to reinforce the staff, presently consisting of one person, and that it is mainly a question about security related to the transport. For the moment there is no back-up in case of absence and there is no possibility to provide solutions if for example accompanying staff are missing. There is also a need to reinforce the administrative and accounting capacity of the Parents Association's office and Mr. Torre is of the opinion that the accounts may only be treated by an internal accountant of the association. He further added that since the Parents Association has signed conventions with OIB for the garderies meals the Financial Regulations for audit apply. This implied that the Parents Association should sign before 31 December 2007 a contract with an external audit firm. Mr. Torre says that he cannot continue to do his job as a Treasurer if the option to recruit an additional member of staff and with external audit appointed this year is not approved.

In reply to a question from a parent regarding the deficit Mr. Torre replied that the deficit in both the budgets presented today is however lower than the deficit approved at the General Assembly of June 2007. He further explained that the Parents Association has since the summer of 2007 a loan provided from the Parents Associations of the three other Parents Associations in Brussels. The loan is without interest and the first repayment will start in 2012, the second one eight years after the loan was given and the third one ten years after. The Parents Association of BRU IV has so far received 75.000€ and the maximum amount of the loan can be 300.000€. Mr. Torre added that the deficit in the budget might be decreased through subventions as discussed earlier, an increase of canteen prices in the future, higher membership fees, a higher number of pupils etc. It should however be kept in mind that a higher number of pupils would not automatically mean that there would be more children eating in the canteen or taking the bus. He finally added that the main objective of the Parents Association was not to make profit but to provide services to the children.

A parent wanted to know what kind of profile the new staff member would have and Mr. Torre said that was important that that person had a knowledge of accounting, who could share the administrative work with the person already working but that s/he would also be ready to step in when unforeseen situations occur in relation to transport in case of for example illness.

Clarification was requested in regard to the differences between the budgets and Mr. Torre repeated that in the first version there are no costs for external audit and for an additional member of staff.

Mrs. Streul said that the question was not whether to have or have not an audit on the annual accounts of 2007/2008. She says that she has deleted the costs in this



year's budget for the external audit because the costs would only occur in the following financial year. She explains that this year's account will be closed on 31 August 2008. The next step would be the establishment of the annual accounts which include a balance sheet and have to follow certain formal rules and the publication in the *Moniteur Belge*. This would be done by an accountant be it internal or external. Supposedly this would take place in September 2008. Afterwards the auditor would check if the accounts and the management were correct. This would take place about in October 2008. The service and the invoice would therefore be expected in the next financial year. For this reason she had taken out the amount of 5.000 € forecasted by the treasurer for this first year.

Mrs. Streul said that the need for extra staff should carefully be evaluated also in the light of if other staff employed by the Parents Association, for example parking staff or the chef, could be available. She said that the recruitment of an additional staff member was an expensive thing to do and also implied a long-term commitment.

She further insisted that the appointment of an auditor would not be in question but that the cost would only occur in the following year. According to Ms Streul the Administrative Board had already the mandate to nominate an auditor following the related resolution of the General Assembly of 7 June.

Mr. Torre clarified that the minutes from the General Assembly in June stipulates that an external auditor is appointed before 31 December 2007 and that according to him the audit should be done for the accounts which will be closed 31 August 2008.

Mr. Cenini added that with further developed services the school will also be more attractive and an investment in additional staff would accordingly be an investment for the future and also guarantee the correct management of the Parents Association.

A parent said that it would be good for the Parents Association if the Treasurer stays and that if the voting is done today this should be taken into consideration. Mr. Torre said that is not him personally but regarding a number of principles and that the tasks under the responsibility of the Parents Association should be carried out in the best possible way.

Another parent asked if it is really urgent to employ a second person and that it might not be better to do it later on when the economy of the Parents Association is better, also taking into consideration that the deficit is already high. Maybe it would be better to wait for six months.

Mr. Ricci gave examples of tasks a second person could do for example sending out invoices, being present at the parking and monitor the accompanying staff, be dealing with security related issues etc. Mr. Cenini also remarked that the number of parents in the Administrative Board is low and the work load is heavy so additional support is needed. A parent added that it should also be taken into consideration that the present staff could be absent for different reasons and that is also why it is important to have a back-up.



In reply to a question from the audience regarding the extra staff Mr. Torre said that the current person working is overloaded with work and there is no back up in case of absence which is a security risk. The other Parents Associations have between 15-20 members of staff and even if the number of pupils is lower at Berkendael the work load is still considerable and not always related to the number children. He urged the General Assembly to not economize in the interests of the security of the children.

Mrs. Streul repeated that there was no proposal to vote about having an auditor or not and that it could be left in the budget and done in the way proposed by Mr. Torre. Mrs. Streul said that the CA had received two proposals through Mr. Torre the same day which the CA would check on due notice and select.

She further said that the accounting of the association could be done by an external accountant hired for the purpose which would be a cheaper alternative. She encouraged the parents to carefully evaluate the situation before hiring an additional person.

The budget presented by Mr. Torre (option "F") containing costs for an additional member of staff was approved with 27 votes in favor, 1 against and 3 abstentions.

The proposal to have an external audit firm appointed before 31 December 2007 and the amount of € 5000 for an external audit firm in the budget for 2007/08 was approved with 21 votes for, 1 against and 9 abstentions. The Administrative Board will appoint the auditor based upon the offers received.

#### Resolution #2

The GENERAL MEETING approved the amended draft budget 2007-2008 presented to it.

Mr. Torre reminded the meeting of the importance of resolution 5 since the Parents Association does not yet have a legal personality and the members of the Board are personally responsible for what they have signed.

Resolution number 5 regarding discharge to the Administrative Board was voted on and adopted with 28 votes for and 3 abstentions.

#### Resolution # 5

The GENERAL MEETING gives full discharge to the Administrative Board for its management from June to December 2007.



## 8. Any other business

### New bus route

#### Resolution # 9

The GENERAL MEETING authorizes the transport committee to evaluate the feasibility to open up a new bus route serving the south a Brussels with a minimum number of six children.

The proposal was adopted with 16 votes for, 1 against and 6 abstentions

#### Meeting with Mrs. Bustorff

A resolution regarding a request for a meeting with Mrs. Bustorff was presented and adopted with unanimity. The meeting should be open for all parents interested and not only for the class representatives. The meeting should be well prepared in order to be as efficient as possible to allow a constructive dialogue. A parent also thought that the meeting should be held in a different environment than the previous meeting with Mrs. Bustorff without disturbances.

#### Résolution # 10

L'Assemblée générale de l'APEEE Bruxelles IV regrette l'absence de la directrice de l'école Européen BXL IV, Mme Bustorff lors de la dite Assemblée du 11 Décembre 2007, absence d'autant plus grave dans cette phase délicate de démarrage de cette nouvelle école. L'Assemblée Générale demande qu'une rencontre entre les parents et la Direction de l'école, de caractère interactif, d'au moins 90 minutes soit organisé par l'école au cours de janvier 2008.

### School party

Resolution number 8 was adopted with unanimity.

#### Resolution # 8

The GENERAL MEETING mandates the Administrative Board to negotiate with the school administration the setting up of a joint school party within the school year and a Christmas market or other Christmas event on a weekend in 2008 or other times enabling more parents to participate.

Mrs. Streul thanked the few parents left and invited the new Administrative Board to meet on Thursday 20 December 2007. The meeting was closed at 01.10.