

Department of History and Civilization

# The "Only" European Schools in the European Union?

DANIELA FINALDI-BARATIERI

HEC No. 2000/6

## EUI WORKING PAPERS



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION**

EUI Working Paper **HEC** No. 2000/6

**The "Only" European Schools  
in the European Union?**

**DANIELA FINALDI-BARATIERI**

**BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)**

All rights reserved.  
No part of this paper may be reproduced in any form  
without permission of the author.

© 2000 Daniela Finaldi-Baratieri  
Printed in Italy in October 2000  
European University Institute  
Badia Fiesolana  
I - 50016 San Domenico (FI)  
Italy



Luisa Passerini

## Preface

Daniela Finaldi Baratieri presents here a case-study which can be considered exemplary of the paradoxes of a certain type of Europeanness today. She studies the European Schools, which are created and run by the European Union; the majority of the European Schools' population is to be found in Brussels and Luxembourg, and the pupils include many "non-entitled", i.e. children whose parents are not employed by the Union. The schools are multilingual, since nearly all pupils' learning experience is carried out in their mother-tongue. The author explores the history of such schools as well as their structure of command and their sources for financing, on the basis of interviews, questionnaires, statistics, periodicals, historical sources and her own field-work.

The observation of these schools takes up a particular meaning, since it is done precisely on those whose identity is in the process of being formed. However, the role of these schools with reference to any possible form of European identity appears quite problematic. As the author shows, they seem inclined more to preserve national traditions and languages than anything else. One of the most interesting sections of this Working Paper is the analysis of the weekly "European hour" in the primary school. This hour is devoted to "togetherness": it is spent in being together and doing some manual work or singing or preparing something in common. It seems to me very significant that the "European" part of time has this vagueness of meaning: it reflects the vagueness of the sense often given to Europeanness today, with a mixture of privilege, good will, and hopes that a better unity is being forged out of multinational encounters. As Daniela Finaldi Baratieri rightly observes, one wonders whether there could be "something more, something more 'European'". The observation that the effort to find a "view of history which is not national, but is distinctly European" gives rise to a mixed feeling of overoptimism, uneasiness and dissatisfaction, not only applies to the European schools but is also true in more general terms. Efforts to criticise old forms of European cultural identity and to find new and more comprehensive ones seem to be scarce in the existing educational systems as well as in the domain of public opinion and information.

At the same time, Jacques Delors might have been right in asserting that the European schools have become a valuable sociological laboratory. However, it is important to value this experience without losing the critical approach proposed by the author of this Working Paper. She looks at them with a witty criticism, which takes into account the point of view of the



students and exposes with humour the questions of elitism and academic standards, and especially the central problem of multilingualism.

The remark by a pupil from secondary school is quoted in this regard: "When somebody says: 'Hey, Gianfranco, will tu sa door even zumachen', everybody understands it immediately". While we are sure that the European Schools confront the problem of multilingualism more seriously than this remark implies, we might again take this anecdote as significant of similar problems at a macro level, and wonder whether often, in European cultural matters, we turn out solutions which are simply the result of summing up various nationalities and/or languages rather than of looking for new innovative and collective solutions. And, more literally, this reminds us how little is presently done for facing seriously, at the level of education and of adult formation, the problem of putting the largest number of people in the position to understand, if not to speak, languages other than their own – which is an indispensable condition for a truly united Europe.

This paper is precious not only for informing us about the European Schools, but also for suggesting a reflection on what it can require to become European today. If the history of the idea of united Europe is largely a history of elites, it would be very useful for us today to reflect on the implications of elitism in present forms of Europeanness – particularly in the field of education – as well as on the role of privilege in European identity, and finally on the characteristics which it might be desirable to encourage in the formation of future forms of European identity.

# THE "ONLY" EUROPEAN SCHOOLS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Daniela Finaldi-Baratieri

There are ten European Schools. They are an independent and self-contained system of schools created and run by the European Union.

This paper represents the fruition of seven months of research into the European Schools<sup>1</sup>. The main impetus behind the research has been a desire to get to grips with the problem of identity and elite construction in the unfolding, expanding and developing of the European Union. What role do the European Schools play in this process? What is their ethos? Is it lived in the same way by the Schools' different actors? Can one speak of elitism when analysing these institutions?

These questions have been tackled through a variety of research styles and techniques that have accumulated data that can be roughly categorised as follows:

1. A period of field-work at four of the ten European Schools.
2. Thirty five to forty interviews with European School teachers, councillors, head-teachers, pupils, parents and catering-staff.
3. One hundred and five extremely detailed questionnaires, "A question of identity", answered by pupils at four European Schools mainly in years six and seven. Questions dealt in subjects as disparate as music, art, sport, religion and the more obvious problem of the pupil's relationship to the schools.
4. The scrutiny of Schola europaea. This is the official in-house pedagogical bulletin published, since the sixties, by the Central Bureau, three or four times yearly.
5. An examination of official statistics and documentation, and reports by the European Parliament and Commission.
6. A general appraisal of the literature to do with the European Schools. Particular attention is devoted to Desmond Swan's recent A Singular Pluralism, an EU Board of Governors' commissioned evaluation of the European School's "...effectiveness in achieving their aims".<sup>2</sup> Professor Swan has been officially defined as "the chronicler of the European Schools."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>THE RESULTS OF THIS RESEARCH WERE DRAWN UP IN DECEMBER 1997 AS PART OF A WIDER ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROJECT EXAMINING THE CONSTRUCTION OF "EUROPEAN IDENTITY", HEADED BY DR. CRIS SHORE OF GOLDSMITH'S COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON AND SPONSORED BY THE ESRC. THE PAPER HAS BEEN FURTHER EXPANDED AND REVISED WHILST STUDYING AT THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE.

<sup>2</sup>SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996, P.1.)

<sup>3</sup>OLSEN J. -REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS "WHERE DO WE COME FROM?...AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?", PP.133-138, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.134).



After a general description of the European Schools history and make up, this paper will try to analyse how the Schools present themselves as special. It will then attempt to assess in which sense one can speak of these institutions as elitists. The role of the European Schools in relation to the creation of a "European" identity will inform the paper as a whole.

## A background of the European Schools

### History

The European Schools were not founded in order to instill a "European Identity" but quite paradoxically to ensure the preservation of national tradition. As the preliminary draft for the creation of a European School in 1953 put it "When their families come to live in Luxembourg, Community officials will want to know that their children can continue their education and in particular the study of their mother tongue."<sup>4</sup> The European Coal and Steel Community's original seat was in Luxembourg and as officials of what were then "The Six" arrived to take up their new posts it was soon realised that sending their children to local schools would remove them from the benefits of their local educational traditions, in particular for Italians, Dutch and Flemings, also a full education in their mother-tongues. Marcel Decombis one of the founding fathers of the European Schools said also that "It would have been a great pity too, to have passed up the opportunity of bringing together children of different backgrounds in one place, of letting them study and play together and of enabling them to learn about each other and to develop mutually through daily contact." He continues "Once the problem had been posed in these terms, a comprehensive solution seemed obvious: the setting-up of an entirely new system of education based on an equal partnership and the combining of features from different national traditions"<sup>5</sup>.

While officials from the Coal and Steel Community declined responsibility for the undertaking a new "Association for Education and Family Interests", headed by an official from the European Court of Justice, Albert Van Houtte, opened a primary school in the premises of what had been a furniture shop. There was one teacher from each member state and although its premises may have been shabby its spirit was squeaky clean. It was a great success with the parents and they pressed for an extension of the school into the secondary because of concern with recognition of its final qualifications. For this they had to turn to the authority of the member states themselves. Representatives of the various ministries of education met in Luxembourg in 1954 and not long afterwards rather appropriately a property belonging to a jam manufacturer was rented to kick the European Secondary School off. By 1958 the School had a statute as well as a "European Baccalaureate", and the

---

<sup>4</sup> QUOTED IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS 1978, p.74.

<sup>5</sup> QUOTED IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS 1978, p.53.



European School in Luxembourg had been joined, as EURATOM and the Common Market were created, by another in Brussels. More European Schools were established at Mol (Belgium) and Varese (Italy) in 1960, at Karlsruhe in 1962, Bergen in Holland in 1962, another in Brussels in 1976<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly by 1976 in negotiations to set up the European Patents Organization at Munich the setting up of a European School there was already foreseen. Lastly in 1978 the European Schools crossed the channel into Britain, at Culham, a traditional English teacher-training school which closed in 1979, a year after the European School had moved into its premises.

It is worth for a moment looking in a some detail at the founding document of the European Schools. There have been modifications and indeed a new statute was agreed by the now very much expanded member-states of the European Union in 1994, but the essentials have remained more or less unchanged since 1954. Three principles form the spinal column of the European Schools. The first is that instruction should be in the official languages of the member-states. That is pupils will receive the main bulk of their education in their mother-tongue. The second states that the European Schools should have a syllabus and time-table which synthesises the different national systems, allowing anyone from any member state to feel comfortable coming into it from home or indeed having to go back for whatever reason into the national system at home. This obviously goes for teachers as much as for pupils. The synthesis of member-states' syllabi was a pre-requisite to the European Baccalaureate, holders of which, the statute assured "...enjoy in their respective countries all the benefits attaching to the possession of the diploma or certificate awarded at the end of the secondary school in those countries"<sup>7</sup> The third pillar upon which the European Schools rest is the idea that the Schools should not be merely a putting of all member-states national systems under one roof, but that there should be joint classes "to encourage... mutual understanding and cultural exchange between pupils"<sup>8</sup>. In the 1994 Statute that replaced that of 1957 this article reads "...in order to encourage the unity of the School, to bring pupils of the different language sections together and to foster mutual understanding, certain subjects shall be taught in joint classes", it also adds that the "European dimension" shall be developed in the curricula."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> THE THIRD EUROPEAN SCHOOL IN BRUSSELS HAS BEEN OPENED IN SEPTEMBER 1999 AT IXELLES AS A SECONDARY SCHOOL.

<sup>7</sup> A. VAN HOUTTE, "THE LEGAL CONSTITUTION OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS" IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS 1978, P.45.

<sup>8</sup> ARTICLE 4 OF THE 1957 STATUTE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS.

<sup>9</sup> CONVENTION DEFINING THE STATUTE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS, (LONDON, HMSO, 1994), P.4.



These principles which were formulated when the European Community had six members have remained in their essence unchanged as the community got bigger. There are differences between the 1994 and the 1957 statute that deal with the administration of the schools but as Van Houtte put it in 1978 the 1957 text "...despite the exceptional expansion that has taken place in the past 25 years... has proved to be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances and a development as important as the admission of three new Member States, whose teaching traditions are so different from those of the original six."<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that there have not been ups and downs in the way the schools have been viewed by the EC or indeed by the member states. Most significant in this context has been the recent (1993) Oostlander report which expressed strong feelings of unease among Euro parliamentarians about the European Schools' accountability, about their excessive expense, and about their failure to live up to the EC's principle of "justice for all"; that is the Schools were charged with elitism.<sup>11</sup> The European Schools, like the European Community itself, have had to keep their heads down when the situation arose but in the end they have always survived whatever criticisms have been lodged against them. As school number ten opens in Brussels it looks like the European Schools are thriving and in 1993, the fortieth anniversary of the foundation J. Olsen one of the School's top administrators could write that "The vision of Jean Monnet has been fulfilled with the European spirit that reigns in the European Schools"<sup>12</sup> There is plenty of confidence at the European Schools that not only are they here to stay but they are indeed pioneers of Europe's education.

### **The structure of command**

As has been said there are at present ten European Schools with a total population of pupils numbering over fifteen thousand. The age range goes all the way from nursery up to the end of secondary. Over six thousand of the pupils go to the three Brussels Schools (Uccle, Woluwe and Ixelles), a further three and a half thousand to Luxembourg whilst roughly a thousand each to all the other six. The ratio of teachers to pupils throughout the schools is in the

<sup>10</sup> A. VAN HOUTTE, "THE LEGAL CONSTITUTION OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS" IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS 1978*, p.48.

<sup>11</sup> *EUROP 2* ERROR! SWITCH ARGUMENT NOT SPECIFIED. ERROR! SWITCH ARGUMENT NOT SPECIFIED. \* T SESSION DOCUMENTS. REPORT ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DECISION ON THE CONCLUSION BY THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY AND THE EUROPEAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMUNITY OF THE CONVENTION DEFINING THE STATUTE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS (COM(93) - C3-0142/93). RAPPORTEUR: MR. A.M. OOSTLANDER.

<sup>12</sup> OLSEN J. "WHERE DO WE COME FROM?... AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?" IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA*, COMMEMORATIVE BOOK 1953-1993, p.136.



order of about one to fifteen. The teachers are seconded (for a maximum period of nine years) from the member-states' national education systems and they are represented very roughly in proportion to the population of the country they come from, except for those from Belgium and Luxembourg who are grossly overrepresented.<sup>13</sup> How is this large human resource, distributed over six countries and functioning now in more than nine languages, actually administered?

The "board of governors" is at the top. This body is made up of the ministers of education (or their representatives) of each of the EU's member-states, a member of the European Commission, a representative of the School's staff and also of the Parent's Association. The last two can only vote on "educational" matters. The Board of Governors are in command of all decisions to do with finance, administration and education of the Schools and they are not accountable to the European Parliament. It is in consultation with the heads, and representatives of the teachers and parents of all the European Schools as well as with representatives of associated institutions (that is institutions that are not part of the EU but that have special privileges in being granted places at the European Schools, some examples are NATO, and Eurocontrol). The permanent link-men between the schools themselves and the Board of Governors are the Board's Secretary-General and his deputy who run the central administrative office of the Schools in Brussels. They chair the administrative board of each school and presumably pass on the decisions made by the Board of Governors. Then there are a series of committees which bring to the Board of Governors details of financial and educational questions. There is a board of inspectors, that make proposals to the Board of Governors, and it is made up of two inspectors seconded from each member-states' national inspectorates, that check standards in the Schools and have a part to play in the development of the School's unified curriculum. There are also constant meetings taking place between representatives of the Parent's Associations of each School.

Each head-teacher of each European School is appointed by the Board of Governors for a period of seven to nine years and there is something of a national rota in their preferment. As D. Swan points out, there were no female heads until 1994. The head-teachers themselves of all the European Schools do periodically meet up to discuss common strategy and problems.

So in terms of the European Schools as a self-contained educational system there are plenty of linking institutions across all ten schools. Each school, although it may have some particularities, is quite clearly part of a total

---

<sup>13</sup> THIS INFORMATION IS GLEANED FROM STATISTICS SUPPLIED BY THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS BRUSSELS. 1996



system. The individual schools themselves, for day to day purposes, are each ran by an administrative board chaired, as has been said, by the Board of Governor's secretary-general. It consists of a representative of the European Commission, the head and deputies of the school, staff and parent representatives and sometimes pupil representatives as observers. This board proposes the School's annual budget and makes most of the important decisions in the day to day running of the school but it is quite clear that there is in fact very little autonomy for each individual school.

### Who pays?

The buildings that the European Schools use, no longer on the scale of small converted furniture shops, are provided free of charge by the member-state in which they stand. Salaries of seconded teachers (about twenty two per cent of the European School's budget as a whole) are paid by the nations from which they are seconded at a fixed rate notwithstanding the rate of salaries paid at home. Teachers are paid roughly three times the usual salary British teacher's receive; the education of their children, if they have any, is also provided free at the European Schools themselves. There are also a significant number of locally recruited temporary teachers, paid at local salary levels, who are paid out of the general budget of the school. Member States will also pay any financial contribution which the Board of Governors decided unanimously is necessary. Member States also pay for the inspection of the Schools.

The Schools are also paid for by contributions that come from non-community organisations buying in effect access to the schools for their own employees' children. The bulk of the money for the schools (in 1990 sixty eight per cent<sup>14</sup>), however, comes from a "...contribution from the European Communities, which is intended to cover the difference between the total amount of expenditure by the Schools and the total of other revenue"<sup>15</sup>. For the number of pupils the Schools cater for their total expenditure is extremely high. A. Oostlander, in the report mentioned above calculates that the expenditure in 1990 per pupil of the European Schools came to 289,031 Belgian Francs. That is a total expenditure of 4,219,567,900 Belgian Francs for all European Schools. To put it into perspective Flemish schools were, at the same time spending 157,742 Belgian Francs for each pupil and this including real estate which the European Schools were not paying. Oostlander points out that each pupil of the European School costs eighty three per cent more than the average Flemish pupils who themselves are extremely costly in

<sup>14</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996, P.71).

<sup>15</sup> ARTICLE 25 OF THE CONVENTION DEFINING THE STATUTE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS, (LONDON, HMSO, 1994, P.10).



general European terms<sup>16</sup>. It is not therefore surprising that the European Schools are often regarded as an expensive luxury and one which the "Subsidiarity" clauses of the Maastricht treaty have failed to reach.

### **Who goes to the European Schools?**

In the European Schools there are two categories of pupil: those from "entitled" families, that is children of people working directly for an EU institution, or an institution with which the Board of Governors has already concluded an agreement; the others, that is firstly children of nationals of European Community member states and secondly children from outside the Community are classified as "non-entitled" and must pay school fees and are granted places only when available. Fees are not very expensive. In 1997 sending a child to Culham cost per year 659 pounds at the nursery, 926 at the primary school, and 1256 at the secondary school (also second children at the school pay half price); but from 1994 onwards it was decided that they should be increased by ten percent every year for ten years.

In 1990 the majority of pupils at the schools of Culham, Bergen, Karlsruhe, Varese, and Mol were in actual fact "non-entitled" with the Karlsruhe School having only thirteen per cent of their entire pupil population within the category of "entitled" pupils. At the very large schools of Luxembourg and Brussels "entitled" pupils were in 1990 very much the majority, in Luxembourg eighty five per cent. Considering that the majority of the European Schools' population is to be found in Brussels and Luxembourg one can safely say that the European Schools are still catering mostly for the children of people working for the EU. The word "still" is used because there has been in the last fifteen or so years a gradual decline in the percentage of "entitled" pupils attending the European Schools although this has not happened in the larger schools to any significant degree.<sup>17</sup>

### **A sketch of public debate on the Schools**

Views on the European Schools are varied. On one extreme they are considered an innovative and wonderful, and very impartial solution to the problem of multi-cultural education, and on the other they are regarded as bastions of costly and immoral elitism.

---

<sup>16</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SESSION DOCUMENTS. REPORT ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DECISION ON THE CONCLUSION BY THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY AND THE EUROPEAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMUNITY OF THE CONVENTION DEFINING THE STATUTE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS (COM(93) - C3-0142/93). RAPPORTEUR: MR. A.M. OOSTLANDER. P35.

<sup>17</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996, PP.108-111). THIS INFORMATION IS CONFIRMED IN THE POPULATION SCOLAIRE A LA RENTREE DE SEPTEMBRE 1994, ALSO (1995, 1996).



To mention a few examples of the former. John Bulwer says that the European Schools maintain "...a careful sociological balance", and that there is real "cultural neutrality" brought about by "The equality of esteem between each [language section]... the Europeanising effect of mixed language classes for History, Geography, Physical Education, European Hours and all language classes; the equality accorded to each language used as a first language in a section (which may be minority languages of low status elsewhere); the absence of racism." And that their exceptional success in the teaching of languages can be explained by this fact. But this is not all, he also says that the European Schools are morally resplendent: "In the atmosphere of resurgent nationalism in European affairs the European Schools stubbornly persist in their original aims of a European institution that rises above the interests of its constituent members."<sup>18</sup> Edoardo Zin is perhaps even stronger in his praise when he says that if we want a Europe formed by "... peoples coming from so many different cultures, yet having many similarities, and that in the promotion of its rich diversity it is also open to the world (in particular the countries of the East and the Third World), and that it is formed in a spirit of pluralism, cooperation and peace... Then to build this Europe, the young, who in the European School learn the initial and deep meaning of walking towards these new horizons, must lead the way."<sup>19</sup> Even Desmond Swan occasionally falls into the same kind of language. The first punchy words of his book are: "Europe is the past the, the present and future of all the peoples who inhabit the lands lying between the Arctic and Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Urals. Traditionally a bitterly divided and warlike continent, it is now, in the European Union, embarked on a voyage of peace. Central to the success of this enterprise must be education, and at the heart of education for a united Europe lie the European Schools."<sup>20</sup> In the words of these writers the European Schools have a gigantic and morally resplendent mission to accomplish and are to a certain extent succeeding.

From the opposite perspective G. Nieve argues that by setting up the European Schools the EU went against its own stated principles of equal educational opportunity for all and in particular for all European migrants, and that there should be no discrimination against the children of any migrants working in one EC country from another EC country. A school system that catered for only a small fraction of these, and indeed exclusively those who

<sup>18</sup> BULWER J. "EUROPEAN SCHOOLS: LANGUAGES FOR ALL?" IN JOURNAL OF MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT, (VOLUME 16, 1995, P.473).

<sup>19</sup> ZIN E. "LA SCUOLA EUROPEA DI VARESE: REALTA' E PROSPETTIVE." IN TRACCE, (YEAR VI, N.4, OCTOBER 1985, P.246).

<sup>20</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996, P.1).



work for white-collar EC institutions, was inherently elitist. "If the public education of host countries is good enough for their nationals and for the children of immigrants in manual occupations", Neave says, "there can, in equity, be no case to make in support of special facilities for the children of those migrants whose occupation places them in the professions."<sup>21</sup> An article by Marie Woolf in the Times Educational Supplement at the height of the Oostlander controversy accused, rather superficially, the European Schools of being elitist institutions, where parents jealously guarded their children's free education whilst the EC poured money into them without due care. "Eurocrats' schools "dearer than Eton"<sup>22</sup> went the headlines. A few years before, on the same line of argument an article on The Economist also suggested that with these Schools the EU was trying to command alliances: "Those great Eurocrats, the Jesuits, spotted it first: get a child young and he is yours for life."<sup>23</sup>

At the European Parliament there have been several debates on the European Schools the most important being 1983 and a decade later. Before both debates there was an extensive and detailed looking into the Schools on the part of MEP rapporteurs. The 1983 rapporteur Papapietro concluded that the European Schools were "a genuine laboratory for the formation of European and Community pedagogy, cultural interaction and ethical and civil environment."<sup>24</sup> But ten years later Oostlander was much less kind. In fact he pushed for the Schools to either be closed down or to be integrated into the education systems of the host-country. His recalcitrance was about a fundamentally different view-point as to the role that the EC had in education. That is he could find no reason, again like Neave, why any particular migrant group should be treated differently from any other; but perhaps more importantly he objected to the penetration of national education systems by the EC's educational principles as the way forward.<sup>25</sup>

The parliament did manage to block the budget arriving at the European Schools for a while but in the end the Commission merely circumvented it, something it was perfectly entitled to do seeing as the European Schools are

<sup>21</sup> NEAVE G. THE EEC AND EDUCATION, (1984, STOKE-ON-TRENT, P.132).

<sup>22</sup> WOOLF M. IN THE TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT, (24TH SEPTEMBER 1993).

<sup>23</sup> "VIVAT SCHOLA EUROPAEA", IN THE ECONOMIST, (19 NOVEMBER 1988: P.36).

<sup>24</sup> QUOTED IN SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996, P.16).

<sup>25</sup> EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SESSION DOCUMENTS. REPORT ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DECISION ON THE CONCLUSION BY THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY AND THE EUROPEAN ATOMIC ENERGY COMMUNITY OF THE CONVENTION DEFINING THE STATUTE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS (COM(93) - C3-0142/93). RAPPORTEUR: MR. A.M. OOSTLANDER. P28.



not under the jurisdiction of the European parliament. It is worth noting that one of the MEP's who had sent two of his eight children to the European Schools suggested that "such criticism can be countered only by education of the critics!"<sup>26</sup> As Olsen, the general secretary of the Board of Governors, would have it "It is indeed strange that, while Europe as such is moving towards closer cooperation (harmonization is no longer a loaded term), there are politicians who would like to close down a system which has proved to be one of the really successful European undertakings. Perhaps the only way to avoid future financial and budgetary frustration is to make the Commission budget for the European School part of "the obligatory expenses", so that we do not have to spend months on quarrels about financial matters, when our time would be better spent on doing what we are better qualified for, i.e. providing a first-class education for our 15.000 pupils."<sup>27</sup>

The education that the European Schools provide for their 15000 pupils may well be "first class", but to understand its peculiarities it is important to examine what have been presented, by the Schools themselves as their distinctive traits: the "European hour", the teaching of social sciences in a foreign language and languages.

---

<sup>26</sup> KELLETT-BOWMAN E. COMMEMORATIVE LETTER ON THE OCCASION OF THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA, COMMEMORATIVE BOOK 1953-1993, (1993: P.120)

<sup>27</sup> OLSEN J. "WHERE DO WE COME FROM?... AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?" (PP.133-138) IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA, COMMEMORATIVE BOOK 1953-1993, (1993: P.135)



## Distinctive traits considered by the Schools themselves as fundamental

### **The “European hour”**

*Dans les cours d'heures europeennes nous sommes tous reunis et nous faisons des travaux manuels, nous chantons, nous faisons du sport et nous preparons le sejour de Chevetogne. Mais nous ne faisons pas de francais, ni de mathematique. Comme nous sommes tous de differentes nationalites, nous apprenons la vie en communaute et d'autre langues.*

*Sebastien Oudaert 5F Ecole Primaire<sup>28</sup>*

In the official European School brochure one finds that one of the peculiarities of the timetable is “a weekly ‘European Hour’ in the primary school”<sup>29</sup>. As G.E. Tooke, one of the teachers, shows, this “subject” is not as mysterious as it first appears: “During two periods a week the pupils of the 3rd, 4th and 5th year are re-divided into mixed nationality groups. Together they pursue subjects extra to - or other than -, the curriculum of normal lessons... Sometimes the children work in their own groups, sometimes the year groups are combined and sometimes they all work together...”<sup>30</sup> It is a quite unique opportunity for very young children to interact with children and teachers speaking different languages and it surely encourages attempts to use and to understand foreign languages. Of course, this also does happen in other schools, for instance London inner-city schools<sup>31</sup>, where there may be on different “activity corners” inscriptions in different languages and even different alphabets, or where an auxiliary Gujarati teacher plays or reads with mother-tongue Gujarati children and other English speaking children quite naturally join in. But the overall feeling at the European Schools is somehow different. All the languages spoken during the European Hour have a special status, firstly because the alternation of a different teacher with a different language makes this obvious, but more importantly, nearly all the pupils’ learning experience is carried out in their mother-tongue and the European Hour thus becomes a peculiar occasion. Inner-city comprehensive schools just do not have the budget to afford such a gentle introduction to foreign languages, although often the teachers do feel that pupils with different backgrounds carry with them a wealth that could potentially be shared by others, but it is often just annihilated. What is being emphasised here is that a very special opportunity is given to the young pupils in the European Schools,

<sup>28</sup> EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988, (BERGEN, 1988: P.105).

<sup>29</sup> THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OFFICIAL BROCHURE (BRUSSELS, 1996: P.11).

<sup>30</sup> EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988, (BERGEN, 1988: P.105).

<sup>31</sup> THIS MATERIAL IS BASED ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF GREENWICH IN 1990-1991.



to learn new ways to communicate, whilst being reassured of their capacity to express themselves; they are developing a "disponibilit  a comunicare"<sup>32</sup>.

Said this it seems a legitimate question to ask why this "hour" is called "European" as opposed to "Mixed Language" or maybe something like "Togetherness"? In fact, during this time anything can be done, "whatever can't be done in the class room"<sup>33</sup> sport, music, creative and out of doors activities, drama and visits. Although constantly being revised, in Varese for instance, from several teachers doing, in turn, uncoordinated activities, it has recently, in liaison with the Inspectors' Council, focused more on a common topic, which lasts a term (next year this programme should be established on an annual bases), this "hour" has been one of the characteristic features of these schools from their inception.<sup>34</sup> As one documents puts it in a nut shell "The principle of 'European Hours' has never been questioned, but ever since 1953, when the Luxembourg School was set up, problems have multiplied [...]. The School should spare no effort to ensure that "European Hours" are a success."<sup>35</sup> Since the answer to the question posed before cannot be found in the concrete of content or organisation of this "hour" it means that we are confronting an imaginative reality, or in other words the very vagueness of the thematics behind the "European hour" give it the effectiveness it has.

As soon as someone decided that from that moment "European hour" would be the name for this time: a new imaginary space came into being. It is not by chance that the young Sebastien emphasises above all their different national identity. Mauss explained in a noteworthy discussion of sympathetic magic "far from there being any association between the two objects due to their colour, we are dealing, on the contrary, with a formal convention, almost a law, whereby, out of a whole series of characteristics, colour is chosen to establish a relationship between two things"<sup>36</sup>. Pointing to the arbitrariness of choosing nationality as the characteristic par excellence, makes clear that this identity "marker"<sup>37</sup> is fundamental to define what living "a European time" is

<sup>32</sup> MARCHESINI A. -DEPUTY HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE'S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE 20 MARCH 1997).

<sup>33</sup> TOOKE G.E. "EUROPEAN HOURS" IN EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988, (BERGEN, 1988: P.105).

<sup>34</sup> MARCHESINI A. -DEPUTY-HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE'S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE 20 MARCH 1997).

<sup>35</sup> PROPOSALS MADE BY THE TEACHING COMMITTEE FOR THE PRIMARY SECTION AND APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS "EUROPEAN HOURS" (B19, PP.XV-XIX, 1995-1996?: P.XV AND P.XV).

<sup>36</sup> MAUSS M. (1902-'03/1972: P.77) QUOTED IN SAHLINS M. "COLORS AND CULTURES", PP.165-180, (1976/D.N.A. P.172).

<sup>37</sup> GRANT N. "SOME PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY AND EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION" IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION (VOL.33, N.1, PP.9-28, 1997: P.13).



about. "Europe" assumes a tangible and pleasurable dimension. "Most of the occasions when people become conscious of citizenship -in this case membership- as such remain associated with symbols and semi-ritual practices..."<sup>38</sup> At the micro-level the "European hour" is a semi-ritual practice.

To stress the importance of this it is enough to imagine that also someone in the London inner-city school could label the lesson with the Gujaraty teacher "British hour", this would certainly make a difference in the way this experience would be perceived and lived by the pupils. The fact that this is not the case does not mean that the concrete reality as it stands is devoid of an imaginary dimension, but what appears clear is that how things are imagined make a difference.

Being European means something very concrete, that can be passed down to the next generations. The "European hour" will be re-elaborated by future teachers and lived by the future pupils. Once invented, the "European Hour" has its own biography, which is referred to as something distinctive about the Schools. As some of its pupils have asserted or as an ex-pupil put it: "...les 'heures europeennes' et autres cours en commun, il y a aussi la recreation... qui renforcent cette formation cosmopolite et culturelle unique en son genre..."<sup>39</sup> and who extends, by inference, the adjective "European" to any free socialisation between different mother-tongue children and asserts that, "The opportunities which very young children have for European interaction are unique to our school."<sup>40</sup>

It is worth noticing that there is implicit in all this the appropriation/arrogation by the people linked to these schools of the power of defining a special meaning of being European, it is not that any interaction happening or hour passing on the EU's territory is "European" no here there is something more, something more "European".

### **The teaching of social sciences in a foreign language**

*"History, geography and general subjects will be taught in two parallel groups: one of the groups will be taught in German and the other in French. Parents will be free to chose which, but all pupils will be obliged to follow these lessons in a language other than their own..."*<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> HOBBSBAWM E. & RANGER T. EDs. THE INVENTION OF TRADITION, (CAMBRIDGE, 1983: PP.11-12).

<sup>39</sup> WATHELET F. "QUEL TYPE D'EDUCATION AI-JE RECU?" IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.114).

<sup>40</sup> HOLLIDAY C. "EUROPEAN INTERACTION 3-6 YEARS" IN EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988, (BERGEN, 1988: P.88).

<sup>41</sup> EXTRACT FROM THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY MR. VAN HOUTTE (27 APRIL 1953) IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1978 (1978: P.75).



*"Questa scuola riunira', dall'inizio dell'eta' scolastica fino alla soglia degli studi universitari, i fanciulli di Germania, Belgio, Francia, Italia, Olanda e di altri paesi interessati alla costruzione di un'Europa unita ogn'uno degli allievi potra' pur proseguendo con professori del suo paese lo studio della sua lingua materna, letteratura e storia nazionale, acquistare fin dall'infanzia la pratica di altre lingue e godere dell'apporto delle diverse culture che formano insieme la civiltà Europea."*<sup>42</sup>

These two sentences have been taken respectively from the Recommendations of the School Committee and the European Schools foundation stones, because although of the same period and both sanctioned by the School authorities, they stand in clear contradiction. It is, from a theoretical point of view quite important to stress how contradictions can live side by side in the mind of the people involved in a project like the constitution of these schools and can be taken as the main source of inspiration for further speeches or practice. A similar point is made by John Dickie in polemic with Silvio Lanaro with reference to Italian unification: "I want to suggest, through my analysis of the babel of patriotic registers around the building of the (Victor Immanuel) monument, is that thinking and feeling discernible in the language of nationalism... is a process rather more fraught with conceptual ambivalence, fantasy, and unease than historical approaches, which have sought to isolate ideas of nationhood have been able to show."<sup>43</sup> There are practical ways of dealing with contradictions of this sort: one way can be to omit the first part of the foundation stone<sup>44</sup> or just leave it in the same magazine and hope that few will notice it<sup>45</sup> or for certain it could be said that the pupils before secondary school do learn "national history" in their mother-tongue, but then why change this when the pupils are more mature? One can feel that conceptual language becomes particularly fragile when it is receptive of an uneasy, but nevertheless important agenda.

Although officially presented as pertaining to language development strategies, perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of it is that the teacher will hardly ever share the same nationality with his/her pupils. At the heart of this decision seems to be this insight: "historians [and perhaps geographers or economists] are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin-

<sup>42</sup> JEAN MONNET IN THE FOUNDATION STONES OF THE SCHOOLS (TAKEN FROM VARESE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL).

<sup>43</sup> DICKIE J. "LA MACCHINA DA SCRIVERE: THE VICTOR IMMANUEL MONUMENT IN ROME AND ITALIAN NATIONALISM" IN THE ITALIANIST N.14, 1994, PP.261-285: P.262).

<sup>44</sup> THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OFFICIAL BROCHURE, (BRUSSELS, 1996: P.7).

<sup>45</sup> OLE DUE, PRESIDENT OF THE COURT OF JUSTICE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES'S LETTER AND OLSEN J. "WHERE DO WE COME FROM?... AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?" IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.18 AND P.136).



addicts: [they] supply the essential material for the market.”<sup>46</sup> or as one of the staff put it: “My history is my propaganda, your history is your propaganda.”<sup>47</sup> A scholar well reputed by the European Schools’ authorities affirms: “Teaching History to non-compatriots may well compel the teachers to question assumptions which never needed questioning on home ground, in order to ensure that the standpoint taken is free of national bias.”<sup>48</sup> As it will become evident shortly, far from a capricious supposition this has been recorded as the main concern both of teachers and pupils.

All the teachers of either history or/and geography I talked to affirmed in one way or an other that there is something very peculiar and special in what they have to do. To mention one instance; “The difference in being a teacher of history or geography in a European School is that apart from giving also a language lesson we develop a special sensitivity about our pupil’s nationalities, [pause]...you try to include various elements of the history of each nation in your course, in particular key moments so that nobody feels completely left out. [pause] I guess the other thing which I do, we are asked to implement a holistic European point of view rather than national [pause], certainly different from teaching British history as something separate from European history... One other thing; we try to select themes or topics which are appropriate to the topics of the European Schools, because they have a European dimension like [pause] and therefore you might be unlikely for example to summing up craft and arts of the respective ‘Golden age’ in isolation.”<sup>49</sup> This extract is also important because it introduces quite vividly a tension lived by these teachers between an “it ought to be” and an actual “is”. This “it ought to be” is something genuinely felt by teachers, but is nevertheless a slogan that they have to interpret and put into practice. Pauses and uncertainty tend to follow affirmations such as “a holistic European point of view rather than a national” or “they have a European dimension” when an effort is put to actually define what this means. Two registers are juxtaposing, but cannot coincide. It is quite clear to the teachers that they are reducing, not taking to their full extent, the premises from which they start. It seems they are saying that it is not just about teaching British history in a European context or

<sup>46</sup> HOBBSAWM E. “ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM IN EUROPE TODAY” IN ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY (VOL.8, N.1, FEBRUARY, 1992: P.3).

<sup>47</sup> BARTHOLOMEW M. -SECRETARY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE, WIFE OF A HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY TEACHER (1 OCTOBER 1996).

<sup>48</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996: PP.51-52).

<sup>49</sup> HOGG AND FARRAR TEACHERS OF RESPECTIVELY HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (BRUSSELS 1 OCTOBER 1996).



including a bit of history from all the countries that at that moment are in the EU. This, rather than being seen as clumsiness or ineptitude should be individuated as tension in one of the arenas into which official resolutions such as "the introduction of a European dimension in education"<sup>50</sup> become interpreted and reinvented within certain unspoken parameters. The slogan is successful, it is a source of identification, exactly because it is assimilated, taken for granted (perhaps helped by the reified formulations of the official documents) in its haziness; its elusiveness creates a tension, a motor for action.

Two teachers were pondering: "What resources and informations you have that's quite something [pause] - The books that we use are quite good, but not [pause] - What? - Special"<sup>51</sup> The issue of text-books seems to constitute a sore point for all the teachers that end up using the same text-books used in their respective national education systems. There is a constant effort to complement with original documents and with material from several text-books. However the assessment of the potential of this effort varies from teachers that see the superficiality caused by the sheer breath of the Baccalaureate's programme<sup>52</sup> and the problems related to the pupils' command of language/s<sup>53</sup> as overriding difficulties, to those who would consider a possibility to write a "proper text-book" from the substantial material accumulated at home<sup>54</sup> or as one of the head-teacher affirmed: "In History and Geography we take original sources [pause] so you get a view of WW2 through original English, French, German resources [pause] And of course, the kids can read them in the original!"<sup>55</sup> Perhaps a lesson on WW2 is a special case, but not so was the one I attended on the Cold-war<sup>56</sup>. The head-masters' last assertion is without doubt over-optimistic. In fact apart for what the tutors say, the lessons I assisted bear out that this is the case. Classes are heavily based on text-books, which obviously also include original excerpts, but in the

<sup>50</sup> O.J. 20 DECEMBER 1976, PARA.IV, SECT.5 QUOTED IN NEAVE G. "THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN EDUCATION" (117-136) IN THE EEC AND EDUCATION (STOCK-ON-TRENT 1984: P.123)

ALSO "RESOLUTION OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL ADOPTED 24 MAY 1988 ON THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN EDUCATION" RE-PRINTED IN HOPKINS K. (ED.) INTO THE HEART OF EUROPE (BERKS, 1994: PP.123-129).

<sup>51</sup> HOGG AND FARRAR TEACHERS OF RESPECTIVELY HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (1 OCTOBER 1996).

<sup>52</sup> MULLER TEACHER OF HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 2/WOLUWE (5 NOVEMBER 1996)

<sup>53</sup> PIERCE A. TEACHER OF HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM (...JUNE 1997)

<sup>54</sup> FARRAR TEACHER OF HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (1 OCTOBER 1996).

<sup>55</sup> MARSHALL HEADMASTER IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (22 JUNE 1993).

<sup>56</sup> ONE OF THE LESSONS I ASSISTED GIVEN BY HALL TO SEVEN YEARS PUPILS AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (1 OCTOBER 1996).



respective teachers' languages. This limitation was also noted by a few pupils who commented that studying history not in this way: "Helps your language, only learn about Germany, not much about other countries."<sup>57</sup> This overoptimism, uneasiness and dissatisfaction are all aspects of a desire to find a "view of history which is not national, but is distinctly European".<sup>58</sup> Or to put it as the brochures do, the European Schools "... encourage a European and global perspective in the study of history and geography, rather than a narrower, nationalistic one."<sup>59</sup>

What is happening is then that the teachers are endowing "Europe" with an existence through time and space by emphasising the cultural output and "achievements" recorded by text-books not from a single nation-state, but from the panoply of EU states. By portraying these states as peers and equal contributors to something greater, not just to "European culture" but "European civilisation", their historical power inequality not only in waging war, but more specifically in determining what is culturally important is downplayed. It is vital to point out that recodification of "social memory" is not based on a simple manichean remembering what has been good and erasing what has been bad, constant in fact is the lesson to be learned from what in history has divide "Europeans", in particular "nationalism". A project, displayed in the library, on Anne Frank had as its concluding remarks that the persecution of the Jews was one of the consequences of extreme nationalism<sup>60</sup>. Exemplary in this context is a poster, in one of the classes, of "the donkeys and the hay parable for cooperation among nations": two donkeys try to reach two piles of hay placed in opposite directions, but the rope that keeps the donkeys tied together is too short for either to reach the desired piles separately, but long enough for both to reach and eat at the same one together<sup>61</sup>. Seen from this angle the fact that pupils will learn from nationally biased books, but that the bias will have a different nationality from that shown on their passports, tends to feed into this. However, what do they mean by "national bias"? It is quite clear that objections are against an undue importance given to events, processes, discoveries local to one state. The bias has implications only in so far as it "offends" the dignity of the other EU's national states and their national identities, which are taken for granted. No concern is shown for

<sup>57</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.62, P.9, N.9)

<sup>58</sup> MARSHALL HEADMASTER IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (22 JUNE 1993).

<sup>59</sup> THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OFFICIAL BROCHURE (BRUSSELS, 1996: P.9).

<sup>60</sup> PROJECT DISPLAYED IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL LIBRARY OF CULHAM (JUNE 1997).

<sup>61</sup> VARESE (1997).



ethnocentricity and xenophobia X the main concern of the “national bias” as intended by Coulby’s outline of the history’s and geography’s curricula typically adopted by schools and universities in Europe. In fact if one substitutes the singular state with the EU’s plurality of states, one can see the same “national bias” fitting like a glove to the envisaged history of Europe. The kernel of this being that Geography and “History tends to present the history of a certain state[s] in as favourable a view as possible and, thus, tends to denigrate the history of others.”<sup>62</sup> The European schools’ opting for breadth instead of depth in these curricula seems consistent with their assumptions that local and regional histories or particular processes are unimportant and forgotten.

It could be said, then, that the content of History or Geography tends to be distinctly European, in that the boundaries of inclusion change. What Barth sustains for the content of ethnic identity can be said for the content of an other identity whose marker is being European: “The category of ethnicity is a form of social organisation, an organizational vehicle which may take on different contents at different times and in various socio-cultural systems [...] The critical factor for defining the ethnic group therefore becomes the social boundary which defines the group with respect to other groups of the same order, not the cultural reality within those borders.”<sup>63</sup> While this conceptualisation highlights the dynamic nature of the content of identity, it suggests the existence, especially at a micro-level such as school curricula, of a huge elasticity and space within which different actors may be creative, yet it provides social boundaries.

A teacher said “I actually try to adopt a neutral, European point of view.”<sup>64</sup> This equating of “neutral” and European, twined with an abhorrence for “national bias” are, to use a Foucauldian phrase, “inscribed” in the European schools’ educational discourse as “truth”. Perhaps single notions get lost in the process of transmission of knowledge, but “truth of language”, that is “illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are”<sup>65</sup>, tend to be absorbed and constitute the heritage’s core. This is confirmed by some of the pupils both from the results of the questionnaire “A question of identity” and from talking to them. In this context the questions which seem to be most revealing are: “What are the advantages and disadvantages in having been

<sup>62</sup> COULBY D. “EUROPEAN CURRICULA, XENOPHOBIA AND WARFARE” (PP.29-41) IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION (VOL.33, N.1 1997: P.37)

<sup>63</sup> BARTH F. INTRODUCTION TO ETHNIC GROUPS AND BOUNDARIES (BOSTON 1969)

<sup>64</sup> FARRAR TEACHER OF HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS I/UCCLE (1 OCTOBER 1996).

<sup>65</sup> NIETZSCHE F. QUOTED IN SAID E. ORIENTALISM (LONDON, 1991: P.203).



taught History/Geography by teachers/text-books from nations different from your?"<sup>66</sup> The majority of students assumed that they had been exposed to different points of view and to a certain extent to objectivity. It is effective to look at a few samples of the answers to get a glimpse at the spectrum of enthusiasm and contradictions felt by the pupils. "We learn History from different 'nation' point of view"<sup>67</sup>, "We learn European Geography"<sup>68</sup>, "Billions we learn more about other places without the preference of our own country"<sup>69</sup> "Objectivity. Not much more."<sup>70</sup> If these answers demonstrate a complete assimilation of the values recognise as shared by the teachers, the one that will follow imply only a partial one and a contradiction between this and a more intimate, subjective sphere of values. Most pupils indicated this uneasiness: "You can see history from two different points of view so I can keep an open mind on all events, even though, I must admit, that I prefer it in Italian."<sup>71</sup>

### Languages

*"When somebody says: 'Hey, Gianfranco, will tu sa door even zumachen.' Everybody understands it immediately"*

*Mira Jeukens 6E Secondary School<sup>72</sup>*

*"You lose interest and comprehension of history because of the hard language."<sup>73</sup>*

"Languages" is the key word by which the European School present themselves and by which a sort of coherence in what they are doing is achieved. The issues linked with languages are all-pervasive. At first sight it appears as if sharing the EU's member states' official languages is natural, without contradictions, inherent in the school premises, and perhaps it is you the outsider who is the odd one out, however it soon becomes apparent that this is not the case. It is worth mentioning the comments on an inspection that took place in the European School of Varese: "Now, in these meetings the objective, surely, was to communicate certain information clearly to a

<sup>66</sup> A QUESTION OF IDENTITY (1996-1997: RESPECTIVELY N.7, P.16 AND N.9, P.9)

<sup>67</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.18, P.16, N.7)

<sup>68</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.76, P.9, N.9)

<sup>69</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.2, P.9, N.9)

<sup>70</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.16, P.16, N.7)

<sup>71</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.5, P.16, N.7)

<sup>72</sup> EUROPEAN SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988, (BERGEN, 1988: P.17).

<sup>73</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.59, P.16, N.7)



multinational audience. Some of that audience understood French, some understood German, some understood English. Everyone on the teachers' side understood Italian. This fact was not unknown to the Inspectors, but for whatever reasons they failed to apply in their actions the principles which we [the teachers] are expected to apply [and] imposed a mongrel mix of French and English..."<sup>74</sup> Difficulties were mentioned by a good number of pupils about the effect of studying History and Geography in the second language, which was introduced to them at the beginning of primary school<sup>75</sup>. This result seems to be validated with the results of a questionnaire given to ex-pupils of the Bergen's European School even if one considers the fact that once finished school one may tend to forget how hard it was and the discrepancy in the phrasing of the questions. In Bergen's questionnaire many ex-pupils did not agree that there was an actual "handicap in understanding the subjects", but in terms of difficulty many can be said to be in agreement.<sup>76</sup> An angry parent comments "Why for heaven's sake have both my kids the luck to join a European class with a teacher who only speaks French and who prefers up front up lecturing to interactive lectures. The kids don't know any French: one drifts off into his own thoughts and boredom, the other is completely irritated by the teachers scht. scht. when somebody tries to translate for her."<sup>77</sup> A sports-teacher deals with this problem in another way. He says: "We find especially with the little ones we are using two or three different languages to say the same thing. So we get a form of, I know it sounds absolutely dreadful, Eurospeech, that you get just enough sense of communication in one language that before you lose the attention of the other pupils that can't understand you, you have to go on to another language and then a third language" Added to this, he says, teacher's must develop a "sixth or seventh sense" in order to understand if classroom noise is pupils helpfully translating what the teacher says for each other or if it is conventional chatting.<sup>78</sup>

As one can clearly see there is a certain amount of disfunctionality in having to cope with different languages, at several levels. This seems to offer a very different impression to an image that the schools are nurturing very carefully. It is not by chance that one is constantly reminded of the old

<sup>74</sup> JOHNSTON J. "IMPERFECT PARTNERS", PP.36-41, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1995, IX, N.123: P.37)

<sup>75</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: P.9, N.9 AND P.16, N.7)

<sup>76</sup> BLOMME L. ET ALL "AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL, BERGEN BY ITS EX-PUPILS", PP.5-28, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1989: XII, N.105: Q.N.40, P.12) ALSO IN DUTCH IN EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988 (BERGEN, 1988: PP.133-159).

<sup>77</sup> PARENT QUOTED IN NALBACH I. "BRUSSELS, EUROPE OR BABYLON?" IN WOLUWINFO 2 (30 SEPTEMBER 1996),

<sup>78</sup> FOSTER, SPORT-TEACHER AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS II/WOLUWE (BRUSSELS 7 NOVEMBER 1996).



advertising campaigns of Coca Cola and more recently United Colors of Benetton (although one must note that the image of united "races" is completely absent) in that an imaginary space, characterised by harmony, juxtaposes a much more contradictory experience. Echoed in this fantasy is the official Eu's slogan "Unity through diversity", but perhaps substantiated by the perception of "languages" as the wealth of the nation without any implication of power. Probably the strongest bridge between these inconsistencies, which allow them to coexist in the mind of the same people, is offered in terms of experimentation, that is any disfunctionality is assigned to the schools self-image as a "laboratory".

It is extremely useful to look at how this portrait is composed, cultivated through out the spectrum of the school organisation. In commemorative speeches, such as a letter of congratulations from Jacques Delors on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the School one finds: "Les ecoles, comme l'a declare le Parlement europeen a plusieurs reprises, sont en effet devenues un laboratoire sociologique unique au monde et irremplacable pour la creation d'une structure scolaire europeenne dans laquelle se poursuit tous les jours l'effort de promouvoir les valeurs communes tout en preservant la riche diversite culturelle et linguistique des Etats membres de la Communauté."<sup>79</sup> In comments by the teachers or pupils of the kind: "J'ai ete' fascine' par l'utilisation de tant de langues, illustration de differentes cultures, et par cette volonte' commune de parler le meme langage, et de converger vers la meme pensee."<sup>80</sup> Perhaps however how this image is made more real is in the editors of the schools' "news-letters", bulletins, where different articles, even advertisements, follow each other in different languages as if the readers can comprehend all of them. Similarly on the corridors' walls where pupils activities, missions, exchanges, participation in EU's initiatives are exhibited, posters change from one language to another, leaving translations only for more important notices (including even Latin on commemorative inscriptions). The "manufactured nature" of this image leads one to note the force that it carries in terms of commitment and at the same time how it defines a "network of communicators". Identity should be considered "a reflexive capacity for producing consciousness of action (that is a symbolic representation of it)"<sup>81</sup> and it is vital to understand "under what

<sup>79</sup> DELORS J. "LETTER OF CONGRATULATIONS ON THE OCCASION OF THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE SCHOOL", PP.14-15, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993 (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.14).

<sup>80</sup> NIARE' B. A PUPIL QUOTED IN SCHICKEL C. "PAROLES D'ELEVES" (PP.1-4) IN COMMISSION EN DIRECT (N.27, 19-25 SEPTEMBER 1996: P.4)

<sup>81</sup> MELUCCI A. QUOTED IN SCHLESINGER P. MEDIA, STATE AND NATION (LONDON, 1991: P.155).



conditions it is possible to realize [to feel] a "common purpose"<sup>82</sup>. This study at the micro-level can only hope to touch, implicitly suggest something in this last direction, while describing how a certain identity is shared and elaborated by a network of people and in spite of the fact that it is lived differently at different levels of the organisation it signs boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

"It would be impossible to set up a school for each nationality, there are simply not enough pupils of each language and culture, and besides any separation of children according to nationality would be contrary to the whole ideal of a truly European education."<sup>83</sup> As has been suggested talking in terms of "languages" gives the possibility of dealing with issues that are far more sensitive in that much more clearly linked with notions of power. This is very important since it creates the possibility of a metaphorical language. The Schools, then, are not arranged by national sections, but linguistic ones. In spite of the fact that the respective teachers are paid by the European national states, the pupils' fifteen European nationalities are grouped into eleven linguistic sections (or less depending on the particular school). This surely constitutes a practical and functional reduction, not to mention a certain autonomy of the Schools in disputes with national authorities,<sup>84</sup> but at the same time shows how the different European nationalities are not so easily collapsible, as it is the case for the "autre", non-European. From official statistics one can see that for the most part linguistic sections do coincide with national sections. For instance in 1996 the Italian population of the nursery was 115 and the Italianophone population was 138, the Finnish was 34 and the Finnishphone 30, the Greek was 55 and the Hellenophone 44. Only in the case of the Anglophone, Francophone and Germanophone section one can notice a considerable discrepancy. In the first case probably due to the attraction of a "strong" language (the strength of this language is confirmed by the fact that the English and Irish population constitutes not even half of the Anglophone section) and in the other two due mainly to the shared language between different nations.<sup>85</sup> Desmond Swan points out that a special "...effort is needed

<sup>82</sup> MACKENZIE W. QUOTED IN SCHLESINGER P. MEDIA, STATE AND NATION (LONDON, 1991: P.156).

<sup>83</sup> EXTRACT FROM THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY MR. VAN HOUTTE (27 APRIL 1953) IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1978 (BRUSSELS, 1978: P.75).

<sup>84</sup> MARSHALL J. HEAD-TEACHER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS1/UCCLE MENTIONED A DISPUTE WITH GREECE (22 JUNE 1993).

<sup>85</sup> DATA FROM THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OFFICIAL STATISTICS POPULATION SCOLAIRE A LA RENTREE DE SEPTEMBER 1996 (BRUSSELS, N/REF.112-D-96, DECEMBER 1996: PP.7-15).



in such cases where a national group (the Belgians, the Luxembourgers, the Austrians and the Irish) will not have a dedicated language section of its own to guard against the de facto assimilation of these with, say, the French, Germans or British”<sup>86</sup>.

By way of parenthesis it is worth while noting that this repartition of the Schools has a different weight for different actors. All the head-teachers I spoke to were eager in punctiliously stressing the linguistic and not national organisation of the Schools, while the teachers took the linguistic and national sections as synonymous. Suffice it to say that some councillors were analyzing the responses to a questionnaire given to the pupils considering the linguistic sections as representative of national sections, with the exception of the Anglophone.<sup>87</sup> Also an English teacher jokingly complained: “The English section is multinational; everybody smuggles their children in.”<sup>88</sup> It seems that the pupils share the same view point of the teachers.

The structural organisation of the School has been etched so that the main term of contradiction inherent in the existence of these sections disappears, leaving instead the impression of a wealth of equal forms of cultural expression, that is language not backed up by the power of a set of unequally powerful national-states. Most importantly this wealth can be shared without worrying about “passports”.

Swan captures here, in a nutshell, a fundamental aspect of the Schools’ ethos: “The equality [of esteem among the Member States, and this to a unique extent, among the major European cultural and linguistic groups represented in them] is established and expressed primarily in the structuring of the Schools into language sections, each of which uses a different major European language as its everyday medium of instruction.”<sup>89</sup> By looking at this “equality” one is reminded of the Orwellian farm wall where next to: “All animal are equal [there appears] and some are more equal than others”.

“The equality of esteem among the major European cultural and linguistic groups” tends to fade into insignificance when one thinks that within “little Europe”: “There are nearly two hundred languages spoken by children in the schools of London [...] These populations have often migrated to the metropolitan centres of the previously colonising (politically and/or

<sup>86</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM (DUBLIN, 1996: P.12).

<sup>87</sup> QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED AND DELIVERED BY VARESE SCHOOL’S COUNCILLORS GROUP ‘ASCOLTO’ FOR THE 5TH-7TH YEAR PUPILS OF THAT SCHOOL IN 1995-1996.

<sup>88</sup> DICKSON ENGLISH TEACHER AT VARESE EUROPEAN SCHOOL (VARESE 21 MARCH 1997).

<sup>89</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM (DUBLIN, 1996: PP.10-11).



economically) power: Surinamese and Moluccans to Amsterdam, Maghrebins to Paris and Marseilles, West Indians and people from the subcontinent of India to London and Birmingham, Turks to Stuttgart and Munich, Chilean refugees to Madrid and now Ethiopians and Maghrebins to Naples and Milan... The impact of these populations on the cultural and educational map of the EU is profound.”<sup>90</sup> Also the “equality of esteem among the Member States” is put at stake with the creation of a special class of languages: the “working languages”. The European School’s policy makes of English, French and German “*langue vehiculaires*”. This French label, more than any other, renders the contradiction that while all languages are a vehicle to communicate only some are sanctioned to be so, or more so, very clear. This distinction does bestow a great prestige and status on these languages. There are a number of clearly notable consequences, the most important being: a tendency to preclude learning possibilities since only vehicular languages are offered as option for first foreign language, which is the only one taught from very early age; a tendency to have important articles or communications written in one of these languages and, as pointed out above, the teachers and text-book’s for History, Geography and more in general social sciences will be from the countries where these languages are spoken.

This policy evidences how languages reflect in themselves the different cultural, political and economic power of various nations. Significant in this sense is that while English was adopted by the European Schools before the UK joined the Union (and one must, of course, not underestimate the USA), Spanish a similar world-widespread language has not acquired the status of “*langue vehiculaire*” even after Spain joined the Union. “To add Spanish would be very costly [commented an head-teacher] The logic behind this is partly economic”<sup>91</sup>. Certainly financial limitations are of fundamental importance, but in having to make a selection the School had to choose their parameters. Interestingly the Schools of Bergen and Varese only recently, after having exerted a lot of pressure were allowed to have on their premises respectively Dutch and Italian as “*langue vehiculaire*”<sup>92</sup>. This was in particular to solve a situation in which non-Dutch children in Bergen and non-Italian children in Varese were not offered tuition from the start of the host-country’s

<sup>90</sup> COULBY D. “EUROPEAN CULTURE: UNITY AND FRACTURES”, PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CESE CONFERENCE (COPENHAGEN, 26-29 JUNE 1994: P.8) QUOTED IN SULTANA R. G. “A UNITING EUROPE, A DIVIDING EDUCATION? EURO-CENTRISM AND THE CURRICULUM” IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION PP. 115-144 (VOL.5, N.2, 1995: P. 131).

<sup>91</sup> MARSHALL J. HEAD-TEACHER AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE (BRUSSELS 22 JUNE 1993).

<sup>92</sup> MARCHESINI A. DEPUTY-HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE’S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE 20 MARCH 1997).



language, increasing thus their sense of isolation<sup>93</sup>, but at the same time has wider implications, one of which is that the language of the country hosting the School is heard around the School and not limited to a specific language section or to the canteen where the staff are employed “locally”.

Among the “*langue vehiculaire*” themselves there is also a tacit hierarchy, German, although popular is promoted with less zeal than French and English. As one head-teacher put it: “German’s low profile can be explained firstly by the fact that Germans normally speak English very well and... because they were the losers in the War.” He concluded: “For Germany to be an economic giant it must be a political dwarf.”<sup>94</sup>

The most significant aspect of the “*langue vehiculaire*” policy is that there are objective forces and constraints outside the decision-making power of the Schools. In this sense it is worthwhile recalling how historians have interpreted the singling out of “one official language” as one of the fundamental steps towards the formation of a nation-state’s identity. For instance Ernest Gellner posits the transmission of a national language through the educational system as cardinal point towards the building of a modern nation’s unity, also in the case of the media he stresses how their “core message is that the language and style of the transmission is important... what is actually said matters little.”<sup>95</sup> Although the extent to which content can be isolated from “language and style” is problematical, here the importance of the latter is surely well emphasised. Similarly Benedict Anderson asserts, pertaining to Europe that, “what, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity.”<sup>96</sup> “Print capitalism”, in Anderson, more than education, selected some dialects, standardized them into “official languages” and divulged them and in so doing, it set the preconditions for the creation of national consciousness. The “*langue vehicular*” policy testifies, at the micro-level, the creeping in of a very powerful centrifugal force exerted by the EU’s “core” Member States. This has been individuated as a tendency, after all the European Schools are more than generously spending to keep under the same roof from five up to eleven different national schools and can proudly assert

<sup>93</sup> THIS NOW SOLVED PROBLEM WAS MENTIONED BY SWAN D. IN A SINGULAR PLURALISM (DUBLIN, 1996: P.13).

<sup>94</sup> MARCHESINI A. DEPUTY-HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE’S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE 20 MARCH 1997).

<sup>95</sup> GELLNER E. NATIONS AND NATIONALISM (OXFORD, 1983: P.127).

<sup>96</sup> ANDERSON B. IMAGINED COMMUNITIES (LONDON, 1983: P.46).



that at the end of their schooling: "All pupils will be fluent in at least one foreign language and competent in a second."<sup>97</sup> This tendency is very important in shedding light on the dynamics of power which maintains the extent of pluralism present in these Schools, otherwise presented by these institutions as the harmonious outcome of a "United Europe". It is hard to imagine that schools, which do not enjoy the same kind of budget as the European Schools, will not strengthen this trend by always choosing to teach the most "important languages". One can easily foresee the wide ranging implications that this trend has, in the accrual of important jobs, and not least in the creation of specific common identity through the EU.

---

<sup>97</sup> DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION (DFE) THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS AND THE EUROPEAN BACCALAUREATE (LONDON, 1994: P.11).



## Elitism

This section will examine the issue of “elitism”, mainly by looking at policies and how these become articulated in the reports of the Schools’ actors. There will be an attempt to consider “elite”, intended as “the choice part or flower of society”<sup>98</sup>, in its objective position of relative privilege, but also in its subjective position of being or feeling elected.

A constant juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory statements seems to inform the spoken and written word about these Schools and their actors. While it can be stated that even individuals, in their thought are not necessarily coherent, or rather they are hardly ever so, contradictions forcefully pose themselves as meaningful. In this context three interlinked areas have been singled out for analysis: the recruitment of the pupil population, the Schools’ academic standards and the role of these institutions.

### **Recruitment of the pupil population**

*“[L’ article 1<sup>99</sup>, 1962] montre bien que jamais le Conseil superieur n’a voulu limiter aux seuls enfants des fonctionnaires l’acces aux Ecoles europeennes [...] On y rencontre des enfants de travailleurs immigrés exercent les professions les plus variees. Jamais un Directeur ne prendra en consideration la profession du pere pour admettre un enfant”<sup>100</sup>*

*“If at national level, 1% of all children answer this definition [i.e. of gifted children], we can presume that in the privileged populations of our schools, the percentage will be appreciably higher.”<sup>101</sup>*

These accounts about the pupil population embody a dissonance that is voiced over and over again by the Schools’ actors: while the Schools are open to everybody they end up with a “selective” pupil population.

---

<sup>98</sup> THE COMPACT EDITION OF THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY (OXFORD, VOL.1, 1971: P.845).

<sup>99</sup> “LE STATUTE DE L’ECOLE, SIGNE’ EN 1957 PREVOIT EN OUTRE QUE ‘L’ECOLE EST OUVERTE AUX ENFANTS DES RESSORTISSANTS DES PARTIES CONTRACTANTES. LES ENFANTS DES AUTRES NATIONALITES PEUVENT Y ETRE ADMIS SELON LES REGLES FIXEES PAR LE CONSEIL SUPERIEUR’. LE PROTOCOLE DE 1962 DESTINE’ A OUVRIR DES ECOLES EUROPEENNES AILLEURS QU’A LUXEMBOURG PRECISE CE QUI SUIIT EN SON ARTICLE 1. ARTICLE 1: ‘POUR L’EDUCATION ET L’ENSEIGNEMENT EN COMMUN D’ENFANTS DU PERSONNEL DES COMMUNAUTES EUROPEENNES, DES ETABLISSEMENTS DENOMMES -ECOLE EUROPEENNE- PEUVENT ETRE CREEES SUR LE TERRITOIRE DES PARTIES CONTRACTANTES. D’AUTRES ENFANTS, QUELLE QUE SOIT LEUR NATIONALITE’, PEUVENT EGLEMENT Y ETRE ADMIS.” PINCK G. “LES ECOLES EUROPEENNES: ECOLES ELITISTES?” PP.5-6 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1993, I, N.116: P.5).

<sup>100</sup> PINCK G. -EX HEAD-TEACHER, ADJOINT DU REPRESENTANT DU CONSEIL SUPERIEUR, EDITOR OF SCHOLA EUROPAEA, “LES ECOLES EUROPEENNES: ECOLES ELITISTES?” PP.5-6 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1993, I, N.116: PP.5-6).

<sup>101</sup> SMITH A. “THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF GIFTED CHILDREN IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS” IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1995, IX, N.123: P.7).



As has already been mentioned priority of entrance is given to children of the EU's functionaries and employees of different DG, that is from commissioner to porter. While enquiring on this specific subject, it becomes quickly obvious that no data is available, at least to the public,<sup>102</sup> dealing with the professional position of the parents. Significantly, this was indicated as proof that no consideration is given to "la profession du pere" and of the mother when children are admitted to the Schools. Emblematic is a councillor's assertion "I never noticed disparities due to different backgrounds, in these schools we have only brains [...]"<sup>103</sup> As a deputy-head commented: "Non ci sono statistiche per uguaglianza, non fa differenza [...] La mia impressione pero' e' che ce ne sono molto pochi dai livelli-gradi piu' bassi [...] forse perche' pensano la scuola sia troppo difficile, o semplicemente non li interessa. Anche la distanza [...] si certamente non stiamo certo parlando di persone che vivono a Uccle o a Woluwe."<sup>104</sup> Desmond Swan seems to agree despite himself when commenting: "Commonly enjoying a high standard of living and material resources, these children may nevertheless experience more frequently the unavoidable absence of one or both parents [...]"<sup>105</sup> Whilst rejecting allegations of elitism, to teachers it seems indisputable that the majority of the pupils do not have financial problems, on the contrary they are considered to be well-off. Frankly, a teacher put it in this way "The general population of the Schools has no problem with money [...] after all if one is employed by the EU one is middle class!"<sup>106</sup> These testimonies touch a critical aspect of the Schools, that of the "entitled population".<sup>107</sup> It becomes significant to know that the people working in the Schools' canteens or as cleaners (and also a some teachers) are employed with a "local contract" or more importantly without an "EU-contract". Notwithstanding their lower,

<sup>102</sup> POPULATION SCOLAIRE A LA RENTREE DE SEPTEMBRE 1994 & 1995 & 1996 (BRUSSELS, DOCUMENTS: N/REF.112-D-94 & N/REF.112-D-95 & N/REF.112-D-96). HEAD-TEACHERS AND SECRETARIES OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS VISITED TOLD ME THAT NO SIMILAR DATA IS AVAILABLE ANYWHERE.

<sup>103</sup> VERLUSSEN -COUNCILLOR IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS/II WOLUWE (BRUSSELS 7 NOVEMBER 1996).

<sup>104</sup> FIORA -DEPUTY-HEAD FOR THE SECONDARY SECTION OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELSII/WOLUWE (BRUSSELS 5 NOVEMBER 1996).

<sup>105</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996: P.106).

<sup>106</sup> MAY -HISTORY TEACHER AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF VARESE (19 MARCH 1997).

<sup>107</sup> IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT NOT ALL THOSE ENTITLED TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THESE SCHOOLS. A STUDY CITED IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT REPORT WITH RAPPORTEUR G. PEUS, (1 APRIL 1986, PE 103.068) STATED THAT IN 1983 ONLY 40% OF THE 4.604 CHILDREN OF COMMISSION OFFICIALS IN BRUSSELS WERE ENROLED IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS, THE PERCENTAGE WAS FALLEN FROM 52% IN 1973. THIS IS ALSO MENTIONED IN A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996: P.113), WHERE SWAN D. GIVES SOME POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS.



being locally based, income; it follows that they have no special right to send their children to these Schools.

Since the official policy on pupil intake asserts that "other children, which ever their nationality, can be equally admitted"<sup>108</sup>, it comes as a surprise that the pupil population counts so very few children from ethnic minorities. Although also on this aspect there is no official data, the teachers do not hesitate, when asked, to confirm this impression: "Not many indeed"<sup>109</sup> one summarised.

The selection of the pupil population cannot be reduced to the fees one has to pay to accede to the Schools, firstly because they are not particularly high, but especially because "les Conseils d'administration des Ecoles ont ete autorises par le Conseil superieur a accorder des exonerations partielle ou totales de la contribution scolaire pour les familles a revenu modeste."<sup>110</sup> Although at the official level the only rule that establishes how the pupil population should be recruited, is that priority has to be given to the children of EU and EU-related institution functionaries, an inconsistent and unspoken criteria are applied. "One stops being choosy for the linguistic section under threat of closure"<sup>111</sup> was reported in one School, while in another "priorita' e' data ai bambini con genitori di nazionalita' mista; a bambini bilingue (esiste per questo un piccolo esame) e a bambini con alta mobilita'".<sup>112</sup> In parenthesis, considering the tiny number of children from "ethnic minorities", it goes without saying that only certain mixed nationalities are favoured and only certain languages tested as relevant. As one can see there is in fact a wide area of discretion involved.

Although inscribed in the reason d'etre of these Schools, the priority given to "entitled" children is in itself questionable. Guy Neave is worth quoting at length here: "Limited though the numbers of European schools might be, they constitute nevertheless a certain contradiction in the area of Community educational policy. This contradiction emerges from the fact that by setting up special establishments for one group of migrants' children, the

<sup>108</sup> ARTICLE 1. 1962 IN PINCK G. "LES ECOLES EUROPEENNES: ECOLES ELITISTES?" PP.5-6 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1993, I, N.116: P.5).

<sup>109</sup> HALL -TEACHER OF HISTORY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS/UCCLE (BRUSSELS, 1 OCTOBER 1996).

<sup>110</sup> PINCK G. -EX HEAD-TEACHER, ADJOINT DU REPRESENTANT DU CONSEIL SUPERIEUR, EDITOR OF SCHOLA EUROPAEA, "LES ECOLES EUROPEENNES: ECOLES ELITISTES?" PP.5-6 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1993, I, N.116: P.6).

<sup>111</sup> BARTHOLOMEW M. -SECRETARY AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS 1/UCCLE, WIFE OF A HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY TEACHER (1 OCTOBER 1996).

<sup>112</sup> MARCHESINI A. -DEPUTY HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE'S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE 20 MARCH 1997).



Community has not extended this principle to the whole of the migrant population. Community civil servants, though it might be indelicate to say so, are a professional substratum of a migrant population numbering around 12.000.000. By according separate establishments for some 10.560 pupils and endowing them with separate status from those attended by the remaining 1.435.000 in the public schools of Member States, the Commission's stance would appear at odds on the one hand with its general policy for the education of migrants' children and on the other, also closely associated with this same group, the principle of equality of educational opportunity. If the public education of host countries is good enough for their nationals and [in particular] for the children of immigrants in manual occupations, there can, in equity, be no case to make in support of special facilities for the children of those migrants whose occupation places them in the professions. On the other hand, it may be that a Member State's schools are failing to provide the equipment, teaching and academic standards. And, this on its own might be sufficient to justify the creation of separate and special schools. If this is the case, then it would be reasonable for the Commission to argue, again in the name of equity, that similar provision be made for the children of those migrants who, by any act of the imagination one cares to name, must possess less cultural and monetary capital than that particular section of the migrant population which already enjoys such rare and special facilities."<sup>113</sup> If anything may be added to this reasoning it is perhaps to spell out that a school system created with special resources for a minority falls, nearly inevitably, in the category "elite" school. Paolo Linati testifies how wide spread this opinion is outside the School's restricted intellectual circle, in Varese. He observes: "Questa qualifica di scuola per i figli dei funzionari ha fatto in modo che la Scuola Europea venisse talvolta considerata "di elite", scuola per alunni e docenti privilegiati. Questo tipo di giudizio, ritorna abbastanza di frequente, ad

<sup>113</sup> NEAVE G. THE EEC AND EDUCATION (STOCK-ON-TRENT, 1984: P.132). IT SEEMS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT HOW DESMOND SWAN BRUSHES NEAVE'S CRITICISM ASIDE. HE ARGUES: "PERHAPS THIS ARGUMENT WOULD HAVE MORE VALIDITY IF THE (THEN) EC AS SUCH DID IN FACT HAVE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE EDUCATION OF ALL ITS IMMIGRANTS OR AGAIN IF IT WERE EVER TO BE ACCORDED A DETERMINING VOICE IN FORMULATING EDUCATION POLICY AS A WHOLE FOR THE MEMBER STATES. BUT NEITHER IS THE CASE TO DATE. (SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM DUBLIN, 1996: P.14). PERHAPS, ONE FINDS THE BEST CRITICISM IN NEAVE'S BOOK WHICH DISCUSSES THE GROWING INVOLVEMENT OF THE (THEN) EEC IN EDUCATION FROM THE '70S. IT IS CLEAR THAT ALTHOUGH IN THE TREATY OF ROME "EDUCATION" DID NOT FIGURE, THE ARTICLE 57 DID IMPLY THE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION POLICY. SIMILARLY ONE CAN FIND SUPPORT FOR THIS TREND IN SULTANA R.G. "A UNITING EUROPE, A DIVIDING EDUCATION? EURO-CENTRISM AND THE CURRICULUM" IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION, VOL.5, N.1, 1995: PP.115-144; ALSO IN THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE SAME AUTHOR AND RYBA R. WITH RESPECTIVELY "THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS EDUCATIONAL AGENDA: A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING?" + "OF FACTS, FICTIONS AND THE EU" AND "THE POWER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN EDUCATIONAL MATTERS" IN EDUCATIONAL DILEMMAS: DEBATES AND DIVERSITY, EDITED BY WATSON K., MODGIL C. AND MODGIL S. (LONDON, VOL.3, 1996: PP.65-88).



esempio a Varese, fra i colleghi della scuola nazionale e nell'opinione di cittadini e amministratori pubblici locali.”<sup>114</sup>

### Academic standards

“Throughout the secondary school, promotion to the next class depends on satisfactory course-work and examination results. Candidates for the European Baccalaureate will have survived annual screenings and a few will have repeated a school year. Consequently the EB pass rate is very high (94.9% 1988-93) and almost all successful candidates proceed to higher education.”<sup>115</sup> A career adviser asserted: “95% of the pupils goes into higher education [...] of course those are the pupils that have passed through all the stages of the general social selection and the academic selection. The other, those who do not go into higher education have been taken out.”<sup>116</sup> Quite telling is also how a deputy-head put it: “I programmi sono tarati su una certa immagine di alunno.”<sup>117</sup>

There are annual statistics, published by each School, which record how many pupils leave and why. The reasons for leaving fall into two categories “scholastic” and “personal”. From how this data is collected the only thing that can safely be deducted is that with the second category the Schools may be able to limit criticism for its high drop-out rate.<sup>118</sup> In a similar sense works also the procedure of “counselling out” pupils who are considered “a rischio di bocciatura”<sup>119</sup>, which diminishes the official examination failure rate. In an official letter of birthday greetings to the Schools one can appreciate how this is translated by one of the older student: “If we apply another Darwinian category, the mental (or in our case, academic) one, our school also seems to be extremely fit and healthy. Just last year a record baccalaureate of 9,74 was

<sup>114</sup> LINATI P. “SCUOLA E SOCIETÀ: IL CASO DELLA SCUOLA EUROPEA”, PP. 78-83, IN EUROPAM UNAM ET PROSPERAM! 1960-1985, PUBLISHED IN OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF VARESE (1985: P. 79).

<sup>115</sup> THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS AND THE EUROPEAN BACCALAUREATE, A SCHOLA EUROPAEA PAMPHLET PRODUCED FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION DFE (LONDON, 1994: P. 11). SIMILARLY IN PEARCE A. THE EUROPEAN BACCALAUREATE AS A PREPARATION FOR UK FIRST DEGREE COURSES, MA DISSERTATION, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION (JULY, 1991).

<sup>116</sup> PEARCE A. -CAREER ADVISER IN THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM (CULHAM, JUNE 1997).

<sup>117</sup> MARCHESINI A. -DEPUTY HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE'S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE, 20 MARCH 1997).

<sup>118</sup> DESMOND SWAN POINTS OUT THAT THESE WERE A SOURCE OF COMPLAINT BY SOME PARENT, TEACHER AND SCHOOL DIRECTOR REPRESENTATIVES BOTH IN 1984 AND 1991. IN A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996: P. 117).

<sup>119</sup> MELONI ERNESTINA -ITALIAN TEACHER AND COUNSELLOR AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM (LONDON, 10 MARCH 1997).



scored, and many baccalaureates were in the category above 8.5. Many pupils go on to prestigious universities and are successful there. In addition, various pupils entries in national and international competitions in arts and sciences have been successful.”<sup>120</sup> It is also indicative to know that “dopo la seconda bocciatura l'alunno deve lasciare la scuola e non può facilmente rientrare nel sistema delle scuole europee.”<sup>121</sup>

The importance of keeping high standards may appear common sense, especially in the view that the European baccalaureate has a status of equivalence with the academic qualifications awarded in the different EU contracting parties' territories, however if one considers that the claim, so much talked about, to establish these schools was that of a service for the children of officials of the (then) European Coal and Steel Community, and as it has been reported not just for them, this becomes somehow questionable. This becomes even more seriously so if one considers that “remedial teaching” in primary school was introduced, at first as a proposal, only in 1984<sup>122</sup> and that provision for the admission of a small number of children with medical or physical disability were guaranteed only in 1989<sup>123</sup>. The words of the deputy-head resonates here “the programs [if not the Schools] are calibrated on a certain image of the pupil. Also in this sense the Schools may be considered elitist, that is a school among the “first rate school”.

Returning for a moment to Pinck's article: “La notion d'elitisme impliquerait de notre part une volonte' deliberee de selectionner les meilleurs eleves au detriment du plus grand nombre. Elle exigerait au moins des tests d'admission car dans nos ecoles la selection, lorsqu'elle s'effectue, ne repose que sur des criteres d'espace. Partout ou' cet espace est disponible, nous admettons les eleves sans distinction de caste mandarinale.”<sup>124</sup> The implication of this argument, apart from freeing from blame the Schools and their actors, is that there is a hope and expectation that the Schools will eventually cater for all and consequentially there will be a huge involvement of the EU in the field

<sup>120</sup> TEICHMANN S. -A 7TH YEAR PUPIL AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF KARLSRUHE “BIRTHDAY GREETING TO THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL FOR THEIR 40TH ANNIVERSARY”, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.124).

<sup>121</sup> MELONI ERNESTINA -ITALIAN TEACHER AND COUNSELLOR AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM (LONDON, 10 MARCH 1997).

<sup>122</sup> BAAJENS M. “ACTIVITES DU COMITE DE REFORME ET DU COMITE PEDAGOGIQUE”, PP.92-96 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA, (BRUSSELS, II, N.85, 1984: P.93).

<sup>123</sup> SWAN D. A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996: P.48).

<sup>124</sup> PINCK G. -EX HEAD-TEACHER, ADJOINT DU REPRESENTANT DU CONSEIL SUPERIEUR, EDITOR OF SCHOLA EUROPAEA, “LES ECOLES EUROPEENNES: ECOLES ELITISTES?” PP.5-6 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1993, I, N.116: P.6).



of education.<sup>125</sup> Following from this one would expect that the Schools' actors would envisage their system of education expanding or spreading across the EU's states. As will be shown shortly this is far from being the case.

### Role of these institutions

*"Ils [the founding-fathers] ont voulu faire une 'experience commune d'education' et creer - selon leurs propres paroles 'une ecole pilote', qu'ils ont appelee 'Ecole Europeenne'".*<sup>126</sup>

*"NO, the European Schools are not simply a service organisation, a school system, or an educational institution.*

*YES, the European Schools are the greatest and biggest European pedagogical laboratory [the bold is mine] which has ever existed. Let it be used! It is tough, it is difficult, it is annoying and irritating, it is wonderful, it is challenging, it is fulfilling, it is a privilege. It is necessary! SUI GENERIS."*<sup>127</sup>

It is relevant to note how often the institutions which try to adopt the same system as the European Schools are remarked upon, these, it goes without saying, are mostly private schools, such as the Peshawar primary school in Pakistan<sup>128</sup>. The best example is given by Olsen: "40 years is not a long time for an educational system. But it is long enough for the European Schools to have achieved the stamp of uniqueness [...] The tendency to use us as models (for instance Die Europaschulen in Berlin from 1992) will continue. I often think with great pleasure of a little primary school in Peshawar (Pakistan), which has for years used our system and called itself a European School. All over Europe, and also in the former Eastern European countries, schools based on our structure and our programmes will spring up. There is no copyright on our system!"<sup>129</sup>

It is not just a matter of a sporadic talk, in fact the most frequent expressions intermittently linked to these Schools, or "educational system" are those of "pioneering", "pilot" and "laboratories". These inevitably presuppose a certain leading-role that these School have, or more correctly see themselves as having in relationship to others. When head-teachers and teachers were

<sup>125</sup> NOTICEABLE IS THE SIMILARITY OF THIS REASONING WITH THAT APPLIED BY DESMOND SWAN MENTIONED IN FOOTNOTE 15.

<sup>126</sup> VAN HOUTTE A. -DEFINED AS THE FOUNDING FATHER OF THESE SCHOOLS BY D. SWAN, "QUEL AVENIR POUR LES ECOLES EUROPEENNES?", PP. 5-11, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (BRUSSELS, 1989, VII, N.104: P.5).

<sup>127</sup> HOYEM T. -HEADMASTER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM, LETTER TO J. OLSEN IN THE OCCASION OF THE SCHOOLS' 40 ANNIVERSARY, PP.122-123 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993 (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.123).

<sup>128</sup> EROS A. "A PRIVATE 'EUROPEAN SCHOOL' IN PESHAWAR", PP.27-32, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA, (BRUSSELS, VI, N.107, 1990).

<sup>129</sup> OLSEN J. "WHERE DO WE COME FROM? ... AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? PP.133-138 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.133,136&137).



asked if it is foreseeable that this "pilot" system could be extended throughout the EU, every single one excluded it, in the name of the stupendously high costs. One explained: "Deve capire che qui noi abbiamo 15 scuole sotto uno stesso tetto, noi non abbiamo un insegnante di fisica, ma per ogni sezione linguistica un diverso insegnante di fisica e così via per quasi tutte le diverse materie. Inoltre, deve tenere conto del fatto che il baccalaureato che offriamo si potrebbe definire 'alla carta', nel senso che gli alunni possono scegliere le materie che desiderano, purchè ci siano più di tre alunni interessati [...] e tutto questo costa!"<sup>130</sup> It can be deduced that there is not even expected among the Schools' actors, despite the construction of another School in Brussels and with the ignored repeated proposal of Mr. Van Houtte to establish an European School in every capital of the Union, that these School will ever have enough space to stop being institutes which have to select their pupils population.

Once one exclude the possibility of expanding the Schools in the sense above mentioned, the only sense of talking of "pilot or pioneering schools" and "laboratories" that is left is that other educational systems, in particular national ones, should copy, with the resources they have, and as best they can, what the European Schools have achieved. This kind of reasoning is apparent in, former head-teacher of two of the Schools, Michael Hart's discussion on the failure of the Schools to be pioneers. After having listed some of the problems: "One is financial: the European Schools present themselves by national comparisons as extremely expensive educational institutions. A second is social and political: the European Schools do not offer technical vocational education and therefore do not cover the whole ability range at secondary education. Thirdly, the European Schools are regarded as too complex and 'sui generis' to serve as a model for development in the field of national education." He continues without seeing any contradiction between the two parts: "But why the member states refuse, by and large, to draw on certain aspects and elements of the education offered by the European Schools such as methods of language teaching, the use of the foreign language as a working language, the integration of different language sections, the innumerable multi-cultural extra-curricular activities for use and enrichment of their national schools, remains a mystery and a matter of regret [...] The 'strengthening of the European dimension' is simply not a priority [for national systems]."<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> MARCHESINI A. -DEPUTY HEAD/DIRETTORE AGGIUNTO FOR VARESE'S EUROPEAN PRIMARY SCHOOL (VARESE, 20 MARCH 1997).

ALTHOUGH IN AN OTHER CONTEXT DESMOND SWAN POINTS OUT THAT MAINTAINING SO MANY LANGUAGE SECTIONS AND RECRUITING HIGH QUALITY STAFF FROM ABROAD IS INEVITABLY GOING TO BE VERY EXPENSIVE IN A SINGULAR PLURALISM, (DUBLIN, 1996, P.25).

<sup>131</sup> HART M. -FORMER HEAD-TEACHER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OF MOL AND LUXEMBOURG "THE EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS" PP.66-68 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.68).



This introduces quite clearly a more subjective dimension, that of feeling an elite and, not exactly coined in this terms, this suggests an image that becomes projected to the “outside” world. Also an aspect of self-adulation, with some notes of irony, makes itself evident at times. An exquisite example is offered by a picture, in which a session of the MEC (i.e. Model European Community Programme) is taking place. In this case there is a Model European Council enacted in Munich’s Patent Office in 1984 by students from the different European Schools. The picture has at its centre a standing speaker the caption underneath comments: “A Future European Prime Minister?”<sup>132</sup>

It is relevant here to observe that this feeling and image is quite a recent one and has not always been the same. As Hart and others have themselves indicated: “In the early years [the European Schools] were closed, rather self-satisfied institutions, largely indifferent to public relations [...]”<sup>133</sup> “the European Schools are not very well-known outside our own circles. Who is to blame? We are! For 40 years we have chosen to live with a low profile, almost hidden from public gaze.”<sup>134</sup> This is confirmed by the development of the role/s assigned to these schools in the different editions of *Schola Europaea*. There seems to have been a change of emphasis in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. A general feeling of confidence seems to have crept in and is growing. From the title that designates the Latin version to stand alone in the circle of all EU’s countries’ names, as opposed to the list of “European School” in at least six of the EU’s official languages. In 1993 a new logos is introduced<sup>135</sup>, which is also use on stickers. But most importantly, the articles lose their purely didactic character and become more “philosophical”, the role of these Schools tends to shift from that of merely functional providers of schooling for the EU’s officials children to that of “laboratories” of “Europeaness”. Although this is not the place to analyze in detail the nature and reasons for these changes, it is not simply a coincidence that it coincides with a growing involvement of the EU in education and with programs such as Peoples Europe. In 1995 the European Commission suggests the promotion of the knowledge of three ‘community’ languages and at this scope the creation of

<sup>132</sup> CAMPBELL J. & FARRAR M. “THE MODEL EUROPEAN COMMUNITY PROGRAMME”, pp.90-93, IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA* 1953-1993, (1993: P.91).

<sup>133</sup> HART M. -FORMER HEAD-TEACHER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS OF MOL AND LUXEMBOURG “THE EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS” PP.66-68 IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA* 1953-1993, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.67).

<sup>134</sup> HOYEM T. -HEADMASTER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM, LETTER TO J. OLSEN IN THE OCCASION OF THE SCHOOLS’ 40 ANNIVERSARY, PP.122-123 IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA* 1953-1993 (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.122).

<sup>135</sup> IVACHEFF P. “DESSINE MOI UN LOGO” IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA*, (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.7) ADVERTISED ON THE COVER.



“un marchio di qualità per le classi europee’ [...] la promozione di tale marchio permetterà di usufruire di finanziamenti supplementari da parte degli Stati membri”<sup>136</sup> It does not take much analysis to discover that the European Schools would have all the requisites for such a mark, partly because it is on them that the proposal is based. Certainly official recognition of this kind tends to boost a sense of purpose and self confidence. This last little example may highlight how an identity is a dynamic feeding off and modifying itself also in relation to different level of power.

### From the pupils’ point of view

Let us turn to what the pupils think about their school and experience.

*“Every morning at eight fifty-five,  
When I feel more dead and much too soon.  
The bell rings.  
Through the doors we all squeeze in,  
Observing teacher has a nervous grin.  
I hang up my coat and my scarf,  
Talk to a friend, have a laugh,  
Slowly open my locker door;  
Half the books fall on the floor.  
Looking around to see if I’m seen,  
I quickly, roughly, stuff them back in.  
The second bell clangs. I must run,  
To enter the room on the teacher’s pun.  
Long lasting lessons seem to take forever.  
Will they end? It seems like never.  
Interval.  
At last a break.  
I seem to wake in the Tower of Babel,  
And speak the languages as best I’m able.  
I ask, ‘heb jij misschien un drink token?’  
Nobody’s puzzled at my strange question.  
Why should they be?  
It’s normal for us multilingual sages.  
English we can catch by chance.  
French is taught by a man of France.  
Spanish? By a Dutch lady, of course.  
For Dutch, the streets are our source.  
Two more lessons before our break.  
My poor head throbs and my fingers ache.  
A healthy lunch of soup, tea and sweets,  
Then ‘Back to your classes’, Docquier repeats.  
Afternoon drags through three lessons again,*

<sup>136</sup> COMMISSIONE EUROPEA LIBRO BIANCO SU ISTRUZIONE E FORMAZIONE: INSEGNARE E APPRENDERE, VERSO LA SOCIETÀ CONOSCITIVA, (LUSSEMBURGO, 1995: PP.70-72).



*Before the wonderful, glorious ring,  
Of the time to go home, time you can sing,  
Time to be free, time to be me.*

*Bell.*

*Out of the playground. On to the bus,  
The driver's making his usual fuss.  
Cars to the left of him, bikes all around,  
Everyone making a free and happy sound.  
Home again.*

*I'm free.*

*Free to do my homework. Free to watch T.V.*

*Free to do my essay, free to read History.*

*'I won't. I won't', I loudly, boldly say.*

*Of course I will, tomorrow's another school day."<sup>137</sup>*

With this little poem, in all its simplicity and humour, a pupil manages to capture most of her peers' feelings about their schooling experience. The school appears as a totalising experience, as life routine. There is hard work, that is long periods of concentration, often bored concentration and homework, but everything seems the prelude to the "wonderful, glorious rings" leading to periods in which one feels to be finally more or less in control of oneself, either in company or solitude. If this could be found in most school's population of the same age, some notes can be considered characteristic of the European Schools'. Many pupils complained, as the poem does, about the "length of the school day"<sup>138</sup> Karine gives quite a lot of space to stress that the pupils of these Schools are very special: "multilingual sages". This agrees not only with what the pupils I talked to asserted but also to the answers to the questionnaire<sup>139</sup>. For instance to the question: "Do you feel the environment you are studying in is different from that of most people of your age?"<sup>140</sup> Nearly all students agreed, and most of them commented in a similar way: "I am surrounded by people with different nationalities, languages and cultures."<sup>141</sup> Just three pupils explicitly accentuated the Europeaness of the Schools, as one put it: "First of all we're an European school, that means that many nationalities have to study together."<sup>142</sup> Another pupil emphatically said:

<sup>137</sup> MAYER K. "BERGEN DAYS" IN *EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988* (1988: p.196).

<sup>138</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.101, N.4, P.4).

<sup>139</sup> PARTICULARLY REVEALING IN "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997) QUESTIONS: N.2-3-4, P.4 & N.4, P.5).

<sup>140</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: N.2, P.4).

<sup>141</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.34, N.2, P.4).

<sup>142</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.1, N.2, P.4).



“(Almost) nobody has a clue how lucky they are.”<sup>143</sup> It could be inferred that most of the Schools’ pupils feel “elected” to something very exclusive. As confirming this is also a ten percent of pupils that when asked: “What do you dislike about your school?”<sup>144</sup> answered on these lines: “Snobby (a bit)” or “That is a privileged cocoon” or “The mentality the people have, they tend to look down on other people”.<sup>145</sup>

Said this, one should bear in mind that the pupils seem not to agree with the more official view of the role of these Schools, that is to say it with Hoyem’s words: “that the European Schools are political schools. Do not be ashamed to say it loud. We teach new Europeans for a new Europe.”<sup>146</sup> This appears clear when one refer to the section “The school” of the questionnaire delivered by the councillors group “Ascolto” at Varese’s School.<sup>147</sup> The assertion “This is a European School above all because...” was completed by most (50%-80%) with “the teachers and the students come from the countries of Europe” while “the school prepares you to become a citizen of Europe” was chosen by a very few (less than 30%-20%).<sup>148</sup> Similarly if the pupils had a decisional say in the Schools’ aims: the majority would opt for “preparing people for university and/or the world of work” while only a 10% would opt for “the development of the social and moral characteristics of citizenship”.<sup>149</sup> Pointing to this discrepancy is not so much important in assessing how “European” the pupils feel, but in highlighting how the different actors in the school, with their different roles and contradictions, may live and see the same reality in dissimilar ways.

Perhaps it is worth adding that ex-pupils<sup>150</sup> seem to realise and value their distinctive “European” education once they are confronted with the “outside world” of university. It is then that they feel “sui generis”.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>143</sup> “A QUESTION OF IDENTITY” (1996-1997: Q.N.74, N.2, P.4).

<sup>144</sup> “A QUESTION OF IDENTITY” (1996-1997: N.4, P.4).

<sup>145</sup> “A QUESTION OF IDENTITY” (1996-1997: RESPECTIVELY Q.N.62-36-29, N.4, P.4).

<sup>146</sup> HOYEM T. -HEADMASTER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF CULHAM, LETTER TO J. OLSEN IN THE OCCASION OF THE SCHOOLS’ 40 ANNIVERSARY, PP.122-123 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993 (BRUSSELS, 1993: P.122).

<sup>147</sup> “THE SCHOOL” (QUESTIONS 1-10: PP.1-3) IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED AND DELIVERED BY VARESE SCHOOL’S COUNCILLORS GROUP ‘ASCOLTO’ FOR THE 5TH-7TH YEAR PUPILS OF THAT SCHOOL IN 1995-1996.

<sup>148</sup> “THE SCHOOL” (QUESTION 5: P.2) IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED AND DELIVERED BY VARESE SCHOOL’S COUNCILLORS GROUP ‘ASCOLTO’ FOR THE 5TH-7TH YEAR PUPILS OF THAT SCHOOL IN 1995-1996.

<sup>149</sup> “THE SCHOOL” (QUESTION 2: P.1) IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED AND DELIVERED BY VARESE SCHOOL’S COUNCILLORS GROUP ‘ASCOLTO’ FOR THE 5TH-7TH YEAR PUPILS OF THAT SCHOOL IN 1995-1996.

<sup>150</sup> IT WOULD BE CERTAINLY VERY PRODUCTIVE TO DEDICATE A STUDY TO THE EX-PUPILS OF THESE SCHOOLS, SINCE THE DATA AVAILABLE IS NEARLY INEXISTENT.



The question of "elitism" and the European Schools is obviously of crucial importance in the determining of the style in which the constitution of a European consciousness is actually defining and redefining itself. There is absolutely no question that the European Schools' policies and actors consider themselves to be regulating or being involved in institutions that foster privilege, for the privileged. The kind of speeches one hears at British Public schools that openly admit, indeed glory in, the fact that their pupils are from privileged backgrounds accessing privileged education<sup>152</sup> are unthinkable at the European Schools. Perhaps their aversion to uniforms<sup>153</sup> has something to do with this. Although one may argue that these Schools are paid for by member-states with public money, it also points to the fragility of this emerging group of elected and to the specific style in which identity is and can be felt. If one draws on the historical parallel of the formation of the nation state the utility of doing this becomes abundantly clear. In his "Storia della Borghesia Italiana" Alberto Banti points out that what demarcated Italy's ruling elite, what provided an imagined linkage between its in reality hopeless plurality and historical fragmentation, in the half century or so after unification, was a growing consciousness of being the avant-garde of a ripening national-patriotic discourse. "...l'identita' patriottica faceva aggio sull'identita' sociale. Gli ideali di patria, nazione, popolo, scandivano l'orientamento collettivo, costruivano una cornice di simboli e di significati nei quali [the Italian bourgeoisie could] proiettare l'esperienza quotidiana."<sup>154</sup> Consciousness of nationhood and of elite came to exist in a relationship of symbiosis once the traditional limit to social mobility disappeared. Banti indicates the existence of barriers to talk in terms of elite as a privileged group: "Un'altra sfera identitaria sbarra la strada al linguaggio di classe 'alta'. Diciamo meglio: l'identita' borghese, come autorappresentazione di una

<sup>151</sup> THIS HAS BEEN DEDUCTED FROM THE MATERIAL SHORTLY MENTIONED, WHICH IS PERHAPS A BIT BIASED SINCE MOST OF THE TESTIMONIES COME FROM EX-PUPILS WHICH CHOSE TO WRITE FOR THE SCHOOLS' PEDAGOGICAL BULLETIN: AN INTERVIEW WITH PRETRASANTA R. -RELIGION TEACHER AND MOTHER OF AN EX-PUPIL OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS/WOLUWE (BRUSSELS, 5 NOVEMBER 1996); WATHELET F. "QUEL TYPE D'EDUCATION AI-JE RECU?", PP.113-115, & LEWIS A. "WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION DID I GET?", PP.116-117, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA 1953-1993 (BRUSSELS, 1993); SORENSEN L.S. "MY EUROPEAN EDUCATION", PP.99-101 IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA CULHAM 1978-1988 (BRUSSELS, 1988); BLOMME L. ET ALL "AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL, BERGEN BY ITS EX-PUPILS", PP.5-28, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA (1989: XII, N.105: Q.N.40, P.12) ALSO IN DUTCH IN EUROPESE SCHOOL BERGEN 1963-1988 (1988: PP.133-159).

<sup>152</sup> IN A RECENT SPEECH AT DULWICH COLLEGE, LONDON, THE HEADMASTER AFFIRMED THAT HIS SCHOOL HAD NOTHING AGAINST PRIVILEGE AS LONG AS ITS BESTOWMENTS WERE PROPERLY USED. (FROM THE 1996 OLD ALLEYNEAN MAGAZINE).

<sup>153</sup> FOSTER, SPORT-TEACHER AT THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF BRUSSELS II/WOLUWE (BRUSSELS, 7 NOVEMBER 1996).

<sup>154</sup> BANTI A. STORIA DELLA BORGHESIA ITALIANA, (DONZELLI, ROMA, 1996: P.237).



comunità sociale, si trova ostacolata da un'altra rappresentazione collettiva."<sup>155</sup>

Although the "European Schools' analysis" represents a case study, a micro-level research the analogy is striking. It must be stressed that although the Schools were founded as a service, they quickly but perhaps not surprisingly became institutions at which the skills that were considered most suitable for future "citizens of Europe" were imparted. Even a member of the European parliament proclaimed: "The European Schools are the blue-print for a future education system for all Europeans. It is incumbent upon all involved with them, therefore, to ensure that they take the lead and set the standards."<sup>156</sup> This is the key mechanism that must be examined when looking at the Schools in terms of elitism. There is absolutely no justification, certainly even in the official politics of the EU itself, why children of people working for EU institutions should in some way be more "citizens of Europe" than say the child of a dock worker from Belfast or a shepherd from Sicily. It is surely in being an Ulsterman (and British) or a Sicilian (and Italian) that one expresses his Europeaness. If this is not the case then "true Europeans" become only those who have access to all those things, "la valigia per l'Europa"<sup>157</sup>, that go to make up what a model European citizen is. But this is not, of course, where it ends. In the Italy of the late nineteenth century it was, as Banti and many others have argued, the predicate of having a sense of Italianess, or an interiorisation of those things that that particular historical moment established and considered to be Italianess, that became very much grounds for justifying access to power for people that were able to identify themselves as a group.

<sup>155</sup> BANTI A. STORIA DELLA BORGHESIA ITALIANA, (DONZELLI, ROMA, 1996: P.X).

<sup>156</sup> ELLES J. -MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT "HOW I SEE THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL SYSTEM" PP.78-80, IN SCHOLA EUROPAEA CULHAM 1978-1988, (CULHAM, 1988: P.79).

<sup>157</sup> STEIWER J. -HEAD-TEACHER OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOL OF VARESE LA VALIGIA PER L'EUROPA: LA SCUOLA EUROPEA, (SOROPTIMIST, BERGAMO 11 MAGGIO 1996: PP.15-18).



### Some concluding remarks

The European Schools foster a blurry and undefined sense of what it means to be "European". Confronted with this fact one is tempted to argue that they have a long way to go before reaching a firm identity or indeed a firm role. However it has been suggested that those regions that are successful in instilling in people a feeling of common identity are exactly unsubstantially defined grey areas where people feel they can give their own contribution, naturally within limits. This is not to suggest that for example the naming of buildings after prominent EU luminaries, or celebrating "Schuman day" or promoting "Jean Monnet questionnaires"<sup>158</sup> among primary school children are not without importance. The model of education as a kind of meat processing plant has been found completely inadequate and misleading. The process by which people identify themselves as part of a larger entity is an active one. It can be seen that sometimes slogans and directives from the top are absorbed and re-elaborated in the daily practise of the School, however, sometimes ideas are sown and propagandised from the top but do not take root further down.

The balance achieved in the School, portrayed as harmony, is the result of a continuous power struggle taking place on different levels. Certainly an overabundant lubrication of money helps to keep these contradictions in check. In the School one can feel that the end unit which has to be accommodated is the EU's nation states. Cooperation is intended to be among these. Since the EU territories include many more nations, many more languages and cultures, one could argue that the School's "singular pluralism" is very much a mutual respect of the powerful.

The European Schools notwithstanding their emphasis on respect for the nation-states appear to transform what being a national means, similarly to what J. Davies has argued about Gheddafi, who transformed the tribal identity of those who had rebelled against Italian colonialism into nascent Libyan nationalism or in other word implanted a non-existent nationalism on an existent tradition, but in so doing changed the meaning of the past-heroes' intentions. The traditional aspects of national history that were used to bolster a specific national allegiance are being reinterpreted as contributors to this time a specifically European civilization. A pupil perhaps wanted to suggest something like this by saying: "The focus is more towards the 'new' nation and not towards my nation, which I am more interested in."<sup>159</sup> The opposition

<sup>158</sup> "JEAN MONNET QUESTIONNAIRE" IN *SCHOLA EUROPAEA*, (BRUSSELS, VII, N.104, 1989: PP.13-24).

<sup>159</sup> "A QUESTION OF IDENTITY" (1996-1997: Q.N.4, P.9, N.9).



to "nationalism" is a key aspect of defining what European means. It is interesting to note that religion does not have the same function, if not in the sense that the Schools are completely tolerant to all creeds, perhaps as opposed to fundamentalist, in fact one finds teachers of lay-morality, catholicism, islam, judaism or whatever, depending from the profession of faith of the pupils.

The language education given to the pupils is extremely expensive and successful and it is surely a calling-card for top-jobs in Europe. The Schools also provide a trampoline to all the universities in Europe with the obvious advantages that this entails. There is a quite clear attempt by EU functionaries, through all the values and skills that the European Schools give, to reproduce themselves as a class across the generations. As has been shown the Schools are not merely a service organisation that caters for the needs of a privileged immigrant population who quite naturally do not want their children's education to go by the wayside as they pursue their own very wonderful careers, although one must bear in mind that the Schools were set up in the first place to solve precisely this problem, but rather they are institutions at which all the attribute, possession of high quality language skills, no absolute loyalty to the nation state, a network of friends from around Europe to name but a few, are elaborated.

In the past the Schools have kept a low profile, but they are increasingly pointed to by the EU as having elaborated aspects that should be extended to other schools of the member-states. It can be noticed that with an increased interest of the EU in education in general the Schools have developed a much more confident image of "we know how". Now the harmonisation of curriculums, methods of teaching, are clearly on the agenda of the European Schools (so far only for the teaching of mathematics in primary school has been harmonised), and this is paralleled by a much greater emphasis on identity creation. There is no intention to reproduce the European School system across Europe since it is far too expensive. They are there to educate the few, and are an amazingly well financed laboratory for the observation and experimentation of definitions of "European" identity and its reproduction.

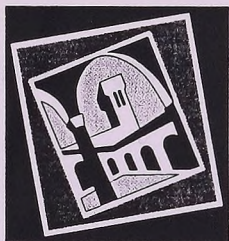
And here another important aspect of the Schools' role in forging a European identity also comes in. The image that these Schools present to the "insiders", as producers of future European prime-ministers etc. is probably particularly important to the sense of identity of the class of EU functionaries and scientists. They feel different from "normal" immigrants but are not just a well paid minority working for some international firm. They are actually an elite. They have a strong appeal, but it would be going too far to suggest that they are fully fledged Etons of the EU. There is no evidence to suggest that the EU elite can pass its position to its heirs, since they must still compete with powerful national-based power elites. However what these Schools are is an



expression of an elite in the making. The Schools play a vitally important part in giving this elite the self-confidence to carry out its objective of accruing to itself more and more extensive powers.

Probably the most crucial insight that this study has highlighted is the ability, that these Schools have, of asserting in different ways that their ethos and pupils are more European, true European, European *sui generis*. This is the kernel by which a group of privileged people can feel to be a cohesive unit, a deserving elite. In this sense the Schools do not simply act on the identity of the pupils, but on all the actors involved in these institutions.





# EUI WORKING PAPERS

EUI Working Papers are published and distributed by the  
European University Institute, Florence

Copies can be obtained free of charge  
- depending on the availability of stocks - from:

The Publications Officer  
European University Institute  
Badia Fiesolana  
I-50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)  
Italy

**Please use order form overleaf**



## Publications of the European University Institute

To The Publications Officer  
European University Institute  
Badia Fiesolana  
I-50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI) - Italy  
Fax: +39-055-4685 636  
e-mail: [publish@datacomm.iue.it](mailto:publish@datacomm.iue.it)  
<http://www.iue.it>

From Name .....

Address .....

.....

.....

.....

- ☐ Please send me a complete list of EUI Working Papers  
☐ Please send me a complete list of EUI book publications  
☐ Please send me the EUI brochure Academic Year 2001/2002

Please send me the following EUI Working Paper(s):

Dept, n°, author .....

Title: .....

Dept, n°, author .....

Title: .....

Dept, n°, author .....

Title: .....

Dept, n°, author .....

Title: .....

Date .....

Signature .....





# Working Papers in History

Published since 1998

## HEC No. 98/1

Luisa PASSERINI (ed.)  
The Question of European Identity: A  
Cultural Historical Approach.  
Papers by Lützel, Niethammer, Liakos

## HEC No. 98/2

Christophe DUHAMELLE  
La noblesse du Saint-Empire et le crédit:  
autour du *Von den Reichsständischen  
Schuldenwesen* de Johann Jacob Moser  
(1774)

## HEC No. 98/3

René LEBOUTTE  
Du registre de population au registre  
national. Deux siècles de pratique  
administrative en Belgique, 1791-1991

## HEC No. 98/4

Jean-Pierre CAVAILLÉ  
Louis Machon: une apologie pour  
Machiavel

## HEC No. 98/5

Natacha COQUERY  
Les courtisanes et le crédit à Paris au  
XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle

## HEC No. 98/6

Mark HÄBERLEIN  
Kinship, Gender, and Business Failure:  
Merchants' Bankruptcies and Social  
Relations in Upper Germany, 1520-1620

## HEC No. 98/7

Roberto DI QUIRICO  
Italian International Banking, 1900-1950

## HEC No. 98/8

Frances M.B. LYNCH  
De Gaulle's First Veto: France, the Rueff  
Plan and the Free Trade Area

\* \* \*

## HEC No. 99/1

Johannes U. MÜLLER/  
Bo STRÄTH (eds)  
Nationalism and Modernity

## HEC 99/2

Luisa PASSERINI/Polymeris VOGLIS  
(eds)  
Gender in the Production of History

## HEC 99/3

Pegerto SAAVEDRA  
Crédit et relations sociales dans la Galice  
rurale à la fin de l'Ancien Régime

## HEC 99/4

Concepción GARCÍA-IGLESIAS  
The Transmission of International  
Business Cycles Shocks: Evidence from  
the European Periphery, 1861-1913

## HEC 99/5

Concepción GARCÍA-IGLESIAS  
Interest Rate Risk and Monetary Union in  
the European Periphery: Lessons from the  
Gold Standard, 1880-1914

\* \* \*

## HEC 2000/1

Concepción GARCÍA-IGLESIAS  
The Gold Standard and its Influence on  
Growth Rates for the European  
Periphery, 1865-1913

## HEC 2000/2

Daniel A. TIRADO/Elisenda PALUZIE/  
Jordi PONS  
Economic Integration and Industrial  
Location



**HEC 2000/3**

Elisenda PALUZIE/ Jordi PONS/  
Daniel A. TIRADO  
Trade Liberalization, Market Integration  
and Industrial Concentration: The  
Spanish Economy During the 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century

**HEC 2000/4**

Belén MORENO CLAVERÍAS  
Le crédit dans les économies familiales  
catalanes au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à partir des  
inventaires après-décès

**HEC 2000/5- Luisa PASSERINI/**

Marina NORDERA (eds)  
Images of Europe

**HEC 2000/6- Daniela FINALDI-  
BARATIERI**

The "Only" European Schools in the  
European Union?