



European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools

## **ECNAIS seminar 14 – 15 November 2013, Bucharest, Romania**

The theme of this seminar was *The role that civil societies play in developing independent education at all levels.*

The seminar took place in the Parliament Building and was opened by Dr. Viorel Enea, president of UNDIPPR.

In his welcome speech, Simon Steen, ECNAIS chairman, stressed that when there is more room for initiatives from the civil society to start and establish private schools, this will strengthen the responsiveness of society to changes and this will benefit the quality of education in private schools and also public schools as well.

Mr. Steen hoped this seminar would be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue and that we can enrich each other with inspiring ideas and good practices about diversity in education as a result of the entrepreneurial and alternative approach of independent schools all over Europe. "Let's keep in mind that the world of the future is what children make of it. We better educate them well and give them the opportunity to gain competences for a rapidly changing world we can only dream of," he concluded.

(The complete text of the speech of Simon Steen is to be found [here](#).)

## **ECNAIS had the honor to welcome Prof. dr. Remus Pricopie, Minister of Education of Romania.**

The minister told the seminar in a very personal way his life experience regarding education. As an employee of the Ministry of Education he was offered a scholarship in the USA. This made him think in a profound way on what education should be, how it should be organized. As a Romanian citizen he was familiar with state planned education. Through the scholarship he got acquainted with the history of education worldwide. It made him understand that his own view on education was very limited. It made him realize that the state should not monopolize education; that education is a right of each community; that each person should choose what's best and that there is

not such a thing as the best solution for the form of education. The common element in education is the interest of the student; the quality of which should be good. This is not the case at the moment in Romania, the minister remarked.

Although there are no EU regulations on education, he stated that students should be able to compare themselves to students in other countries, as to make it possible for them to work there as well. This means that Romanian education should level other EU levels of education. To achieve this, diversity at all levels is needed, the minister is convinced of.

This view should be on the Romanian agenda for the coming years. Education is an ongoing challenge, because education is an ongoing process, as is the changing of society, concluded prof. dr. Pricopie his words of welcome.

**The first keynote speaker of the seminar was Dr. Gheorghe Felea, General inspector of the Ministry of Education.**

Dr. Felea stated that Romania needs a plural approach to reach the EU objectives of 2020. This means that in education its all about quality now.

In Romania today there are more churches and hospitals than schools. Today there are 7497 schools (which is a decrease since 1989). Because of a decrease in demography, there are also less students.

Romania has many many laws on education, but only three which deal with private education. Because efficiency in private education is much better than in public education, the Ministry of Education supports legal requirements. The state provides basic money for education, also for private schools and its students.

In Romania there is educational pluralism, and also pedagogical and religious pluralism. Together this makes up the education for future citizens. Private educations has an outstanding position in this. But it should be more promoted, Dr. Felea said.

**The second keynote speaker was Prof. dr. Teclu Codresi, UNDIPPPR vice-president**

Prof. dr. Codresi stated that private education is important and can influence moral thinking in Romania and make education more efficient. This is because managers of private schools have the benefit of having worked in the public and private sector.

Romania uses the term 'private schools' and not 'independent schools'. This may lead to the wrong conclusions concerning the financing of private schools; these conclusions have to be eliminated.

UNDIPPR is a representative organization in the field of civil society and started 13 years ago. Private schools want to be seen as partners in discussion on legislation, equal to the trade unions. Proposals to achieve this, are being done. Also proposals for the improvement of legislation are being made.

Prof. dr. Codresci proposed a contests between ECNAIS schools, because schools could benefit from such a contest. He also proposed ECNAIS to participate in EU financed programs.

**Prof. Constanta Mihaila, vice-president of ARACIP, was the third keynote speaker.**

Prof. Mihaila talked about minimum quality standards: their meaning and effects. Quality standards started with the evaluation of private schools, as a condition to be accepted in the Romanian system. There are 1089 private schools at this moment, from kindergarten (569) to post secondary schools (263), both making out the biggest part of private schools (compared to primary schools, 106, and secondary schools, 151).

Private education is still very much seen as a 'money thing', related to business. This is the picture private schools have to fight against. UNDIPPR and dr. Viorel do so in their discussions with the authorities. Private schools have proofed they delivered quality, so now everybody knows private schools are a serious alternative.

In her address, prof. Mihaila focused on the value of quality standards. For more information on this, see her [power point](#).

**Reflections on the theme were made ECNAIS members from Bulgaria, Iceland and Ukraine.**

*Bulgaria, Radka Karagiozova (BAPS)*

In the view of Radka Karagiozova its all about partnership with other institutions, parents etc. That's how the Bulgarian association BAPS worked to achieve a better position for independent schools. A lot of amendments were send to parliament, the

Sofia city council and the Ministry of Education. But as always, it often takes two to tango.

A lot of effort was put into a partnership with parents: together open letters were written, parental initiatives were supported and there were joined media events. This all resulted in the founding of parental associations. Also there are partnerships with business. This sector has EU contacts and sees the benefit of private schools.

Within BAPS there are about 40 schools with shared goals, which forms a very important partnership.

In dealing with the government, BAPS has to be "tender aggressive. We need to be firm, but in other situations more flexible. This depends on the situation. But we have to be firm for the sake of parental organizations," concluded Radka Karagiozova.

#### *Iceland, Sigridur Gudjonsdottir (SSSK)*

Sigridur Gudjonsdottir took the seminar on a tour through Iceland, a small country, which makes many things very different. Parents on Iceland have freedom of choice. Private schools are no threat to public schools, on the contrary, they can benefit from private schools. The results of private schools should always be good, because they are looked upon in a suspicious way. So, the standards are high. All combined, this leads to a grow of private schools.

Very gradually a standard of financing private schools is established (it differs from one municipality to the other).

For more information on Iceland, [see](#) the power point presentation of Sigridur Gudjonsdottir.

#### *Ukraine, Oksana Balakshyna and Roman Nebozhuk (representing Association of Kyiv Private Schools)*

The educational infrastructure is well developed in Ukraine, Oksana Balakshyna and Roman Nebozhuk [showed](#) their audience. Public education is free of charge. Private ownership of schools is possible and as such registered in legislation. This makes it possible to ask a fee. The average fee is about 2.000 euro a year. As private schools get no subsidy, this fee is necessary. This all makes it very difficult for private schools and

makes it understandable that only 1% of the schools is a private school. For public and private schools there is the same curriculum.

In Ukraine the church is separated from the state, but nevertheless churches are controlled by the state. A church is not allowed to be a founder of a school. So ownership has been done through private persons (there are 12 Greek Catholic schools, 5 orthodox, 5 protestant). Attempts to make churches founders of schools as well, were not successful.

For Ukraine private schools, the support of ECNAIS is important. The voice of private schools is not heard by the ministry. Its just state, state and state. So it will take time to bring around some change. Also in Ukraine its important that parents take an active part; this could be a stimulus.

**The seminar closed with a Round table in which the participants could reflect on the theme and the input presented earlier in the seminar.**

The overall conclusion was that for independent education to reach an equal position with public education throughout Europe, it will take time and patience. Essential in this process of growth is the support of parents and the possibility for independent education to form partnerships in civil society. As future generations will be masters of their souls, the present generation should be the captains of their fate (see note down below).

For ECNAIS' future, seven questions will be relevant ([quoted](#) from *New landscapes for independent schools. Opportunities and boundaries. ECNAIS 1988-2013*):

“Do the presidents of the National Associations of Independent Schools...  
... consider the 'European dimension of education' as a basic duty with which to confront their pupils?  
... guide their schools to the fulfillment of this duty?  
... in this setting 'think global to act local'?  
... help the schools of their Associations *to do so*?  
... feel the need of their personal Life Long Learning?  
... feel the need of meeting other National Associations to think together and to learn together?  
... feel the need of joining together as in ECNAIS?”

**(Note)**

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeoning's of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

*Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley (1849–1903)