

**AME Presidential Report, 2014.**  
For the General Meeting of May, 2015.

In the previous year, in a four-year report we've performed analysis on the whole last period and have established the basic turn point, we've appointed the tasks and duties of the coming period. As a reminder we attach last year's four-year report and the presentation of strategies, considering that we have not since acquired new, authentic data, and that it's been ratified by last year's General Meeting. Having these documents will make the current report easier to interpret.

**The situation of independent schools**

2014 was a year of uncertainty and waiting. Because of the three elections, no substantive decisions have been made by the state. Though the government itself remained, the area of education was appointed new leadership, while the local governments and the whole apparatus of education was preoccupied with manoeuvring for position. The constant correction and re-correction of the state administration for education posed serious difficulties, as did the insecurity of the decision makers, the inner fluctuation of the bureaucratic apparatus and of course the unpreparedness the incompetence and the fear of decision making caused by all this. The re- and restructuring of KLIK (Klebensberg Institution Maintenance Centre) and the announcement of its newer and newer versions made it impossible for the institutions to find the competent platform of discussion and agreement. (For example, the lack of any state organization maintaining vocational training has made it impossible to find a suitable partner for discussion for the concerned institutions.)

At the same time, in the past year the centralization of the school system has been dashing on. The changes have not been directed point-blank on the non-governmental sector, but the constant „refinement“ of jurisdiction and the gradual logic of promulgation caused severe difficulties for the whole network of independent education; vocational training especially. (We are currently expecting yet another modification of the relating law.) The majority of effort on both the maintenance and management part of the institutions goes to following the changes of legislation creating an ever changing situation – and adapting to them. Long term planning – except for a few areas – has essentially ceased to exist; day to day survival has become the first and foremost task. A few examples:

1. Monopolizing the textbook provision has irrevocably destroyed the textbook-market
2. The headcount-system for vocational training to each institution has been put to effect
3. The „career model for pedagogues“ has started out, causing several hardships for non-governmental school maintainers (e.g. Master pedagogues)
4. The system of financing fixed by the educational law was merely interpreted differently by the state budget in 2013, then essentially altered in 2014 replacing long term guarantees with ad hoc decisions.

There is a political order – though not explicit, but nevertheless obvious and palpable – to narrow and marginalize the network of independent schools. In the area of vocational training it has been openly stated that no competition with the state is possible. In 2014 this process of uncertainty and marginalization has continued. It has been – and probably continue to be – a period of transition, for the state institutions are otherwise engaged. It has no steady systems of maintaining, qualifying and monitoring schools, and is preoccupied by this fact. It can be well foreseen though that after all this settles down, we will eventually get on the agenda.

Despite the uncertainty and the short-term-thinking trait, the appeal of independent institutions has increased in several areas, thanks to the dislike of centralization and uniformity the the non-religious middle class usually feels. The interest for educational institutions that demand tuition fees has significantly increased and the number of applications to these institutions have multiplied, principally in the central region and bigger cities. Meanwhile the demand for schools offering second chances for dropout students and altruistic institutions have also grown.

With the financing of wages, the budget has improved the situation in 2013-14; the school maintainers in general receive more money, though in quite a few places this increase is overpowered by the extra demands of the career-model. Alas, we can't prevent the hard-negotiated professional guarantees fixed in the educational law to be cancelled by the budget of 2015. This projects serious financial problems for 2016.

#### AME's „answers”

1. Despite having only a quarter or a third of the whole network as member, AME is definitely a legitimate representative of independent schools in front of the government, the legislation and the public as well. Not only has it maintained its role as such, but has also further strengthened it in the past years.
2. It's difficult to judge whether AME's basic strategy for the past years has been a success or a failure. We've been operating among transition, aimed for survival while suffering the inertness of the state apparatus. Our basic strategy was waiting and negotiating. We haven't partnered in bigger projects, we aimed to distance ourselves from demonstrations and protests – in the interest of our members. We have not launched grand media events, but formed individual agreements, lobbied for individual schools with more or less success. As a result few independent schools have closed down (yet), despite the obvious tendencies. We managed to correct some of the educational contracts and vocational agreements, but we are palpably losing ground.
3. We continue a constant discussion with the managements of EMMI and NGM. These negotiations have created opportunities for information exchange, and the presentation of the angles of the independent sector. Still, no substantive results have been reached, for these platforms and leaders are not competent in making significant corrections – even though they were understanding towards the problems we face.
4. AME is capable to immediately react to the problems that arise. We presented several new initiations, though the success those of is questionable: in many cases we only managed to gain media attention, but not to make actual changes.
5. The strengthening of the operation and activities of the departments is a significant change. The General Meeting of 2014 has given the departments more autonomy, and they have been able to live up to the opportunity. The number of department meetings has increased, and the strengthening of inner cooperation has produced several significant results. (Thanks to the department lead-

ers, Orsolya Dobos, Lidia Lencsés, Zsuzsa Naderi and József Braun.) The detailed report is presented within the reports of the departments, but it must hereby be stated how much the inner exchange of information and up-to-date orientation helped each and every leader of the institutions. By sharing the experiences of the others, giving out new ideas and generalizing individual problems, they have been facilitating the negotiations between AME and the state representatives while preparing the other school leaders to the upcoming problems and also showing them possible solutions.

6. We have increased the regularity of contact with the media, presented more topics and appeared on more forums and platforms. We've also increased our presence in the social media, and the attendance of AME's website and Facebook profile – especially the alternative department – has grown by leaps.
7. The attendance of ICS has increased, and not only on the topics about money. The number of professional events has grown, especially that of alternative schools.
8. Despite the inner debates we have continued to advise the maintainers toward correct and precise following of the law, giving several lectures and guidance on the topic. (Despite the several attempts for unorthodox solutions or legal manoeuvring.

### Difficulties

1. The whole operational system of education and this new paradigm contradicts the existence of this area, so the representatives of AME have found themselves in a weirdly antagonistic position. There's no chance for relevant correction, for the competent people refuse to discuss any critics on the educational politics with us. They couldn't do it even if they wanted to, for they have no authorisation to do so, while on the other hand, we could easily impair the chances of a given institutions along the negotiations. But we have no latitude of lobbying for independent schools without the possibility of criticising the whole system. We can only scratch out individual results within a system that essentially excludes independent schools.
2. Each local problem an individual institution faces must be taken to state- or vice state secretarial level, where it – for lack of competence – it gets stuck, because locally there's just no competent office or person to negotiate with.
3. We still couldn't manage to increase organization within the sector.
4. There is no definite standpoint concerning the opening towards other sectors. We haven't been able to agree on the modification of the deed of foundation.
5. The crisis meeting that included other organizations was – if not wholly, but still – a failure. Problems in conciliation and differences in genre caused it to stay without continuation.
6. AME has no capacity for keeping in continuous contact with other NGOs. The problem is, that
  - a. The organizations are overly political, and every discussion places us to one of the „sides” (solely the fact of being „independent” does the same).
  - b. The professional organizations and other NGOs operating within the sector of public education consider us a potential and real competitor, therefore they observe and treat us with suspicion.
7. Despite the opportunities, FÜPI has not become the pedagogic and educational centre (POK) of the independent educational sector.
  - a. A state contract on education has still not been established
  - b. The independent schools, lacking resources, don't use the its professional services

- c. The majority of the concerned institutions are preoccupied with sheer survival and thus are unable of professional development.
8. Despite several attempts, kindergartens have still not been integrated into AME.

### Suggestions

1. This General Meeting should decide how long – if any – this procrastinating, waiting, cooperating representation of interest can be sustained. What are the possible reasons for confrontation, and if such occurs, what procedures are deemed appropriate by the General Meeting. We need to discuss the schedule of the working-out of this task.
2. The GM should authorize a bigger project that aims to convince the government and the public on the necessity of the independent sector in education. The project should stand with an independent budget (15-20 million) financed by the members with highly differentiated contributions beyond the membership fees. Employment of specialists is necessary.
3. Immediately after the set-up of the new organization of school maintenance, contact with the local institutional management must be established. This GM should authorize the presidency to appoint local representatives with a widened authority for negotiation.
4. AME should create an alternative career model for pedagogues. For the work-out that of AME should find resources and experts. Instead of external measuring, the school management and the pedagogical board would be appointed for the evaluation of the teachers.
5. We should get back to the almost forgotten qualification system of the „copper plates”, based on self-evaluation by standard viewpoints with the involvement of the school-goers.
6. We should finally launch the title of „Labourer of the Nation”

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