



**European Forum for Freedom in Education**  
*Europäisches Forum für Freiheit im Bildungswesen*

www.effe-eu.org      contact@effe-eu.org

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Dear *effe* members,

Here is the latest news from Brussels just in time for the long, hot summer break.

*effe* is hoping that with the arrival of the Polish Presidency of the European Council comes a new energy in the area of education. Even before the European Union goes on its summer break, interesting discussions about new directions and ideas in education have already begun.

We will also be following the progress of the new initiative from the Greens to get more of Europe's citizens involved and active in the EU's agenda.



Have fun reading,

Kind regards  
Anne Liekenbrock, *Director*

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## Contents

### Information from Brussels

The Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union  
Meeting of the Council of the European Union for Education, Youth,  
Culture and Sports, 19th-20th May 2011

The European Citizens' Initiative: How to get it started, Brussels, 29th June  
2011

### National information

Free schools in England: a new beginning or the beginning of the end?

### News

*effe* Colloquium "We *are* schools", Münster, 18th-19th November 2011

Update of the *effe* Atlas on Freedom in Education

Internship at *effe* EU Office, Brussels

## The Polish Presidency of the EU-Council

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011, Poland took over the rotating Presidency of the EU Council and will be in charge of steering the 27 EU member states through the debates and compromises of the next six months. The Polish representatives face real challenges as the EU continues to go through a turbulent period of financial and currency diffi-



José Manuel Barroso, President of the EU Commission, and the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk at the inauguration of the Permanent Representation of Poland to the EU, 26th May 2011

culties. Nevertheless, the Poles' considerable preparation for the Presidency has been widely acknowledged over the last few months. They made huge efforts to raise support across Europe for their projected initiatives and objectives and the administration has been well prepared to carry out its tasks.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Polish government has got in touch with a substantial number of NGOs, such as the European Youth Forum, with the objective of facilitating mutual cooperation.<sup>2</sup> The fact that 80 % of Poles are currently in favour of the EU makes such a commitment to European affairs easier of course.<sup>3</sup> However, the national general elections scheduled for October are likely to threaten this commitment as inevitably, the election campaign will raise tensions and most probably demand at least some of the government's attention and energy.

The Polish Presidency signals the beginning of a new 'trio' of Presidencies (including Denmark and Cyprus who will chair the EU Council in 2012). It shoulders therefore the increased responsibility of shaping the political agenda of the EU until the end of next year. With regards to the economy, the Polish Presidency aims to improve the EU's competitiveness as well as to extend the Single European Market, by means of the European Patent, for example. Additionally, the negotiations concerning the EU budget 2013-2020 are currently taking place and Poland intends to have them finalised during its presidency.<sup>4</sup> Building on strong working relationships with both the President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, and the Budget Commissioner Lewandowski, Poland hopes to maintain the principle of economic redistribution in favour of the poorer countries of the Union.<sup>5</sup> To add to that, the Presidency plans measures to ensure safe energy supply and food security and will face the fallout from the recent health scares (such as swine flu and e.coli contamination of food) and price fluctuations which continue to concern consumers. Poland also advocates stronger links bet-



ween the EU and its Eastern neighbours (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasus), while accepting the European Commission's report on the European Neighbourhood Policy from May 2011 as any base for discussion.<sup>6</sup> This "Eastern Partnership" priority area is in danger of being overshadowed

however, by the on-going instability throughout the Arab World. Such political changes in the region could, according to the Poles, serve as an opportunity to remodel relations with North African countries.<sup>7</sup>



View on the brand new Permanent Representation of Poland to the EU which reflects the new self-confidence acquired by the country on the European level

Though education is not a top priority for the Presidency, the Polish government has already made clear that learning mobility of pupils, teachers and students remains an important issue for them.<sup>8</sup> The “Eastern Partnership”<sup>9</sup> also includes an educational dimension, which consists of the inclusion of the Eastern neighbours into EU programmes designed to facilitate learning mobility.<sup>10</sup> This initiative coincides with Poland’s efforts to support the work to democratise both the Ukraine and Belarus and strengthen their countries’ ties to the West. Mobility shall be enhanced by redefining key competences and through an increased effort to teach foreign languages.<sup>11</sup> The modernisation of universities shall also be part of the agenda.

In the field of Youth Policy, the Polish Presidency, following a consultation with various NGOs, has decided to lend its support to the Youth in the World Programme which seeks to bring together young people from the EU and from Eastern and South-Eastern neighbouring countries. The aim is to allow participants to share non-

formal and informal learning experiences as well as volunteering activities in order to improve mutual understanding.<sup>12</sup> On the level of culture, Poland has promised its continued support for the Commission’s ‘Culture Programme’ and the ‘Europe for Citizens Programme’. The Polish Presidency wishes to encourage the participation in culture and promotion of cultural and artistic education for people of all ages. Finally, the issue of digitalisation in connection with projects such as the European Digital Library Europeana, European cinema in the digital age and the continuation of the Media 2007 programme will also be addressed.<sup>13</sup>

*effe* welcomes the initiative of the Polish Presidency to highlight the issue of mobility in education policy. Mobility already plays an important role in the every day life of many pupils and students all over Europe and it deserves political support. It is not simply enough to adapt education policy to the needs of the labour market, if the aim is



Erasmus students on Krakow’s market square: the Polish Presidency attaches great importance to learning mobility

to reduce early school leaving rates and to increase the number of university graduates. Learning mobility on the other hand substantially improves the foreign language skills of pupils and students, broadens their cultural horizons, advances personal development and prepares them for their professional challenges on an increasingly global labour market. *effe* also believes that the attempts to bring together young people

through non-formal and informal learning activities is certainly something deserving of support as long as the acquired skills are subsequently recognised without the need to be tested and quantified. Cross-border exchanges from an early age are essential in order to combat national preconceptions. From *effe's* point of view, intercultural understanding and tolerance towards political, social, cultural and educational diversity constitute the best basis for a pluralistic and democratic society. It is for this reason that *effe* is happy to support the Polish Presidency with its efforts in this area.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bpb.de/themen/24ZFKY,2,0,Analyse%3A Die polnische Ratspr%C3%A4sidentschaft in der Europ%C3%A4ischen Union%3A Herausforderungen Erwartungen Pl%C3%A4ne und M%C3%B6glichkeiten.html#art2](http://www.bpb.de/themen/24ZFKY,2,0,Analyse%3A%20Die%20polnische%20Ratspr%C3%A4sidentschaft%20in%20der%20Europ%C3%A4ischen%20Union%3A%20Herausforderungen%20Erwartungen%20Pl%C3%A4ne%20und%20M%C3%B6glichkeiten.html#art2) (in German)

<sup>2</sup> <http://prezydencjaue.gov.pl/en/archive/303-education-and-youth-during-presidency-ngos-perspective>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/polish-eu-presidency-budget-solidarity-links-dossier-505551>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bpb.de/themen/24ZFKY,3,0,Analyse%3A Die polnische Ratspr%C3%A4sidentschaft in der Europ%C3%A4ischen Union%3A Herausforderungen Erwartungen Pl%C3%A4ne und M%C3%B6glichkeiten.html#art3](http://www.bpb.de/themen/24ZFKY,3,0,Analyse%3A%20Die%20polnische%20Ratspr%C3%A4sidentschaft%20in%20der%20Europ%C3%A4ischen%20Union%3A%20Herausforderungen%20Erwartungen%20Pl%C3%A4ne%20und%20M%C3%B6glichkeiten.html#art3) (in German)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/polish-eu-presidency-budget-solidarity-links-dossier-505551>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.bpb.de/themen/24ZFKY,3,0,Analyse%3A Die polnische Ratspr%C3%A4sidentschaft in der Europ%C3%A4ischen Union%3A Herausforderungen Erwartungen Pl%C3%A4ne und M%C3%B6glichkeiten.html#art3](http://www.bpb.de/themen/24ZFKY,3,0,Analyse%3A%20Die%20polnische%20Ratspr%C3%A4sidentschaft%20in%20der%20Europ%C3%A4ischen%20Union%3A%20Herausforderungen%20Erwartungen%20Pl%C3%A4ne%20und%20M%C3%B6glichkeiten.html#art3) (in German)

<sup>7</sup> <http://euobserver.com/895/32347>

<sup>8</sup> <http://prezydencjaue.gov.pl/en/component/content/article/347>

<sup>9</sup> The "Eastern Partnership" intends to create stronger links between the EU and the Eastern neighbouring countries.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.men.gov.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2231%3A-minister-katarzyna-hall-na-obradach-rady-ue-do-spraw-edukacji-modziew-kultury-i-sportu&catid=206%3A-ministerstwo-prezydencja-2011&Itemid=256](http://www.men.gov.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2231%3A-minister-katarzyna-hall-na-obradach-rady-ue-do-spraw-edukacji-modziew-kultury-i-sportu&catid=206%3A-ministerstwo-prezydencja-2011&Itemid=256) (in Polish)

<sup>11</sup> <http://prezydencjaue.gov.pl/en/archive/303-education-and-youth-during-presidency-ngos-perspective>

<sup>12</sup> <http://prezydencjaue.gov.pl/en/archive/303-education-and-youth-during-presidency-ngos-perspective>

<sup>13</sup> <http://prezydencjaue.gov.pl/en/component/content/article/347>

## Meeting of the EU Council for Education, Youth, Culture and Sports, 19th-20th May 2011

On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011 the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union in Brussels presented the outcomes of the EU Council's meeting in the fields of Education, Youth, Culture and Sports. In the Council, the respective ministers from the 27 member states meet regularly to discuss current issues.

Firstly, Guido Kemmerling, the person responsible for Culture and Sports at the Permanent Representation, summarised the discussions at the Council's meeting some days before. The German government was represented by the Minister of State for Culture, Bernd Neumann, whereas Wolfgang Heubisch spoke on behalf of the Bundesrat, the Upper chamber of the German Parliament. One issue dealt with by the Council was the future of the

Commission's Culture and Media Programmes (after 2013) and whether it should be merged into a single programme; a proposal which Mr. Neumann strongly opposed. The European Heritage Label however, an initiative which seeks to formally recognise the importance of outstanding historical monuments, cultural landscapes and memorials in Europe, is to be adopted very soon. Aside from the issue of mobility concerning non-EU artists and orchestra members, France argued strongly for a so called 'culture manifesto' to stress the value of culture in these times of budgetary cuts. Germany remained sceptical towards such an initiative.

Next, Axel Stammberger who is one of those at the permanent representation in charge of youth policy, presented the discussion outcomes relevant to his field. Since the Minister for Family Affairs and Youth, Kristina

Schröder, is on maternity leave, Dr. Hermann Kues, Parliamentary State Secretary in the Ministry of Family Affairs and Youth, represented the German government in her place. The discussion revolved around



The Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU in Brussels' European neighbourhood

the issue of youth unemployment which the recent Trio Presidency of Spain-Belgium-Hungary has identified in a position paper as a major problem. Another priority of the Council is the issue of youth participation in democratic life. The Council believe this could be encouraged through the acquirement of key competences and Europe-wide mobility. In this context, Germany emphasised the importance of the Youth in Action Programme.<sup>1</sup> At the meeting, the issue of volunteering was also raised; it is a particularly pertinent topic in Germany at the moment where the mandatory community service for young people is set to be replaced by the "Federal Volunteering Service".<sup>2</sup> For the German representatives, volunteering is an "inter-generational task" and "an appropriate first step to enter the job market". Nonetheless they also stressed the risk of volunteering becoming a means of exploitation as a cheap labour force.

In the meeting on education, German interests were represented by Georg Schütte from the Ministry of Education and Jürgen Zöllner, a Member of the Bundesrat. At the beginning of the meeting, the participants emphasised the central role played by non-formal and informal learning in combating

the marginalisation of the less-educated sections of society. Moreover, the offer for further education should be adapted according to the market's needs and the allocation of school vouchers should be improved.<sup>3</sup> The Council stated that it supports the Commission's efforts in these matters. Early School leaving was the next topic on the agenda: it was agreed that huge discrepancies between the member states make it difficult to decide upon a common European strategy. Dr. Frank Petrikowski, in charge of education and research at the Permanent Representation, emphasised the fact that the UK persistently opposed commitments to set targets insisting on retaining national sovereignty on that matter. Nevertheless, a resolution was approved by a majority decision which aims at reducing the Europe-wide school leaving rate to less than 10 % by 2020.<sup>4</sup> The issues of learner mobility and the potential obstacles to it were also raised during the discussions. Italy, backed by the Netherlands, voiced its objections to carrying out a precise review of the current situation in this field. However, as before, a reso-



Young participants of the Youth in Action Programme

lution urging member states to remove administrative and institutional hindrances to learning mobility was ultimately adopted.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the upcoming Polish Presidency of the European Council presented its plans and visions on education.<sup>6</sup> After the Council meeting, the Polish delegation asked the German delegation for a bilateral discussion

on the planned agenda. The Germans took note of the objectives linked to the “Eastern Partnership” but refrained from making any agreement or rejection of it at



Dr. Frank Petrikowski, in charge of education and research at the Permanent Representation, summarised the Council discussions

the time. The representative of the Permanent Representation hinted however at German reservations towards the Polish initiative which, in their opinion, would launch a drive towards EU accession for the Eastern neighbouring countries. Either way, the German delegation pointed out that instruments such as the European Neighbourhood Policy already exist which take into account these countries’ interests.

In general, the rapporteurs wished to draw attention to the fact that the Education, Culture, Youth and Sports Council had to rely on a majority decision to approve a resolution for the first time. Traditionally, the Council has had a culture of consensus and compromise. A possible reason for this development could be the ‘re-nationalisation’ of individual countries’ interests.

*effe* shares the Council’s attitude towards complex and far-reaching issues such as youth unemployment and believes that it is essential not to simply tackle them with short-term economic measures. Indeed, these issues require deep reflection and

*effe* welcomes the Council’s attempts – by means of mobility incentives and a stronger participation in democratic life – to build bridges leading young people back to the core of society. The emphasis on volunteering as a formative experience (for people of all ages) is an important step in the right direction. However, the discussions also brought to light negative developments and contradictions. Though the Family and Youth Ministers saw volunteering as an essential means of social integration, the Education Ministers recommended that further and adult education be adopted to respond to market requirements. *effe* remains sceptical about this approach and believes that volunteering is less an instrument serving the purposes of the labour market than a field of democratic and civil society action.



Spanish pupils on their way back home: their country has one of the highest early school leaving rates

<sup>1</sup>The Programme is available to young people all over Europe and aims to enhance their learning mobility and activities in the area of non-formal and informal learning. See: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/programme/about\\_youth\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/programme/about_youth_en.php)

<sup>2</sup>*effe* is currently writing an extensive report on volunteering, based on a survey aimed at young Germans who had spent their gap year doing voluntary work in the social sector. Updates on this subject will be included in future *effe* newsletters.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/122118.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/122118.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09036.en11.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For further information, see the article on the “Polish Presidency” in this newsletter.

## Countdown for the European Citizens' Initiative

On June 29th 2011, a conference on the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)<sup>1</sup> was organised by the European Free Alliance of the Greens. "It represents one of the core



questions for our future", said Gerald Häfner, one of the initial ECI proposers in his introduction. "The fundamental question for all other issues like nuclear energy, migration, the economy, etc., is the question of democracy: *How* are decisions made within a society?"

The ECI is one of the first steps in developing the means to promote civic participation throughout Europe. It could also – as was pointed out by legal expert,

Prof. Christian Joerges – help to overcome the distance between "Brussels" and European citizens: a minimum of seven people from seven different EU member states will be able to submit a request to the European Commission and, after a successful registration of the ECI, collect one million signatures over the course of a year in order to initiate a hearing in the Parliament together with the Commission.

The different member states now have time until April 2012 to set up the legal basis for the ECI. And here is where the debate begins: should the new online signature-collecting system require people's passport numbers? How will the necessary translations be organised? How much money would an ECI need, realistically speaking, in order to be successful? Eva Lichtenberger (the Greens) was heavily involved in coordinating the discussions and statements about these and many other questions, posed by politicians, experts and civil society.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.citizens-initiative.eu>

## Free schools in England: a new beginning or the beginning of the end?

Josh Tebbutt, Project Officer, *effe*

In June 2010, Michael Gove MP, the Education Secretary in David Cameron's newly elected Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, announced a radical new policy of so-called 'free schools'. Inspired by the Swedish model, these schools would be all-ability, state-funded schools set up by groups of teachers,

parents, charities, universities or businesses in response to particular local educational demands. Although they would be subject to national education inspections, they would have an unprecedented amount of autonomy (for the fully-funded state sector) in the shaping and day-to-day management of their schools.<sup>1</sup>

For a country with a relatively unimpressive history of alternative education compared with its Scandinavian and Teutonic neighbours, this is a notable development for education policy in England.<sup>2</sup> The need for greater educational autonomy has long been acknowledged by Westminster, whether more implicitly by the previous Labour governments or increasingly explicitly as it has been by the Coalition. Academy schools, a flagship policy of Tony Blair's Labour government launched in 2000, arguably paved the way for Mr. Gove's



free schools by allowing institutions to receive direct funding from central government rather than their local education authority, as is conventionally the case. With a 10% private sponsorship stake, academies offered existing (often failing) state schools a special status under which they, and the private sponsor, would receive greater powers with the hope they could innovatively combat long-term problems within the school. Mr. Gove's plans however appear to go one (or indeed several) step(s) further in handing over significantly more control to the group of individuals who set-up and manage the school with regards to the curriculum, the length of the school day and the hiring of teaching staff.

Far from embracing this apparent policy descendent of the Blair era, the current Labour party, and in particular their spokesman on Education, Andy Burnham MP, have led the criticism of the 'free school' concept. The lack of consultation with the local population (free school proposals are

approved directly by the Secretary of State for Education<sup>3</sup>), the potential for 'untrained teachers' to be let into schools (teachers in free schools will not necessarily need to have Qualified Teacher Status<sup>4</sup>) and the accusation of simply paying for ex-private schools to become state schools have all been cited by Mr. Burnham as arguments against the 'free school' policy. Neither do opponents of the initiative appear to have been overawed by the comparison of the proposed plans with its Swedish counterpart, despite Sweden's reputation as being one of the Scandinavian goliaths of educational standards. On the contrary, they argue that the multiplicity of private businesses involved in the Swedish system has led to a falling of standards and (perhaps most woundingly for the new-generation Cameron-Conservative Party) a negative impact on social mobility.<sup>5</sup> After all, they point out, is it not the socially-mobile, motivated and engaged parents of the middle-class who will go about setting up a new free school? Exactly the type of parents you need to be involved in the improvement of the less-successful schools that already exist in the public sector. Free schools, critics argue, could simply compound the differences between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' by giving the privileged a way out from underperforming schools.

As a fractious and complex system, the education system of the UK is difficult to explain to anyone without first-hand experience of it. (Even then, there is no accounting for local and regional peculiarities.) Adding yet another school-type to the existing panoply of categories in England will only make any explanation more difficult. It is however, the degree of autonomy which will set the new free schools apart and potentially, so Mr. Gove hopes, have a transformative effect on the learning of the students who attend them. Only eight schools have been

approved to open in 2011 (still a remarkable achievement when one considers the policy was announced in June 2010) but they include schools ranging from the traditional, to the religious and those with an alternative pedagogical approach, such as the Montessori primary school<sup>6</sup> opening in Crawley.<sup>7</sup> But Mr. Gove is ambitious; he has received 281 free school applications for 2012 and hopes that free schools could “help alleviate some of the pressure” for the quarter of a million more primary school places which will be needed by 2014-15.<sup>8</sup> One can hope that these free schools will not only improve educational standards but will give children, parents and teachers a renewed sense of engagement and empowerment over their education. With such a small number of free schools so far, the criticism of exclusivity appears valid though that will surely be weakened with the increasing ubiquity of such schools. Many of the ethos upon

which the proposed free schools are based have, up until now, only been available in the private or independent sector (e.g. Montessori) so theoretically at least, this policy could bring such teaching approaches in to the reach of all. Only time will determine whether or not these improvements shall come to fruition but in such numbers, one thing is sure: free schools could change the state-school educational landscape of a whole country for generations to come.

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.education.gov.uk/freeschools/b0061428/free-schools/what>

<sup>2</sup> To varying degrees, the education systems of the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom [England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland] differ. As a policy area devolved to local government, policies put forward by Westminster only affect England on the whole.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. Education Minister

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.tda.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/faqs/becoming-a-teacher/qualified-teacher-status.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.andyburnham.net/> accessed 29/06/2011

<sup>6</sup> Primary schools typically cater for children aged between 4/5-11 years old.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.discoverynewschool.org/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/speeches/a0077948/michael-goves-speech-to-the-policy-exchange-on-free-schools>

## effe Colloquium “We are schools”, Münster, 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> November 2011



The next *effe* colloquium will take place from the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> November 2011 at the Montessori School in Münster. The event will be built around the title “We are schools – the education system is a responsibility of society” and will bring together *effe* members as well as representatives from various education associations.

Alongside discussions on the topic of ‘school of citizens’, there will also be the

opportunity to observe some lessons at the Montessori School itself. Kurt Wilhelmi (from the organisation ‘Omnibus für direkte Demokratie’), Pia Amacher (Elternlobby Schweiz – Parents’ Lobby Swizerland) and a student from the ‘Schule in Freiheit’ in Berlin will all present their own experiences.

We look forward to seeing you.

More information regarding the colloquium, including registration forms, will be put on the *effe* website very soon. Check back regularly for further updates.

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## ***effe* Atlas of Freedom in Education - new edition coming soon**

The EU Office has been busy developing a new edition of the *effe* 'Atlas' over the last month. Alongside an overview of the different national educational systems and education-related legislation, you will also be able to find information about

existing free and independent schools as well as their legal and financial situation for nearly all European countries. It will be published on our website very soon.

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### **Internship at EU Office, Brussels**

*effe* is currently looking for a new intern for the EU office in Brussels to start the first week of October 2011. For more information outlining the responsibilities and

experience required for the position please see the vacancies page on the *effe* website at [www.effe-eu.org](http://www.effe-eu.org).

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#### **Editorial:**

Anne Liekenbrock  
Joshua Tebbutt

Philipp Zessin (intern)  
Clara Steinkellner (intern)