

EUROPEAN SCHOOL STUDENT RIGHTS CHARTER

adopted by the member- and observer organisations



ALL RIGHTS INCLUDED!

of the

ORGANIZING BUREAU OF EUROPEAN SCHOOL STUDENT UNIONS

This European School Student Rights Charter was developed during the OBESSU conferences on school student rights in Europe, held in Alicante, Spain from 16 to 21 December 1994 and in Helsingør, Denmark from 18 to 23 April 1995.

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EDITORIAL

The presentation of this European School Student Rights Charter (ESSRC) is the first comprehensive step made by representatives of school student organisations from over 16 countries in defining basic guidelines for the democratisation of education and the increase of efforts towards 'real' participation of all 'stakeholding' parties (echelons) within the respective education systems in Europe.

Although the focus within this Charter lies primarily on (both lower and upper) secondary and vocational school education, the participating organisations within OBESSU hope that it might also serve as an example for other areas within the educational systems, including the primary level.

By presenting this ESSRC the school students in Europe provide their national governments and the European intergovernmental superstructures with an example of:

"...models of democracy and tolerance within the school, including relations between teachers and students that exemplify democratic practice, as well as opportunities to discuss both the micro-society of the classroom as it embodies (or fails to embody) democratic principles and issues in the broader society.." ¹

It were the Member States of the Council of Europe who considered the development of such models as examples of potentially successful policies and strategies in order to improve the role of education in promoting democracy and pluralism in society. Therefore we expect that national governments will receive this Charter with interest and with a constructive approach,.

The realization of the principles as laid down within this Charter depends upon a number of factors. The most important condition for success lies in the involvement of students at school level. Change can only take place if those who are in need of such are willing to work for it. No legislation will function properly if its subjects are not motivated to claim their rights and uphold them. Furthermore it must be said that any change will have to be based on cooperation and on a positive approach towards other parties within the school system, such as teachers, school management and parents.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that our call for improving the rights and the participation of school students within the education systems in Europe is not limited to small groups of 'elitist' or 'privileged' young people, but that it is aimed at enabling and stimulating all (groups of) young people in exercising their rights and in taking responsibilities concerning their immediate way-of-life into their own hands. Learning about democracy without experiencing it is as sensible as trying to fly without wings.

¹ Council of Europe, "Education: Structures, Policies and Strategies", Conclusions and recommendations on Theme 1: Education for democratic and pluralist societies, Seminar open to all CSCE Participating States, Strasbourg, 7-10 December 1993, (CE.ED/CSCE (93) 19), p.3;

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INTRODUCTION

School democracy is one of the most elementary issues influencing the position and interests of school students in education systems all over Europe. Democracy in schools - or the lack of it - has a direct and clear relation with the fundamentals of democratic society.

One could compare a school to a micro-society, with its own rules and regulations, with its own traditions and ways of doing things and with its own process of decision-making. Just like in the 'big world' surrounding us, this micro-society should respect the principles of democracy, mutual respect and tolerance.

Unfortunately, reality is sometimes different. School society is too often not the reflection of the larger society which it is part of. The way schools work varies from very democratic and open to very strict and autocratic. And the latter is - sadly enough - still too often the case in the day to day school life of students all over Europe.

For this reason democracy in education is one of the most important fields of attention for school student associations. Many of these associations were once founded because of the fact that students were dissatisfied with the process of democracy in their schools. They were founded with the expectation that they could and would improve the position of students in their immediate school environment.

Organisations of school students from over 16 European countries, gathered within the OBESSU framework, have developed and adopted this Charter on school student rights with the strong belief and the conviction, that for the promotion and the sustainability of the - sometimes fragile - principles of democracy and tolerance with as a result a peaceful and stable society, democratisation of education and effective school student participation is indispensable.

Despite the structural and cultural differences between the education systems in each of the contributing countries, a number of important common statements were adopted in this Charter, clearly presenting the relevance of a European dimension in school student cooperation. By doing so, the most important of OBESSU's objectives in the intercultural exchange of experiences has been realised: "to define those issues that bind us, and not the issues that divide us!".

This charter is a major step towards the realisation of our common objectives. In the field of secondary and even tertiary education it is the first of its kind. The participating organisations involved in the establishment of this charter call upon the governments of the European nations to adopt it and to support the spread and promotion of its principles towards multinational fora and structures, such as

the Parliaments of the Council of Europe and the European Union and the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Chapter I

EUROPEAN SCHOOL STUDENT RIGHTS CHARTER

Article 1

The right to Association

- 1.1 The right to associate at any level of education must be guaranteed by legislation.
- 1.2 In every school there should be a legally recognised student council, which has been democratically elected by the school students.
- 1.3 School students and school student associations should have the right to establish national school student organisations.
- 1.4 Finances, facilities and support should be provided by the school, as well as by the local and central authorities in question in order for school student associations and organisations to function properly.
- 1.5 School student organisations at all levels of education should have the possibility to perform their activities during schooldays.
- 1.6 School students must have the right to assemble, demonstrate and express their opinion both inside and outside the school. They must be able to do so freely and without sanctions.

Article 2

The right to Participation

- 2.1 School students must be involved in the decision making processes in all matters of their own concern. This must be guaranteed by legislation.
- 2.2 The power of decisionmaking must not be concentrated in the hands of single individuals; decisionmaking bodies at all levels must be representative and democratic.
- 2.3 There must be an organ of collective decisionmaking such as a schoolboard when the decisionmaking process of a school is concerned.
- 2.4 School students must have influence on the content of the lectures, the methods of teaching, the curricula and books and should be guaranteed proper evaluation of their work. Furthermore, school students should be given the opportunity to evaluate the teaching.
- 2.5 School students must have at least equal influence as teachers have in the school decisionmaking processes.

Article 3

The right to Appeal

- 3.1 School students should have the right to appeal against unfair treatment and have the right to demand disciplinary actions in case of such violations.

3.2 Any appeal through internal or external channels should not cause any harm to the school student(s) appealing.

**Article 4
Civil Rights**

- 4.1 Civil Rights must apply to all school students.
- 4.2 Education must be based upon mutual respect, understanding, democracy and tolerance. School systems will promote the fight against discrimination, facism and xenophobia.
- 4.3 Privacy information concerning individual school students must be respected and used only with the students' explicit prior consent.

**Article 5
The right to Quality Education**

- 5.1 School students must have the right to high-quality impartial education.
- 5.2 There should be quality assessment at all levels of education.
- 5.3 There should be no fees of any kind. School students should get their public secondary education funded by the state.
- 5.4 Vocational traning should enable students to find a job responding to their qualifications and interests. Social partners should be consulted in the decisionmaking process concerning vocational training. Vocational training should leave flexibility in the later choice of carreers.
- 5.5 Secondary education in general should provide students with the

practical skills and preparation in order to enable them to bring the theory that they learn into practice in their further education and future (working) lives.

- 5.6 Every type of education at secondary level should contain general education.
- 5.7 Schools must provide special measures to compensate in any specific deficits due to shortcomings in the upbringing and previous education of school students.
- 5.8 All parts of the secondary school systems are of equal importance and should have the same rights and the same status.
- 5.9 At the beginning of a school year the school board must give proof of validity that new books must be used in the classes. The use of books must not be changed for reasons of economy but for educational reasons.
- 5.10 School students must have adequate and flexible time-tables and study-schedules throughout their education.

**Article 6
The right to Access to Education**

- 6.1 There should be no technical, financial or sociocultural barriers to secondary education.
- 6.2 Entry to any type of higher education should be available to all who have completed secondary education. High-er education entrance criteria

should be flexible and be aimed at encouraging access.

- 6.3 School students should not be required to specialize before they are fully aware of the importance and impact of their choice.
- 6.4 Facilities must be provided for disabled people enabling them to receive education on an equal basis.
- 6.5 Any break during a study-career must be allowed without loss of any achieved study-credits and without loss of the right to continue education.

Article 7

The right to maintain Cultural and Personal Identity

- 7.1 Everyone should have the right to maintain their cultural heritage. School students speaking a minority language should be offered lessons in the language in question.
- 7.2 The individuality of school students must be respected by the school. Equality in education shall not mean uniformity; students have to be allowed to develop their personal abilities towards the direction they want to.

Article 8

The right to gender Equality

- 8.1 Discrepancy in skills between school students because of a gender specific socialisation should be compensated by means of education. Schools will

actively work for gender equality in society.

- 8.2 In order to achieve education promoting gender equality, sexes must not be presented in stereotypes in the educational process.
- 8.3 A gender balanced staff at secondary schools should be realized, while retaining competence as the primary selection criteria.

Article 9

The right to a flexible school

- 9.1 The authorities in question should give the school a flexible framework still defining general guidelines and minimum requirements.
- 9.2 Education and learning should not be regarded as occurring only during the years in school. The school system should adapt itself to serve the principle of continuous education. Students must be taught abilities and given facilities to actively seek information themselves and not only to receive knowledge passively through the teaching process.
- 9.3 School students must have the right to receive education in the required form when they are absent from school due to illness.

Article 10

The right to a proper school environment

- 10.1 School students should have the right to be educated in an adequate

(learning) environment. Legislation in society in this field should also include schools.

10.2 The social function of the school should be taken into account and cared for.

10.3 School students must have the right to a free insurance during schooltime. They must also have the right to free medical assistance when they get involved into an accident during school activities, this including practical work as a part of the education curriculum.

Article 11

The right to Information and Guidance

- 11.1** School students have the right to be adequately informed about their rights and possibilities as well as about the educational structures.
- 11.2** All school students must be provided with proper guidance and orientation in all matters of their own concern. Social and psychological help should be provided within the schools.
- 11.3** School students should be informed about everything that is of relevance for their education and its procedures. Plans for each subject in the curriculum should be presented to the school students before the beginning of each term.

Article 12

Internal regulations

- 12.1** In every school there shall be a set of internal regulations. The school board or the school community will decide upon the content of these rules. In unclear cases, the interpretation of the regulations shall be done by the school-board, not by the head-master or teachers.
- 12.2** At the start of each school year, a written copy of these regulations will be distributed among all the students. Any changes made by the schoolboard or the school community during the year will be handed out in the same way.

Article 13

The right to Global and Society Education

- 13.1** School students have the right to receive education in areas that are of importance for understanding the world we live in, such as:
- intercultural education
 - sex education
 - education promoting democratic participation in society
 - environmental education
 - tolerance and solidarity
 - social skills
- 13.2** There should be a possibility for school students to attend environmental awareness education. Schools that provide environmental education must have an environmental protection policy within their institution. The education in general shall promote environmental awareness.

SAFEGUARD AND SUPERVISION

To safeguard that - once adopted - the contents of this charter are properly used and that the legislation concerning the school student rights is being followed, it is of the greatest importance that there are supervising authorities at every level that are competent to take disciplinary actions against the party which is in violation.

Chapter II

DEFINITION OF USED TERMS AND THEIR EXPLANATION

Autochton and allochton: autochton citizens are citizens who(se parents) originate from the country in question and/or who have the nationality of that country. Alloch-tone citizens are those citizens who(se pa-rents) originate from another country and/or who do not have the nationality of the coun-try of domicile. Allochtone groups of citizens often form a minority part of a society. When we speak of *native* citizens we primarily mean citizens whose ancestors originate from the country in question, but who are now considered to be a minority-group be-cause of massive immigration. The result of the latter is often that the traditional lan-guage and/or culture has been "overwhel-med" by the 'newcomers' (ref. art 7.1/ Chapter III).

Bilingual classes: bilingual classes are classes that are taught in two languages (both a minority and a majority language) at the same time (ref. art 7.1).

Civil rights: school students are citizens like everybody else within a society and for that reason rights it is clear that civil rights that are granted to other citizens also apply to school students (ref. art 4).

Curriculum and lecture: a "curriculum" is "study programme", including the guidelines of what has to be taught (and therefore learned) and what has to be accomplished in the education at - in this case - secondary school level. A study-curriculum is often divided in semesters, trimesters and years (time-wise) and in different subjects (contents-wise), such as Maths, Geography, etc. A

"**lecture**" concerns the contents of the teaching that is taught in a lesson (ref.art 2.4).

Decisionmaking body: a decisionmaking body (within a school) is a group of people that makes decisions concerning its own and other peoples position. Decisionmaking bodies *within a school* are f.i. the *school-board*, the *student council*, the *teachers' council* and other, similar structures (ref. art 2).

Facilities: facilities are (for example): availability of a workroom as well as having access to electronic equipment (such as computers and copiers); access to communication equipment (telephone, fax) and the possibility to print materials like stationary. Facilities on a higher level of school student participation and association, such as national level, includes (for example) a proper office with equipment and employees (ref. art 1.4).

In all matters of their own concern: as a general principle, there is no issue within a school that does not concern the school students in it (ref. art 2.1).

Schoolboard: a school board is a decision making body in school. It is composed of representatives of school students and other groups of people related to the school, such as teachers, supporting staff, etc... The head-master (director) is responsible for carrying out the decisions of the schoolboard (see art. 12).

School community decisions: such decisions include the possibility to have

types of direct democracy within a school, such as a (school-)referendum (see art. 12).

School students: school students are those people (pupils) who attend primary and secondary education, the legislation of their country accordingly. This also includes school students in apprenticeships and/or vocational trainees.

School student council: a school student council is a representative body that has been elected by, through and for all students in the school.

School student organisations: school student organisations organise school students, student councils, and/or associations at all levels of the education system, such as the school level, the local-, regional- and/or national level. They have representative structures and they promote and emphasize school student interests, in particular when questions of education politics and/or education policies are concerned. **National school student organisations** are organisations who operate at more than one regional level and/or who organise activities 'nation-wide'. This term includes organisations on multi-regional and/or national level with an "association-", "union-" or other structure.

Social partners: social partners are the representatives of (in general) (organisations of) employees and employers.

Special measures: special measures concern f.i. additional education and special guidance to those who are in need of such (ref. art 5.7).

Vocational training: vocational training is a (secondary education) study which combines practical and theoretical education

and which offers professional working skills and competence to its students. Vocational training is also referred to as apprenticeship, in-service-training, business-education, vocational education or professional education. There are different kinds of vocational training, such as 'on the job training' (work and training within a company), mixed work/ education studies, where students attend school one (or more) days per week and work within a company for the rest of the time and vice versa and vocational school education, where students spend most of their education at school and follow training or 'stages' only for a limited period of time (ref. art 5.4).

Chapter III

ARGUMENTATION AND EXPLANATION OF THE ARTICLES

Introduction

In a truly democratic system every part of society is represented in legislative and decision-making bodies, including those who do not have the right to vote because they have not passed the age of consent. Youth in general and school students in particular represent a large group of citizens in our society, but the great majority of them do not have the right to vote and are therefore not (in-)directly represented in those decision-making bodies and processes that influence their lives every day.

This in despite of the fact that most school students would be very capable to make up their own minds and to take decisions concerning their own interests, when given the chance and provided that they are being taken seriously.

The participating organisations within OBESSU think that school students are in need of participation in legal and representative bodies that represent their interests and demands. Our modern society faces a large number of complex problems, which in turn can only be solved if society is based upon the fundamentals of democracy and pluralism and if its citizens are responsible and critical enough to deal with the challenges posed to them.

When they reach the age of consent, young people obtain the right to vote (and the right to be elected). These democratic rights require a large feeling of responsibility. Society does not prepare young people enough for taking that

responsibility. In order to change that situation there have to be possibilities for true and effective participation by young people in those decisionmaking processes that influence their lives.

It is for these reasons that the member- and observerorganisations within OBESSU have stated and defined the rights of school students in this charter. This charter should therefore be looked upon as an investment in and a promotion of the principles of democracy in our society.

It is based upon the belief that when young people become involved in democratic processes in which they feel that their participation and influence is effective, they will develop the responsibility that is necessary to be part of modern society and that will enable them to impose changes to that society in order to make that society worth living in.

In addition to the experience with participative democracy as meant above, quality education should provide young people with more. To understand society and the world we live in, young people must have a strong basis that includes not only theoretical knowledge, but also a comprehensive understanding concerning our habitat and the issues that need to be faced in order to guarantee a secure, stable and peaceful society. If we want to achieve solidarity and mutual respect at all levels of society, school students must receive intercultural education which

provides the necessary information for such mutual understanding.

Skills concerning the process of social intercourse must be taught and practised in order to accomplish social awareness between people. Modern society is still developing and seems to become a society with a more open character and with a decreasing number of taboos. The relations between boys and girls change and become more equal. School, as a part of life in society and as an important factor in education and the development of young peoples' personality, has to promote and intensify these changes within its sex-education. In a time where environmental consciousness could decide upon the future of the world and the quality of life in it, it is the task of the school to increase the awareness of school students in this respect. Attention for all of these elements within the education will improve the quality of society as a whole.

Article 1

In general: The right to associate is a fundamental principle of democracy. Therefore school students must be able to effectively expand their influence by means of association. The functionality of the association in school society is guaranteed by legislation.

1.1 Legislation is the best way to secure a right (provided it is upheld). It is the basis of organising society. It secures equal application of rights and obligations. Therefore it guarantees the existence of school student associations in general and commits politicians and school staff to accept them. The right (for school students) to associate has

to be laid down into legislation that can not be changed easily.

1.2 School is a part of society. Therefore the rules of society and democracy have to be valid in school as well. School student representations can only be legitimate if they are democratically elected. Some of the tasks of the student council are the evaluation of teaching methods and the codecision-making on the school-budget. Furthermore it should improve the quality of the functioning of the school and its working environment. The student council is an excellent body for signaling and explicating the genuine interests of school students.

1.3 A decisionmaking process becomes more pluralistic if more and more people are involved in it. Pluralism is a fundamental requirement for a democratic society. If decisionmaking processes (concerning school students or their education) take place at national level, then representation at every level - including the national - must be available for school students as well. There are existing (trade-) unions for almost every kind of profession, so it is only reasonable that similar structures exist for school students as well. Common (student) problems have to be represented with one voice and cooperation has to be promoted.

1.4 School student organisations cannot function without proper facilities. Therefore they have to be guaranteed. This assures that the organisations do not just exist on paper. Funding of school student associations must have a high priority, but in return

these associations have the obligation to show what they use and have used the money for. Learning how society and financing work is also part of education. This educational function is an investment in the school as well as in the entire society and it will certainly pay back.

1.5 To secure the contact between organisations and its members, to provide efficiency and to make the necessary decisions it is important that students can meet during schooldays and not just during leisure time, which is often difficult or even impossible. Such activities are to be regarded as a part of the practical education in school. This practical education prepares for life in society, concerning knowledge of democracy and societal structures, etc. If students have the possibility to meet during schooldays they are able to study during leisure time. Of course school students have the responsibility and the obligation to catch up with schoolwork. Because of the fact that school students want to learn, there will be no abuse of this right for as long as schools have a high quality of education and as long as the school is "student-friendly".

1.6 It is a basic right for any individual in democratic society to express ones opinions without any consequences or sanctions, the human rights accordingly. The right to demonstrate is important because school students need a way to express their opinions if other channels are ineffective. Furthermore, by demonstrating school students can attract the public attention that they need to impose their demands. Punishment has to be avoided because it

prevents school students from expressing their opinion freely. School students and/or students associations should have the right to set up and distribute a school newspaper within their school. In case of insulting or libellous publications, only the school-board can decide to suspend or forbid the newspaper. Support and facilities should be given by the school whenever possible.

Article 2

In general: The right to associate does not make any sense if school students cannot participate. Furthermore it has to be avoided that the right to associate is just an alibi for the government or school management, instead of accepting real school student participation.

2.1 see chapter II: 'all matters of their own concern'

2.2 A single individual is not representative and does not have enough knowledge to make decisions on behalf of others. This is against the principle of democracy.

2.3 To provide the best education possible and to approve such, school students must have influence on the content of lectures and the methods of teaching. As school students are 'users' in school they know how to improve it. The school board is an important forum to meet and discuss.

2.4 During the past decades it has always been the teacher who could decide about the contents of the lectures, the methods of teaching, the curricula and books. Today there is a new development towards increasing school

student influence in these matters. However, school students will have to be committed to be actively involved in this process. But they will also become more motivated if they actually have influence.

- 2.5 In schools there are always a lot more school students than teachers. Because of that fact, it would only be logical that school students have at least equal influence in the school-decisionmaking process in comparison with teachers. After all, school students are experts in all matters of their own concern.

Article 3

- 3.1 In society everybody has the possibility to appeal against any kind of unfair treatment. This right must also be given to school students at school level. Signals of unfair treatment coming from school students should be handled with care and precaution in order to protect their privacy. Complaints and comments of school students must never be regarded as nonsense, no matter how oversimplified they sometimes may be. The right to demand disciplinary actions is a 'means of power' for school students to ensure that appeals are always taken seriously.
- 3.2 The freedom of speech combined with the right to appeal includes that students are excluded from any harm for expressing their opinion. Often school students hesitate to appeal because they fear negative consequences. This can be prevented by structuring the channels for appeal into a standard procedure in which the privacy rights

of all parties concerned are being protected

Article 4

- 4.1 *NO ARGUMENTATION REQUIRED.*
- 4.2 Considering the fact that the aspects mentioned in this article are the most violated fundamentals of our society, this article should be given specific attention. Growing intolerance, fascism and xenophobia show the need for an education based upon mutual respect, understanding, democracy and tolerance.
- 4.3 Schools often have records on students containing information that is not always relevant for the students' functioning within the school. Furthermore, some information about an individual might put the student's reputation in jeopardy and can make him or her unpopular among other groups and persons within the school. Publishing of personal information can also lead to a student being ridiculed (un-)intentionally.

Article 5

In general: Education is not only meant to obtain a diploma, it is all about gaining as much knowledge as you need to become a critical thinking, responsible individual. Funding high-quality education is investing in the future of our society. High-quality education has a positive influence on the economical situation.

- 5.1 In order for a school student to develop him- or herself as a critical individual with an objective view on

society as a whole, it is of the greatest importance that education is impartial.

- 5.2 There must be an objective, independent, pluralistic evaluation of the content of teaching. Therefore the evaluation must be done by a representative group.
- 5.3 School students should not be deterred from education because they are financially disadvantaged. This would be in contradiction to the right to access to education (financial and socio-economic barriers).
- 5.4 To offer students the best conditions to manage themselves in the labour-market vocational training has to be closely related to the social partners. Good communication with these partners is very important. However, as modern society (and the demands at the labour-market) changes very fast, vocational training needs great flexibility. School students must have the possibility to develop their own personality to the utmost. Therefore there must be a possibility to reconsider or undo mistakes in chosen study-routes.
- 5.5 *'Tell me and I know it, show me and I remember it, let me try and I understand'* School (education) should be orientated towards real life requirements.
- 5.6 School must prepare school students for society, in all its aspects. Because of that it is necessary that not only the classical and/or (working) skills-oriented subjects are being taught, but that aspects of modern society such as inter-cultural education, social skills

and education promoting democratic participation are also included.

- 5.7 As all individuals have equal rights, they must have equal opportunities as well. School students have different qualities, interests and have - due to economic and social differences - certain deficits (in experience or education) and shortcomings. Secondary education might be the last chance to overcome them.
- 5.9 Sometimes teachers write the books they use in their teaching themselves. Because they often control the contents of the education they offer, some teachers might abuse this opportunity use such the schoolbooks so that they obtain a source of additional income.
- 5.10 Because of family responsibilities, part-time work, etc, school students must have flexible time-tables and study-schedules to arrange their course work on a satisfying and flexible basis.

Article 6

- 6.1 In a pluralistic society all groups have the right to be equally represented within the educational system. Selection on criteria other than ability and individual intelligence violates the principle of equal opportunity.
- 6.2 In order to effectuate the right to evaluate and to achieve flexibility school students must not be forced to early to choose their way in life. As broad (individual) knowledge is important for society as a whole, as many people as possible must have access to education. Education has to be generally available to anyone.

- 6.3 see 6.2
- 6.4 Disabled people and people without a handicap are equal. Education has the duty to compensate the shortcomings of disabled school students as much as possible, e.g. by providing adequate facilities.
- 6.5 There is a need for flexibility in this field to ensure that breaks in a study-career can be taken without unreasonable consequences like those mentioned in the article. This can e.g. concern women who have to take a break during their study-career because of childbirth, etc.

Article 7

- 7.1 The right to maintain one's own cultural heritage is fundamental and must be respected. Cultural diversity and the exchange between cultures are positive aspects of society. In order to avoid cultural isolation, these lessons should have a function of bridging the gaps between the autochthon and allochthon culture and promote intercultural learning. Bilingual classes should be offered when asked for and whenever administratively possible.
- 7.2 It must be taken into consideration and be respected that all humans are different. As a result of that fact school has to enable people to seek their own knowledge and experiences in order to develop their own personality.

Article 8

- 8.1 Gender equality is a human right and has to be promoted in and by the

school. In a time where there is still a difference in the way that boys and girls are being brought up, school has to fulfil a special task in this field.

- 8.2 To fulfil its task in society school has to promote the overcoming of stereotypes about sexes like e.g. *'women just being responsible for family and household while men earn the money'*.
- 8.3 Staff composition often promotes stereotypes. A gender balanced staff will contribute to the promotion of a gender balanced society. If a man and a woman are applying for the same job and are equally qualified and competent, the underrepresented gender must be preferred.

Article 9

- 9.1 Schools generally know better what they spend their budget on. Every school is different and has different requirements. Of course this article must not be abused to cut down the school budget (by the authorities and/or by the school) or to reduce quality.
- 9.2 Education has to create the ability to think independently and to develop a critical attitude and a comprehensive way of thinking towards knowledge and reality. The student should be the active centre and processor of the learning situation.
- 9.3 If school students are absent from school due to illness, his/hers education should not suffer because of it. Preventing such is a task of the school and can be done by e.g.

contact between teachers and school students concerning alternative study plans and lectures etc. at hospital or at home.

Article 10

10.1/10.2 To ensure that every student is able to concentrate and work efficiently, it is a right to have a good working environment, which includes all physical elements in school such as proper tables and chairs, adequate lighting, airconditioning and cleaning, as well as that good materials have been used for the construction of the school. The students' working environment must meet at least the same standards in this field as the ones that have been laid down in legislation for other kinds of professions in society. This in order to avoid asthma and other serious diseases caused by an inadequate working environment. It is always better to prevent physical damage to occur in the first place. High quality education requires good working conditions. Therefore, investing in the latter is an investment in society.

10.3 School students must have the right to free insurance during school time. They must also have the right to a free medical assistance when they have an accident during school activities, this including practice and excursions as part of the education. Healthcare should be provided at every school.

Article 11

11.1 Rights make no sense if people do not know of their existence. Having a right includes being informed about it.

11.2 The right to guidance is the right to have a professional guidance counsellor at school who provides the students with adequate information and advice. This is essential when the students are forced to choose where to go and what to do at a very early stage. In the short term improved guidance will avoid students from jumping around in the education-system and will offer more students the possibility to start in tertiary education. Psychological help should be available in order to overcome any mental barriers/problems and in order to provide a sound basis for education.

11.3 It is very important that student have a complete overview on what they are expected to achieve, how the education process works (including ways of testing, criteria for marks, etc) and that they know in advance what subject-matter they are expected to cover in a given period. This enables students to plan and to prioritise their work for each term.

Article 12

12.1 As the national legislation does not cover all the details of everyday school life, it is necessary that schools have internal regulations. The contents of these regulations vary, the legislation in each country accordingly. But the procedure concerning these regulations (establishment, effectuation) must follow the same democratic principles regardless of the country in question. Firstly, as stated in article 2.3., the schoolboard is the organ that makes the decisions in the school, which

means that school students will also be involved in the establishment of the regulations, which in turn will guarantee that the regulations are reasonable and that they take the students' points of view into consideration. And because the regulations are developed by all parties in the school, they will be observed more actively.

Secondly, on certain decisions concerning major changes in the articles, it may be useful to arrange a voting in the school where all members of the school community or of a specific group have the right to vote. This "decisionmaking by the school community" in the form of a referendum-like procedure can be either decisive or advisory, according to the traditions and regulations of the institution in question. However, the interpretation of the rules is almost as important as deciding on them. Too often the school students cannot count on a fair and equal treatment because the interpretation of the regulations may change from case to case and from teacher to teacher.

12.2 To avoid misunderstandings and confusion concerning the regulations, proper information on these regulations and especially in case of any changes to them, must be provided to the school students. The best way to do this is to ensure that every school student has the possibility to check the current regulations from his/her own copy.

Article 13

13.1 The areas of education that have been stated in this article are important

for creating citizens that are responsible, critical and able to communicate and socialise with other people.

13.2 The environment is an important issue for school students, now and in the future. Therefore it is important that they are aware of the fact that the environment cannot bare any further deterioration. The school must support environmental awareness of school students, both when they ask for such education, among others by carrying out an environmental protection policy at the school which supports the environmental awareness education.

Article 14

NO ARGUMENTATION REQUIRED

Chapter IV

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

The development of this first European Student Rights Charter is a first step into reviving the discussion on the democratisation of our education-systems. But as we stated before in this document, writing Charters alone does not lead towards a more democratic schoolsystem. In addition, changes will not take place overnight, but ask time.

This Charter is only the beginning of a process that will ask a lot of time and effort from all those who are involved in it. Democratisation of the schoolsystem demands a greater involvement of students in their day-to-day school life. They must realize that before they can benefit from greater openness and increased attention for their needs, problems and wishes, they should actively work with other parties within their school to reach that situation.

Furthermore, this Charter is a model for school student participation and democracy, but at school-level additional regulations, agreements and articles will have to be developed to accommodate the specific traditions and organisation of the school in question.

Introducing the principles of this Charter within the schoolsystem requires a change of thought and mentality from teachers as well. Teachers should realise that their students are capable of taking the right decisions and offering serious and constructive criticism on the schoolsystem in general and on the teaching in particular.

Teachers are often afraid that they lose control when they give more responsibility students to or when they develop a more 'personal' relationship with them.

Sometimes teachers do lose control and/or students do not always behave more responsible. However, much depends on how such increased responsibility and involvement is realised within a school.

When students on the one hand are asked to behave responsible when their conduct and their obligations towards school and the teacher is concerned but on the other hand are not taken seriously when they have criticism on the way the school functions in general and/or on the methods of teaching, then schools and teachers should not expect a serious commitment of their students. Responsibility and mutual respect require commitment from both sides.

OBESSU believes that teaching that is based upon authority and hierarchy, is nothing else but choosing the 'easy way' and is a simplification of how society works.

We hope that students, teachers, school management, parents, politicians and all those involved in the education system will start discussing the principles as laid down in this Charter. We also hope that such discussion will be based upon mutual respect and understanding.

OBESSU will develop and support any further activities in this field, both at national and at European or international level. It also plans to arrange a survey into the practice of school student participation in Europe and

in-to its consequences for the school system as a whole!

“EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT OBESSU BUT COULD NOT ASK”

INTRODUCTION

The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is Europe's only and largest school student association. It was founded in April 1975 in Dublin, Ireland and has nineteen member and six observer organisations from twenty-two European countries. All member organisations are national, representative and democratic school student associations.

OBJECTIVES

OBESSU has the objectives to:

- promote greater solidarity, cooperation and understanding between all the youth of Europe, but particularly between school students and their respective national organisations
- to put an end to all discrimination and injustice where they exist within the educational systems of European countries
- to work in cooperation with all European school student organisations and structures towards a genuine, all European school student cooperation
- to develop greater understanding among people to enable the creation of a peaceful and secure environment to facilitate the development of each individual

STRUCTURE

OBESSU is a European non-governmental youth organisation. The structure is that of an 'association of associations', a platform of national school student organisations. The

most important decision making body within the organisation is the General Assembly, which consists out of all the member-organisations. It gathers at least once a year and elects the executive-body of the organisation - the board - as well as the members of the advisory board. Furthermore the General Assembly decides upon the OBESSU workprogrammes and activity-plans.

The executive-board is elected out of candidates that have been nominated by the national member organisations and consists out of five persons. The board is charged with the day to day management of the association, the representation of OBESSU towards other structures and is responsible for the execution of the work- and activityprogrammes.

SECRETARIAT

In order to be able to function as a European organization, in 1994 OBESSU established a permanent secretariat in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The OBESSU-secretariat is the activity- and information centre of the association. The secretariat coordinates and executes the activity-programme under supervision of the board. The secretariat is run by the Secretary General. From January 1995 the OBESSU secretariat has obtained a broader basis and has been transformed into the European School Student Information Centre (ESSIC). From this centre information about secondary education and the position of school students in it will be gathered. The ESSIC will spread information through publications and through the

establishment of an on-line computer-network (to be realized in 1996).

—————ACTIVITIES—————

From 1975 OBESSU has primarily been active in the field of organizing seminars and conferences for its members and observers on a broad range of topics concerning European youth and school student.

At this moment OBESSU is working on a number of projects and activities such as access to and the democratisation of education, improving contacts with school student representations in Central and Eastern European countries, education quality, equal opportunities, school student mobility and intercultural education.

—————CO-OPERATION WITHIN EUROPE—————

At European level OBESSU is cooperating with other organizations and structures in the field of youth and education, such as the Youth Forum of the European Union, the Council of Europe, the European Student Information Bureau and - when necessary - with national governments and the Commission of the European Union.

—————WORKING METHODS—————

OBESSU tries to realize its objectives in a number of ways. Whenever a certain issue or problem within the European education system(s) becomes of such importance that a discussion at European level is required, OBESSU organizes seminars and/ or other meetings where the members- and observers can gather and define - if possible - common positions from a school student perspective. The most important principle within this process is the principle of subsidiarity.

When a common position on a certain problem or topic has been established, OBESSU will - through the spread of information and through lobbying - try to get its opinion adopted by other (European) organisations and structures.

—————WORKING LANGUAGE—————

Communication in international structures is sometimes difficult. The main working language within OBESSU is English. Therefore all official documents are published in this language. OBESSU will try to make use of more languages in the future, for instance during seminars and conferences and in its publications.

—————PUBLICATIONS—————

OBESSU has published a number of resolutions concerning important issues in the education level. The most recent resolutions concern school student 'living conditions' and 'access to further and higher education'. This European School Student Rights Charter is the most recent OBESSU publication.

Furthermore, OBESSU has been working on a European School Student Exchange Programme (ESSE), which should enable secondary students in Europe to spend a part of their secondary education abroad, in analogy to former the European ERASMUS and LINGUA programmes for the higher education level.

Finally, OBESSU publishes a newsletter titled 'On the Blackboard', with information about OBESSU activities, developments at European level and activities of the OBESSU member and observer organisations.

The following national school student associations are member of OBESSU:

AKS - Austria, SEMK - Cyprus, DGS/ LH - Denmark, FSS/ SLL - Finland, LFU - Farao-Islands, FIDL

- France, BSV - Germany, BSN/ INSI - Iceland, LSM - Italy, SOS LG - Liechtenstein, UNEL GSS - Luxembourg, LAKS - the Netherlands, NGS - Norway, CEAE-UDE - Spain, Elevorganisation i Sverige - Sweden, USO - Switzerland.

Observers of OBESSU are: ISSUE - Rep. of Ireland, USM - Macedonia, MAKOSZ - Romania

Other affiliates: EGL - Estonia, MAKK-BÖX - Hungary, SPS - Slovakia.

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