



FENPROF – FEDERAÇÃO NACIONAL DOS PROFESSORES

Sua Referência:

Nossa Referência: FP-072/2011

Data: 4-04-2011

To the Honourable Mrs. Anna
Diamantopoulou

Greek Minister of Education

Fax: **00302103443865**

Subject: **Merging and closing down of schools**

Dear Minister,

The National Federation of Teachers (FENPROF) - the largest teachers' union in Portugal - was recently informed that the Greek Ministry of Education has announced the merging of 1933 school units in both primary and secondary education. These measures have also been implemented in Portugal, with very negative impact on the quality of education, and therefore we'd like to call your attention to the Portuguese experience.

Due to the government decision to close down all primary schools with fewer than 21 pupils, more 701 schools were closed down in 2010, without taking into account the different realities of each school and the consequences of an indiscriminate closure in the desertification of the countryside.

Besides, ignoring the opinions of school communities and local authorities, in 2010 the Ministry of Education also decided to merge almost 200 preparatory and secondary schools in 84 huge "school clusters", disregarding the history and identity of these schools, their different cultures, the projects they were developing, and the mandates of their boards of direction, that had been democratically elected.

Having used the argument that the measure intended to improve the educational system, the government finally admitted that this restructuration has allowed a reduction of 5.000 teachers in the system in 2010/11. The Stability and Growth Program recently rejected by the Parliament estimated that the continuation of this process would enable the savings of around 450 million Euros over the next two years.

We don't question the need to rationalize resources, especially in times of serious economic and financial crisis, such as the one Portugal and Greece are facing. Governments have the right and the obligation to do so. But they

shouldn't do it jeopardizing the goals of the educational system. FENPROF has carried out a study on the consequences of these "school clusters" and, from the information obtained amongst teachers and headmasters, we came to the conclusion that merging schools with different histories and cultures (in some cases physically distant) into artificial "organic units" leads to dehumanized spaces and impersonal relationships, as well as to increasing conflicts, bureaucracy and centralism.

That's why FENPROF has urged the Portuguese government to make an accurate evaluation of the existing "units" before continuing with the creation of other with the same (or larger) size and complexity. And at the same time we consider that it is necessary to launch a public debate on the educational system we want for our country.

While in other countries the size of schools is being reduced to improve public education - for example, in Finland, 40% of schools have fewer than 50 students and only 3% more than 600; in New York, 20 of the largest secondary schools were replaced by 200 new units, with a maximum number of students little beyond 400; in the UK, one of the priorities of the current prime minister is the creation of smaller schools, profoundly reversing the trend in the last decade...- in Portugal schools are being closed down and merged into "clusters" with hundreds of teachers and thousands of students working in several (and sometimes distant) buildings.

Do we want schools with their own projects and identities or pedagogically weakened and unmanageable "units"? Which should our priority be - to invest in education and qualification or to reduce costs in order to make our public system cheaper?

FENPROF believes that disinvesting in education, whether in Portugal or in Greece (countries where almost everything is being mortgaged), means giving up the future of a quality educational public system. Taking this in consideration, FENPROF urges the Greek Ministry of Education to take into account the Portuguese reality and to review its own decision upon this matter of utmost importance.

Yours sincerely,



Mário Nogueira
Secretary-General