



Opening speech ECNAIS seminar

School leadership and school management in independent schools

Dear Zsuzsanna Naderi, Orsolya Dobos and Lajos Molnar, Co-chairs of the Hungarian association for independent schools [please extend our official compliments to Mr. Zoltán Maruza, State Secretary for Public Education who could not be present today but sent a text that was much appreciated]

Dear members of ECNAIS, dear principals and teachers, ladies and gentleman,

Firstly, I have to remember that we meet again in the context of war in Europe. Sometimes, February, 24th, 2022 seems a faraway date. And for the countries that do not neighbor Ukraine or Russia, the war seems not to be so present in our daily life anymore. On the one hand, this is good; our societies must not live stuck in fear; we have a duty to our children and students to educate them in hope for the future. But on the other hand, this is not good; we must not accept war as a fact and aggression as a way to govern relations between people. Therefore, I once again propose that we acknowledge the struggles and difficulties going on, but also honor those in difficulty by taking action to promote quality education for all.

Secondly, I would like to thank our Hungarian members for the hard work and good collaboration put into making this seminar a reality. For years, ECNAIS had a very dear relationship with Hungary, in the person of Zsafia Bak. When, in late September 2021, Zsafia retired, we of course got a bit nervous, as we always do when people change. Specially, very dear people. The reason is that international affairs is not always on the top of the agenda for national associations and so, when the enthusiastic leave, we sometimes lose contact with the members. This was not the case with Hungary! In early December, not even 3 months into the



ECNAIS

European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools

new team, we received an email from the Hungarian Association considering hosting an event! Thank you so much Zsuzsanna, Györgyi, and all the others for your dedication to the common cause of independent education. Your participation strengthens us all as a group.

With this, on behalf of ECNAIS, I welcome you all to the seminar “School leadership and school management in independent schools”.

For those of you who are less acquainted with ECNAIS, we are a non confessional, non political association based in Helsinki (Finland). ECNAIS was founded in 1988, by a group of educators who wanted to learn more about the challenges and the vision of each other for independent education in Europe. We unite national associations of independent schools from all countries of Europe and our vision is to promote dialogue within countries and the freedom of education for parents and educators. Today, we have gathered here 22 representants of independent schools, from 13 European countries. Once again we pledge to stand for independent education as a hallmark of free and democratic societies. Independent education represents more than 18% of the students in Europe – more than 20 million students. This is us.

And now, let me convey the importance of the theme of this seminar: School leadership and school management in independent schools. There is abundant literature on leadership and management in the education sector. There are academic journals entirely devoted to this topic. So it is important to understand that we are not pretending to be an academic organization and will not be mimicking other events. As in so many other topics, the richness of our time together is that we may debate these issues amongst people from the independent school sector.

People that have to balance education with fiscal stability; dreams with possibilities; the educators' wishes with the parents' expectations – and you all know how this may sometimes be difficult –; pedagogical matters with legal obligations. And, most important for the theme of this seminar, most of us have to find a way to recruit, retain and reform leaders. The long term sustainability of our educational projects depends on this.

And so, for the next two days we will focus on school leadership from the independent school sector perspective. To set the stage for our conversation, ECNAIS asked members for some information from each country and put it all together. Let me highlight three dimensions of this report.

Firstly, who are the school leaders? As would be expected, the concept is not univocal. Different legal and cultural environments mean different answers. The school leader may be the owner of the school, an employee of the owner, someone with mainly pedagogical tasks or mostly managerial. Some are teachers, some are not. Some teach classes (be it a small number or bigger) and others don't.

Secondly, how does one become school leader? This is one common feature amongst all countries: the school leader is appointed by the ownership of the school – a board in some cases – and almost always is someone rising from the ranks of teachers of the school. Also common is the fact that there are no real career paths for school leaders. Maybe the most vibrant market in this regard, looking at answers received, is the UK, with school heads being recruited by different schools or chains through their career. Maybe there is something to be said about this. If we want to open schools to context and to a changing world, how do we give leaders new world views and different experiences they may integrate in their leadership?



Thirdly, how is leadership different in independent and public schools? It is curious to note that all countries say it is different except The Netherlands.

As would be expected, in some way or another the difference boils down to the fact that in, independent schools, acts and consequences are closer together. In a way, innovations that work bring great rewards but if they do not, termination is just a heartbeat away. Well, maybe you will find different and more interesting insights in our memo, but these are the ones that caught my eye. Much more ideas and perspectives will be shared by our wonderful speakers, whom we thank deeply for having accepted to be with us today and tomorrow.

To end, let me share some issues we addressed at the General Meeting of ECNAIS yesterday. Firstly, on April 18th and 19th we will have our ECNAIS conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, with the theme “Building and maintaining identity in educational organizations in a rapidly changing World”. Thank you to our Bulgarian friends for hosting the event. Secondly, our November 2024 seminar will take place 14 and 15 November, in Bucharest, Romania. Thank you to our Romanian friends for hosting the event. Thirdly, we are proud to announce that ECNAIS is member of the Educational Leadership Network Europe. ELNE is a Europe-wide network of relevant and reputable European- and national-level organisations, as well as regional and local institutions, representing policymakers, practitioners, researchers and stakeholders of the education and training sector from all over Europe. This EU funded network the ELNE Network aims at enhancing collaborative school leadership in Europe. To achieve this objective, ELNE showcases existing research, practices, and social programmes that can be good examples for other institutions and organisations and provides a platform for education stakeholders` dialogue breaking existing silos. Finally, if all goes to plan, the 2nd ECNAIS Debate event will take place in April 2026.



ECNAIS

European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools

And with this I wish you an inspirational conference. And please take some extra time to enjoy your stay in the beautiful city of Budapest.

Thank you very much

Rodrigo Melo
ECNAIS Chairman

Budapest, 15th November 2023