

Allgemeiner
Schulleitungsverband
Deutschlands e.V.



Potsdam, 24th of March 2006

Speech of the President of the ASD, Walter Rossow

Dear Mrs. Erdsiek-Rave, dear Mr. Mielke, dear Mr. Westburnham, dear colleagues from over 25 countries in Europe,

I welcome you here in Potsdam in the name of the German principal organisation ASD. Please excuse that I speak to you in German. My English may be good enough to speak when I am on holiday but unfortunately not good enough to welcome you to this conference in English.

For the first time, an ESHA board meeting is held as part of an ASD-Conference. And for the first time, the president of the Conference of the German Ministers of Education speaks at an ASD-Conference.

Mrs. Erdsiek-Rave, we are glad to have you here because you show us your appreciation of school management and principals – in Germany and in the many other European countries represented here.

Dear European colleagues, this morning you had the opportunity to visit schools. You hopefully gained insight on schools in Brandenburg and maybe on the school system in this German state. But so far, you haven't heard anything about the German school system as a whole. This is difficult indeed because we don't have a standardized and centralized system.

Dear colleagues, I will explain this special system to our European guests by taking you back in history. As you know, after World War II, the three victorious allies (the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Soviet Union) met at Cecilienhof Palace in Potsdam not far from here in Juli 1945. In the Potsdam Agreement, the allies decided that Germany was going to have a federal, decentralized structure. This federal structure was laid down in our Constitution.

In the years from 1949 to 1990 Germany was a divided country. In the western part and in Berlin the states developed their own, individual educational policy while the eastern German educational system was centralized. As I see it, we missed the opportunity to unify the good aspects of both systems at reunification in 1990. You can see the effects of our federal system right here: among the 25 delegates from Europe you won't find a German representative, but the ASD-delegates from 15 German states. But let me give you two more examples to show the effects of federalism in Germany: Once every six months Germany and France meet and thus, also the ministers of education of both

countries. During the meetings, the ministers can discuss every educational aspect besides school. The French minister of education is responsible for French schools, the German minister lacks this authority.

The spelling reform is another example. In 1996 there were strong ambitions to make a change, but today we have taken almost everything back. This month, the German ministers of education have agreed on the least common denominator.

Surely we could also have a look at the little Italian town named PISA which is a World Heritage Site but has only little to do with education. Every three years, Germany anxiously awaits the results of this international competition. These results for the whole of the country though don't seem half as important as the ranking of the German states.

So much, dear colleagues, about the characteristics of our federal system. But let me get back to the objectives of this conference of ESHA and ASD. In a time where education of young people is becoming increasingly important, it is more than necessary that the locally responsible decision makers exchange their ideas and problems. And these decision makers, dear colleagues, work in the school managements – not only in Germany but in all countries represented here. And let me add that I am not only talking about principals but also about vice principals. To be successful we need applicants who are experienced teachers. In addition to a professional recruitment process we need trainings that really prepare for the job and also training on the job. With measures like these, we can say: “A school is only as good as its school management.” or: “We can't have good schools without good school managements!”

The job description of school management has to be the basis on which qualified training is developed. It is important that the job description acknowledges that being in the school management doesn't merely mean being a teacher with some administrative responsibility. Those who take on responsibility have a different and new position. Many ministers of education in Germany accept this but they have a hard time explaining this to the other members of their cabinet. Maybe - no - surely something would change if we had a clear job description for school management written down.

This might make it easier to agree on working time which principals can structure independently. It is not enough to talk about “management time”. School management needs enough time to take care of quality development and quality assurance at an independent school. This cannot be compensated – as some self-proclaimed experts, primarily ministers of finance, think – by appointing economic assistants. In this case we need to have a look at other European countries like Belgium, France, Italy or Denmark.

Dear Mrs. Erdsiek-Rave, I hope that your attendance at this Conference will spark an effective cooperation between the Conference of the German Ministers of Education and the ASD which again will lead to an agreement on the job description, on the training, on working time, on the legal status and most importantly on equal treatment of school managements in all sixteen German states.

What Neil Armstrong said after he had landed on the moon in 1969 can be applied to our situation. A small step for you, Mrs. Erdsiek-Rave, and for your colleagues would be a large step for school management in Germany.

Dear colleagues, thank you for your attention. I hope you enjoy your stay in Postdam. Now the President of the Conference of the German Ministers of Education, Ute Erdsiek-Rave will speak to us.

Translated by Jahel Mielke