Executive Summary

Interim Evaluation of the Action COMENIUS of the
SOCRATES II Programme in Germany

Final Report

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1. Objectives and Methods of the COMENIUS Evaluation Study

1.1 The Mandate for the National Evaluation

SOCRATES, the Action Programme of the European Communities in the field of education, was decided by the Council and the European Parliament (Council Decision No. 819/95/EC) in March 1995 for a phase of five years (from 1 January 1995 to 31 December 1999). With this decision an overarching Programme was created which included all activities in the field of general and higher education. The Programme integrated a number of previously individual support Programmes of the EU some of which were targeted to specific sectors of education.

On 24 January 2000, the European Parliament and the Council decided (Council Decision No. 253/2000/EC) to support a second phase of the SOCRATES Programme (SOCRATES II). SOCRATES II started on 1 January 2000 and will end on 31 December 2006. Thus, it is two years longer than SOCRATES I. SOCRATES II has an overall budget of 1.85 billion Euros.

SOCRATES II consists of altogether eight Actions, three of which are targeted to individual sectors of the education system: school education (COMENIUS), higher education (ERASMUS), and Adult Education / Lifelong Learning (GRUNDTVIG). Within the framework of these Actions financial support is provided for the exchange and mobility of individuals, for transnational cooperation projects of institutions, and for cooperation within partnerships and networks. Two other Actions promote and support the learning of foreign languages (LINGUA) and the use of new information and communication technologies in education (MINERVA). SOCRATES II is complemented by three further Actions – Observation and Innovation, Joint Actions (with other Community Programmes), and Accompanying Measures - providing financial support for analyses, compilation of information and reference material, the creation of synergy effects with other European Programmes, dissemination of best practice, etc.

Article 14 of the Decision of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a second phase of SOCRATES determines the regular monitoring and evaluation of the Programme by the European Commission (para. 1 and 2) „in cooperation with the Member States.“ For this purpose the „Member States shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions … an interim evaluation report on the results achieved and on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the implementation of this programme by 30 June 2004, …“ (para. 3). Furthermore, paragraph 2 defines the aims of the evaluation: “This evaluation is intended to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of actions implemented with regard to the objectives referred to in Article 2. It will also look at the impact of the programme as a whole.”
In order to submit the national interim report about the implementation and evaluation of the SOCRATES II Programme in Germany, the Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Culture of the German States has published a call for proposals at the beginning of May 2002 inviting offers to carry out the external interim evaluation of those parts of the SOCRATES II Programme supporting activities in the field of general and vocational schools.

The call for proposals formulated the following objectives for the evaluation study: „The evaluation study shall analyse the relationship between the effects of the Programme and the aims of the COMENIUS Action and answer the question whether the activities supported in the framework of the COMENIUS Action are compatible with the needs of the target groups. At the same time the study shall analyse the efficiency of the Programme and identify possible problems of the Programme and its administration and implementation in Germany“ (Call for Proposal published in the weekly DIE ZEIT from 8 May 2002).

1.2 Organisation and Approach

The evaluation of the COMENIUS Action as part of the SOCRATES II Programme was carried out jointly by three institutions: by the Wittenberg Institute for Research on Higher Education (HoF Wittenberg), by the Centre for Research on Schools and Issues of Teacher Training (ZSL), both linked to Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, and by the Association of Empirical Studies (GES) in Kassel. HoF Wittenberg was tenderer and coordinated the various parts of which the evaluation study is composed. The three institutions involved had a close and continuous cooperation throughout the duration of the study.

The team of evaluators was composed of the following individuals: Barbara M. Kehm (HoF Wittenberg), Friedhelm Maiworm (GES Kassel), Heiko Kastner, Sascha Richter and Hartmut Wenzel (ZSL Halle).

The duration of the evaluation study was 15 months. Included in the study were only those parts of the COMENIUS Action for which the Pedagogical Exchange Service (PAD) is responsible as the German National Agency, i.e. all public schools in the field of general education and vocational training. COMENIUS supported activities in the field of vocational training outside schools were excluded from this study. However, these latter activities were included in another evaluation study commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

The COMENIUS Action of the SOCRATES II Programme is composed of a variety of measures which have been analysed in detail. Within the framework of COMENIUS 1 three different types of school partnerships are supported: School Projects, Language Projects and School Development Projects. Within the framework of COMENIUS 2 various activities in the field of training of school education staff are supported, among them European Cooperation Projects (COMENIUS 2.1), a measure into which the Action LINGUA A has been integrated which was supported under SOCRATES I; Language Assistantships for future or young teachers of foreign languages (COMENIUS 2.2a), a measure into which the SOCRATES I
Action LINGUA C was integrated; and the participation of school education staff in in-service training courses (COMENIUS 2.2c), an activity into which the SOCRATES I Action LINGUA B was integrated. Another measure of COMENIUS supporting mobility of future teachers in initial teacher training (COMENIUS 2.2b) was not included in this evaluation study because no German participation took place. Finally, in the framework of COMENIUS 3 networks of various organisations and institutions in the school sector are supported which work on themes of common interest. The networks were included in the evaluation study.

1.3 Main Aims and Questions

The COMENIUS evaluation study was supposed to provide answers to a number of questions focused in particular on the aims and effects of the COMENIUS Action in the school sector. Apart from the efficiency of the Action and possible problems with its implementation in Germany, the needs of the COMENIUS target groups were to be addressed in the framework of the study as well. As COMENIUS was to be evaluated in the context of the SOCRATES II Programme as a whole, the analysis of the aims and effects of the Action was carried out on the basis of various dimensions pertaining to the overall questions.

The aims of COMENIUS were divided into four dimensions: (a) the relationship between objectives and results; (b) the relationship between input and output; (c) problems and solutions; (d) inclusion of target groups.

The effects of COMENIUS were divided into three dimensions: (a) effects on participating individuals; (b) effects on participating institutions and organisations; (c) effects on the German school system.

1.4 The Design of the Study

The evaluation was based on a broad spectrum of approaches to collect information and data. The evaluators used existing resources as much as possible but also carried out their own surveys. Essentially four methods were used:

- Analysis of existing data bases, documents and files (applications, project reports, etc.);
- Interviews with relevant actors and participants partially combined with local visits in selected institutions;
- Written questionnaires sent to various target groups or groups of participants (including a reminder after eight weeks to secure a high reponse rate);
- Case studies of COMENIUS School Partnerships at ten selected schools;
- Workshop with participants to validate results of the evaluation.

All COMENIUS activities were evaluated by paying particular attention to seven thematic issues which were derived from indicators developed jointly by the European Commission and an expert working group (cf. SOC/COM/01/0151 from 17 May 2001, pp. 2-6) and also
took into account the results and recommendation of the evaluation of the first phase of the SOCRATES Programme.

(1) The German participation in the various types of activities supported under COMENIUS. This included questions of an appropriate German representation and about the relevance of the activities for various types of schools and for the German school system as a whole.

(2) The configuration of projects, cooperations and networks. This included analyses of the geographical and sectoral configuration as well as the representation of various types of schools.

(3) Aims of the projects and motives for participation. This included an analysis of the motives and project aims in terms of their correspondence with the aims of the COMENIUS Action.

(4) Conditions and experiences during the project. An analysis of the framework conditions for carrying out the activities (funding, support, administration, etc.), the quality of cooperation, the commitment of the participants, and the bureaucratic expense.

(5) Implementation of the project. Participants were asked whether they had achieved their project aims or whether there were changes of project aims and about the types of products, results and outcomes achieved or expected.

(6) Scope and effects of the projects: The evaluation analysed the scope of project results and outcomes beyond the immediate beneficiaries, the feedback of participants, the contribution and potential of results for dissemination, innovation and quality improvement in school education, and assessed activities to evaluate the quality of results and products.

(7) Measures to disseminate results: Analysis of the questions whether project results have a potential for transfer and whether dissemination of results takes place.

In order to analyse the effects of the COMENIUS Action on the German school system as a whole four overarching questions were included in the study. It was expected that answers to these questions would provide indicators for innovation and further development of the COMENIUS Action itself. For this part of the study expertise and ideas were important of relevant persons responsible for the Programme within the German States and in the National Agency pertaining to possible directions of development of the COMENIUS Action.

(1) What are the chances of the COMENIUS Action to affect the school system? Are the various activities for which support is provided sufficiently large and innovative to have an effect on existing structures and traditions or to trigger new developments or are they islands and niches?

(2) What are the effects of the mixture of centralised and decentralised activities in terms of coherence of the COMENIUS Action? Are there national or regional adaptations? Do the aims of the SOCRATES Programme and the COMENIUS Action complement educational policy or are there contradictions?
(3) Has the status of COMENIUS changed due to changes in societal contexts? Have the results of the PISA Study for Germany triggered a change in the framework conditions for the implementation of the COMENIUS Action?

(4) What are the possible innovative functions of COMENIUS in the future? Are there COMENIUS measures in which a new focus of the Action is inherent? Should certain activities substituted by something else due to the fact that they have become routines or due to their lack of success?

2. Steering and Administration of the COMENIUS Action in Germany

Steering and administration of the COMENIUS Action in Germany is essentially carried out on three levels: by the representatives of the German States in the SOCRATES Committee and the sub-committee for schools, by the persons responsible for SOCRATES in the Ministry for Education and Culture in each of the 16 German States (henceforth called SOCRATES representatives of the State), and by the Pedagogical Exchange Service as the National Agency for COMENIUS. Some of the German States have delegated the responsibility for the administration and implementation of individual measures of the COMENIUS Action to local or regional authorities or special institutes for in-service training of teachers and curriculum development. Furthermore, a group of about 70 COMENIUS moderators – typically school teachers with considerable COMENIUS experience – has been established for the promotion of and information about COMENIUS in schools. Applications of schools or individual teaching staff to participate in one of the various COMENIUS activities have to be submitted via the official channels. The SOCRATES representatives of the States are responsible for a review and quality check of all applications for school partnerships coming from the schools of their respective State. This is basically a well functioning structure. At the same time, however, it has some gaps and deficits due to a heavy workload of the responsible political actors (i.e. the SOCRATES representatives of the States), to a certain amount of scepticism vis-à-vis the compatibility of European Programmes in the field of education with the cultural and educational autonomy of the German States, and a dominance of other political issues in the school policies of the German States. Only a small minority of the German States actually has developed an explicit policy and strategy on issues of internationalisation of schools in general and the implementation of COMENIUS in particular.

The evaluators found a high degree of communication and a good quality of cooperation as regards the necessary coordination between the responsible actors on the federal and the State level. The work of the National Agency for COMENIUS, Pedagogical Exchange Service (PAD), is very positively assessed by all individuals involved in COMENIUS. In contrast, the SOCRATES representatives of the States sometimes lack support within their own Ministries. Almost all of them have additional work tasks and responsibilities apart from COMENIUS and have only little time for COMENIUS. Vis-à-vis the Federal Government and the European Commission the primary principle is that the interests of the German States
are represented by the States themselves. Here and there, this leads to a decisive drawing of boundaries. For example, the selection criteria for the review of applications are agreed upon by all States but there is no coordination concerning quality control of applications among the States.

The status of COMENIUS in the school policies of the German States varies from relatively high to lamentably low. Most of the States do not only lack an explicit policy and strategy for the utilisation of COMENIUS for their own school policy but some of them do not even recognize existing leeway for supporting their own policy agendas with the help of COMENIUS. In most cases the States have two priorities: to spend ‘their’ COMENIUS budget¹ and to protect their autonomy in cultural and educational affairs. Beyond that, the evaluation showed that there are three overarching aims playing a role – sometimes more, sometimes less decisive - in the implementation and utilisation of the COMENIUS Action in the German States: (a) to promote and support foreign language learning, in particular in primary schools; (b) to introduce a European dimension in school instruction by emphasising interdisciplinary learning and the development of intercultural competences; (c) to reduce xenophobia and to promote more tolerance.

The promotion of and information about COMENIUS as well as advice for applicants is provided in a multitude of ways (mass publication and distribution of brochures, information in official bulletins and other publications as well as via the internet, events and information days, school visits by COMENIUS moderators, individual advice per telephone or in person, etc.). Nevertheless, quite a few of the German States have reduced COMENIUS promotion as soon as there were enough applications to exhaust their available COMENIUS budget. The reasoning was that the rejection rate should not be unnecessarily high so that not too many applicants would be disappointed. At the same time the SOCRATES representatives of the States argued that they did not want to increase their workload too much by having to review and select too many applications. Furthermore, the evaluators found some gaps in the flow of information: information which is passed on through official channels does not always reach the schools or those to whom it is directed; COMENIUS is only rarely made a topic in official meetings of heads of schools.

The selection of applications in the individual States is restricted to the available budget. The key for its distribution ("Koenigsteiner Key") serves as an instrument which tends to prevent competitive quality assessment among the States. In 2003, for the first time since the beginning of SOCRATES II, the number of applications exceeded the available budget. However, even in this case the "Koenigsteiner Key" will remain in force.

In terms of steering of COMENIUS in the German States the evaluators noted three areas of problems. First, there is a lack of political acceptance of COMENIUS by the school policy of some of the States. This leads to the fact that only a minority of the States provide additional funds for co-financing of COMENIUS activities (e.g. from regional or city partnerships or from other support programmes of the State for the school sector). Thus, synergy effects remain

¹ The available COMENIUS budget for Germany is distributed among the German States according to the number of inhabitants and the proportion of pupils among the population. The criteria and weightings are laid down in the “Koenigsteiner Key”.

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weak and unclear. Second, there are complaints about the high level of regulation from the European Commission with regard to applications, forms, reporting and justifying the budget as well as long and complicated official channels on the level of the States. Third, there is an insufficient transparency of communication flows due to the hierarchical structure of the German school system.

With regard to the potential effects of COMENIUS on the school system as a whole, the evaluators found a structurally secured (e.g. via official channels) vigilance vis-à-vis any interference into the autonomy of the German States in cultural and educational affairs, although a concrete interference into this autonomy was not always perceptible. The German COMENIUS budget for the decentralised measures was completely spent for the first time in 2003 but it is too small for the size of the German school system to achieve a ‘critical mass’ and with it a potential for impacts on the system as a whole. In addition, the school policy of the States does not provide enough strategic impulses for a targeted utilisation of the COMENIUS Action.

Apart from a few exceptions, political actors said that the results of the PISA Study for Germany had no impact on the implementation of COMENIUS in Germany. However, they stated that there is an increased interest of schools and policy makers to learn from other countries and their respective school practice. Still, the consequences that have been or will be drawn in Germany tend to prioritise the definition of national standards in individual school subjects and neglect an opening of the school system for increased international cooperation.

3. COMENIUS 1: School Partnerships

3.1 German Participation in COMENIUS School Partnerships

During the time frame covered by the evaluation (2000/01 to 2002/03), the number of contracts for school partnership projects clearly decreased at first from 1,443 in 2000/01 to 1,144 in 2001/02. For 2002/03 a slight increase can be noted to 1,175 projects. In each of these years more than four fifth of all contracts for school partnerships were issued for school projects.

The decrease in the number of school partnerships which were supported under COMENIUS can be explained by the fact that despite an only slight increase of the COMENIUS 1 budget from 6,174,710 € in 2000/01 to 6,824,925 € in 2001/02 and to 7,148,824 € in 2002/03, the financial support for the individual school participating in a project has been raised markedly from 2001/02 onwards. Although the standard grant for material resources was reduced from about 1,900 € on average in 2000/01 to 1,300 € in 2001/02, the support of mobility activities and for expenses incurred during travel abroad was increased and has led to an overall increase in accepted project costs of almost 50 percent, from about 4,000 € in 2000/01 to 5,800 € in 2001/02 on average. In consequence this led to a decrease in the number of
projects which could be supported. However, in the end only three quarters of the accepted project budget were actually spent so that in the two years analysed by the evaluators considerable funds had to be paid back to Brussels which would have made it possible to support 400 to 500 additional school partnerships in Germany.

In the time frame covered by the evaluation, altogether 2,474 school partnerships were supported under COMENIUS: 2,084 school projects, 281 language projects, and 109 school development projects. The projects were carried out in 2,188 German schools of which every tenth school was involved in several school partnerships.

In relation to the relative proportion of the various types of schools in Germany, secondary schools (about 30% of all German schools) are clearly overrepresented in COMENIUS school partnerships (53%). The participation of primary schools (about 45% of all German schools) in COMENIUS school partnerships is relatively low (24%). Equally underrepresented are vocational and technical schools (10%) which have a proportion of about 15 percent of all German schools.

Because of the fact that the COMENIUS budget is distributed among the German States according to the „Koenigsteiner Key“ it is not surprising that involvement in school partnerships is distributed accordingly. Divergence from this distribution, for example an over-proportional participation of schools located in the States of Brandenburg and Hesse, are either due to an redistribution of COMENIUS funds which had not been spent in other States to those States which are particularly active or are the result of different costs per partnership in individual States.

Currently about two percent of German schools participate annually in a COMENIUS school partnership. Because projects are supported for several years, only about 30 to 40 percent of the contracts signed each year can be given schools newly applying for COMENIUS funding. Theoretically about 0.6 to 0.8 percent of all German schools are thus given the opportunity to participate in COMENIUS 1 projects.

3.2 Country Configuration of the Projects

In the framework of COMENIUS school partnerships, German schools have cooperated with schools from all countries eligible to participate in SOCRATES. They cooperated particularly often with schools from Italy (38% of the school partnerships), from the United Kingdom (31%), from France (30%), from Spain (25%), and from Poland (20%).

Cooperation with schools from Central and Eastern Europe has increased continuously during the time frame covered by the evaluation. This result reflects an increasing opening up of the SOCRATES Programme for countries from this region on the one hand and can be interpreted as an indicator for the increasing and reciprocal interest of German and Central and Eastern European schools to cooperate with each other on the other hand.

German schools are particularly active in taking over the role of project coordinator. Although they only make up about one quarter of all participants in school projects and school
development projects, German schools have taken over a coordinating role in 44 percent of the projects.

3.3 Themes and Aims of the Projects

COMENIUS school partnerships work on a multitude of themes. On average the schools have named five subjects in their project applications which were to be included in the project work. Geography (56%), foreign languages (54%), history (47%), mother tongue (44%), new technologies (43%), and arts and artisan crafts (36%) were named particularly often.

In about two thirds of the schools involved in COMENIUS school partnerships the evaluators found concrete activities with respect to the COMENIUS priorities. Often several of these priorities were taken into account at the same time. Frequently these were activities to promote an intercultural education and to fight xenophobia and racism (54%), followed by activities to promote gender equality (27%), to promote the participation of pupils with socio-economic disadvantages (21), and the participation of pupils with special pedagogical needs (18%). The integration of pupils from minority groups or the promotion of participation of pupils with handicaps was an issue at approximately every tenth school.

3.4 Conditions and Experiences during the Project

In the majority of schools only the head of the school and the teaching staff are involved in formulating the COMENIUS plan. One quarter of the schools also involved their pupils. Representatives of parents’ associations and societies or associations of the friends of a school hardly play a role. In the debate about the future role of the COMENIUS plan it is necessary to take into account that strategies for the internationalisation of a school only make sense if there is a long-term perspective. But the sustainability of international cooperation activities is not guaranteed by COMENIUS alone. On the contrary, the priorities of the German States are much rather targeted to the support of as many schools as possible than to the continuous support of schools already active in COMENIUS. In this context, the COMENIUS plan does not make sense any longer.

On average, the weekly expense of time devoted by all teaching staff involved in a school partnership is declared as amounting to 9.3 hours whereby 6.4 hours are devoted to actual project work and 2.9 hours to project administration.

About three quarters of the schools support the participation in a COMENIUS school partnership by providing material resources and the use of a telephone as well as (limited) access to secretarial work. Only about every third of the respondents participating in the survey which was carried out by the evaluators reported a reduction of their regular teaching load. In the East German States a reduction of the teaching load is granted more frequently than in the West German States (in 44% percent of schools as compared to 30%).

87.2 percent of the costs incurred for participating in a COMENIUS school partnership are covered by the COMENIUS support. To a small extent school funds (4.2 percent of the costs) and contributions of parents (4.1% of the costs) are also used to cover the costs.
Apart from a few exceptions all schools have followed the COMENIUS guidelines according to which the project activities are supposed to be carried out within the regular teaching hours, to include several classes, and to be designed in an interdisciplinary way. Equally realised was the demand to include instruction in the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT) in addition to subject related and social competences.

In about half of the school partnerships more than one language is used for communication among the participating schools. Altogether four out of five respondents responsible for the project reported that English was used as the language of communication within the project. In about half of the school partnerships also German is used as the language of communication and in every fourth project French is used as a joint language of communication. Other languages, for example Spanish or Italian, are used in about every sixth project. Additional foreign language instruction for participants in the project is offered almost exclusively at schools for pupils with special needs and at primary schools.

Almost 90 percent of the German schools have visited their partner schools abroad in 2001/02 and two thirds have invited their partners from abroad to project meetings in Germany. Apart from teaching staff also pupils participated in about one third of the project meetings abroad. On average, the German delegation consisted of two to three teachers and one or two pupils. More than four pupils participated in every tenth project meeting abroad.

In general, cooperation with foreign partner schools works well. Serious problems – if at all – arise from failure to keep to agreed meetings or dates by partner schools (24%), from differences in expectations among partners as regards cooperation (16%), and from changing contact persons (12%). Only every tenth school reported communication problems due to deficits in the knowledge of foreign languages by German or foreign participants.

With respect to the SOCRATES Programme and its guidelines, the problem named most frequently was the late information about acceptance of the project (13%). In particular schools which started a COMENIUS school partnership in 2001/02 felt that the time between application and information of acceptance was too long (18%).

3.5 Implementation of the Projects

In 2001/02 the majority of the COMENIUS school partnerships was able to realise their project plans without extensive changes of the original application. Only every fourth school had to adapt the aims and the schedule of the project to new conditions due to a variety of internal and external problems.

A great number of products were achieved in the framework of COMENIUS school partnerships supported in 2001/02. The evaluators found particularly often photo documentations (in 55% percent of the projects), websites (45%), videos (42%), CD-ROMs (40%), project readers (37%), teaching and learning material (29%), and powerpoint presentations (21%). Interestingly projects which were only at the end of their first year of COMENIUS support had already equally often achieved a visible product as projects which were in their third year of support.
3.6 Scope and Effects of the Projects

A clear increase in their cognitive, social, and instrumental competences is noted among pupils as a result of participation in a COMENIUS project. Apart from an increased interest in and additional knowledge about the partner countries, a clear majority of the teaching staff responsible for the project also saw positive effects on the motivation of participating pupils, an improvement of their ability for teamwork, more initiative and independence and an increase in their subject related knowledge. Teachers judged the development of foreign language competences among participating pupils with more reserve. Only slightly less than half of the teaching staff saw clear progress in this respect which could be attributed to the participation of the pupils in the project.

The outcomes for pupils were judged particularly positive in language projects. Schools participating in language projects noted more often than schools involved in other types of school partnerships a significant improvement of cognitive as well as social competences in the pupils. It is possible to assume that the above average outcomes are also a result of the obligatory mobility of pupils in language projects. Schools for pupils with special pedagogical needs are, however, especially reserved concerning the outcomes for pupils participating in COMENIUS projects.

Teaching staff responsible for a COMENIUS project judge their involvement as a very enriching experience. Nine out of ten participants reported a considerable increase in knowledge about the school systems of other countries, an extension of their knowledge about subjects which they normally do not teach, or the opportunity to get into intensive contacts with colleagues from other countries. Three quarters of the teaching staff emphasised that the reflection of their own teaching methods and an increased motivation for their work were important personal gains resulting from involvement in the school partnership. Two out of three teachers reported an increase in their foreign language competences and extensive new knowledge in their own subject as well as in teaching methods and pedagogical concepts.

Teachers involved in school development projects judge the outcomes for themselves particularly positive. In comparison, teachers involved in language projects judge the outcome for themselves with more reserve. Overall it can be said that the majority of teaching staff is being compensated in a multitude of ways for the extra work resulting from participation in a COMENIUS school partnership.

As a rule the joint work on a specific theme leads to positive outcomes for participating teachers and pupils. Effects on teaching and the school as a whole going beyond the projects are however less regular. It is therefore not surprising that the schools emphasised dominantly those aspects which are relatively close to the project or do not interfere in the organisation and the teaching provision of the individual school.

The majority of the schools noted positive effects in terms of introducing a European dimension into teaching and learning (80%), emphasising the profile of the school (72%),
strengthening transdisciplinary work (69%), improving the image and attractiveness of the school (61%), and an increased utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICT) (55%). Comparatively less often the evaluators noted reports about taking over teaching methods (35%) or teaching material (29%) from foreign partners or a change of school regulations or in the organisation of the school (14%). It can be assumed that especially those effects which were named most frequently will disappear again once the COMENIUS school partnership has come to an end.

Overall, teachers who are coordinating or have coordinated a COMENIUS project at their school are satisfied with the results: 36 percent of teachers participating in the survey of the evaluation team were very satisfied, 50 percent were satisfied, eleven percent answered the respective question neither positively nor negatively, and only three percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Similarly positive were the answers to such a question in the reports which the schools had to submit to the PAD.

When asked about the results of the PISA study, more than two thirds of the teachers responsible for the COMENIUS projects were of the view that COMENIUS projects could contribute to an improvement of the education at German schools and to a raise in the level of performance among pupils.

3.7 Measures to Disseminate Results and Project Evaluation

In 2001/02 almost all schools involved in COMENIUS school partnerships developed activities to disseminate their project experiences and results. Particularly frequent were exhibitions (82%) and events (81%) within the school community. Furthermore, three out of four project were able to publish one or more articles in the local press. Every third school partnership also organised events for the interested public outside the immediate school community or mailed the project results to third parties.

The COMENIUS guidelines include the demand that all schools participating in the projects monitor and evaluate their transnational project work. This demand was followed by 85 percent of the German schools. As a rule, the self-evaluation of the projects takes place in a rather informal and unstructured form within the framework of reflective discussions among project participants. Only a few school partnerships used written questionnaires for pupils (15%) or teachers (7%). Approximately every twentieth school partnership was systematically and externally evaluated in a professional way.

4. COMENIUS 2: Training of School Education Staff

4.1 European Cooperation Projects for the Training of School Education Staff

German participation in European cooperation projects for the training of school education staff can be characterised as altogether appropriate. A comparative view at participation by
country in 2000/01 shows that Germany had the fourth rank on average and even managed to climb up to second rank in the following two years.

The country configuration within projects under German coordination is approximately the same as the European average. The most important partner countries are Spain, Austria, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

There is a particularly large proportion of higher education institutions participating in COMENIUS 2.1 projects, followed by adult and continuing education institutions and local or regional authorities. This is not surprising because these are the main providers of initial teacher training and in-service training for teaching staff. It should be emphasised in a positive way that apart from these „professional“ organisations numerous other associations and organisations also participate in this measure of the COMENIUS Action.

Projects with German participation cover an altogether broad spectrum of themes. Although there were considerably fewer projects supported in 2001/02, the diversity of themes was not reduced. However, there was a shift in terms of the thematic focus due to which the priorities “intercultural education” and “integration of pupils with special needs” moved into the background in favour of the priorities “development of teaching”, “bilingual instruction”, and “foreign language learning in primary schools”.

Projects with German participation are addressed to teachers from all types of schools, teacher trainers from a variety of institutional backgrounds, heads of schools, and other types of school education staff. This reflects the target groups which the COMENIUS Action 2.1 wants to address.

When the current COMENIUS Action 2.1 was formed by incorporating former measures of the LINGUA Action there was hope that this would lead to positive effects in terms of a larger thematic scope of the projects for the education of children of migrant workers, occupational travellers, gypsies and travellers, for intercultural education, and for the promotion of foreign language learning in initial teacher training. These areas should receive more attention in the future2 because the expectations have only been partially fulfilled so far. In general, it can be noted that the thematic scope of the previous measures (i.e. in SOCRATES I) is also reflected in COMENIUS 2.1 under SOCRATES II, however, at a clearly lower quantitative level.

In the course of the years, the range of products which the projects aspire to was not reduced. An emphasis is put on the development of in-service training courses, websites, a variety of publications, teaching and continuing education material. Thus, a solid base is created for the dissemination of project results. However, the project compendium does not explicitly point to the fact that in-service training courses developed in the framework of COMENIUS 2.1 projects will subsequently be included in the COMENIUS & GRUNDTVIG Catalogue of European in-service training courses. Thus, an important opportunity for dissemination is lost.

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2 Cf. List of priorities of the European Commission in the guidelines for applicants for the application round 2000.
Although all actors participating in the projects report about strategies intended to serve the dissemination of their project results, it remains mostly unclear whether these strategies are suitable to reach a broad circle of recipients. National transmission of results is still very limited since results are not centrally collected and archived and only little information is available concerning access to the results.

Projects with German participation are mostly based on established frameworks of cooperation. Typically partners who are inexperienced in European activities are only included in the projects when they have a specific expertise which is valuable for the project work. Predominantly the projects are conceived in cooperation with known and trusted partners. Thus, the circle of participants can only become larger if project partners have gained sufficient skills to write an application themselves in a future round of applications.

Generally the application procedure is characterised as requiring much energy and being too extensive and complicated. Participants in the projects have often requested a simplification.

Within the institutions COMENIUS 2.1 projects either play an integrative or an additive role. In those cases in which the projects are an integrated part of the institution's regular business the individuals involved in the project work clearly reported a lesser workload. However, all participating individuals invest additional private time to carry out the work for the project. The institutions themselves usually attribute considerable value and importance to the fact that they are involved in a COMENIUS 2.1 project and mostly support the actual project work in a multitude of ways.

The motivation of the actors to participate in or to initiate a European cooperation project for the training of school education staff results predominantly from the fact that the projects contribute to an individual and institutional professionalisation.

The quality of cooperation within the project partnership is generally judged as good. Within this context, meetings of the project partners play an important role and are regarded as effective and constructive elements of the project work. Sometimes there are problems to keep a steady flow of communication in between these meetings.

Cooperation with the National Agency, the PAD, and with the Technical Assistance Office (TAO) in Brussels is judged positively by the actors with regard to issues related to the theme and the management of the project. Participants valued in particular the training and advice sessions for applicants organised by the TAO in Brussels. The most serious problem in the cooperation with Brussels is the extreme unreliability of the European Commission in keeping to their own deadlines. Coordinators complained about late information concerning the acceptance of their application and delayed transfer of project funds. The whole phase between submitting the application and receiving the first rate of support is deemed as extremely difficult to handle. Especially smaller institutions have a hard time to bridge this phase. It is necessary that the European Commission keeps to the deadlines or that regulations are introduced which enable according shifts in the workplans and schedules of the projects.
Problems within the project partnerships are usually due to cultural differences or leaving of a partner. Mostly the project partners are able to solve such difficulties.

Proposals for changes of the COMENIUS Action or parts of it were dominantly directed to issues of less bureaucracy and a higher degree of transparency concerning the decision making processes of the European Commission.

The effects of participating in a European cooperation project for the individuals are increases in their professional and subject related competences, for the institutions it is an improvement in their image. All actors confirm that COMENIUS contributes to a strengthening of the European dimension in their educational provisions but the degree varies with the size of the institution. Especially in big institutions the effects tend to be isolated.

Quite often the individuals involved in the projects wanted better support and advice in the process of writing an application and providing a balance-sheet for the project funds. The PAD actually offers such support but it seems that this is not common knowledge.

4.2 COMENIUS Language Assistantships

On the basis of data generated by the evaluators, it can be said that the assistantships for future foreign language teachers are a well functioning part of the COMENIUS Action. Satisfaction with the stay at a school abroad is high. Almost 53 percent of the language assistants are overall very satisfied with their COMENIUS supported stay abroad and 33.7 percent are satisfied. Such a positive assessment of more than 85 percent of the respondents to the evaluators’ questionnaire indicates the quality of this measure to which not only the assistants themselves contribute but also the staff at the host school. In addition, the administrative framework created by the PAD contributes to the success as well. Overall, only relatively few problems were found in the implementation of this measure of the COMENIUS Action. Mostly assistantships enable good practical experiences at the host school abroad, thus fulfilling the expectations of the future foreign language teachers participating in COMENIUS 2.2.b in terms of a broad increase in experience. The language assistants themselves are usually well prepared before they embark on their stay abroad.

Within the time frame covered by the evaluation, the number of German COMENIUS language assistants increased from 105 in 2000/01 to about 150 in 2001/02 and 2002/03. The distribution of funds to support language assistantships over the German States again follows the “Koenigsteiner Key” and is balanced accordingly. The most favourite host countries of German language assistants are Spain, the United Kingdom, France, and Sweden. Noteworthy is the gradual decrease of language assistantships in the United Kingdom and a gradual increase of Central and Eastern European host countries.

A COMENIUS supported language assistantship is predominantly taken up by women in initial teacher training at universities. Every second of the German language assistants is at the end of her first half of the degree programme or at the beginning of the second half. Further 40 percent go abroad after having successfully completed the first state examination.
for teacher training. The schools hosting German language assistants are predominantly general or vocational secondary schools and primary schools.

More than two thirds of the teaching carried out by German language assistants at their host schools abroad takes place in German. All language assistants have the opportunity to teach their own language or their mother tongue. In addition, the English language has a considerable importance in teaching abroad.

The most important reasons for the decision to take up a language assistantship abroad are an increase in professional and personal experiences and an improvement of the knowledge of a foreign language. In addition, the wish to better understand the host country and its school system are highly relevant for the decision. Thus, the intentions of the language assistants are congruent with the aims of COMENIUS 2.2.b. The majority of language assistants reported that their expectations were fulfilled with their stay abroad.

The participants receive an average monthly COMENIUS support of 800 € to cover the costs of living in the host country. The most expensive host countries are the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom. The least expensive host countries are the Central and Eastern European countries. However, for these later countries the COMENIUS support is insufficient to cover the costs of living. Usually, the difference was covered by the language assistants’ own means.

One third of the language assistants reported problems in the phase of preparation for their stay abroad. Altogether one quarter were not provided with information about their host school before their stay abroad. The reason which could be identified for this is, in particular, a lack of cooperation from the host school before the beginning of the language assistantship. In many other cases however, the language assistants receive sufficient information and material.

Staying in the host country is less complicated than preparing for the stay abroad. The language assistants are mostly satisfied with the support they receive from their host school. The host schools provide a multitude of experiences for them which contribute to a refinement of their pedagogical skills and an increase in teaching experience. Mentoring and guidance of language assistants at their host schools seems to function in a relatively uncomplicated and knowledgeable way. Almost two thirds of the German language assistants were supported by an individual teacher of their host school acting as mentor.

In the majority of cases the language assistants are successfully integrated into their host school. 70 percent of the respondents to the evaluators’ questionnaire reported that they felt part of their host school during their stay abroad. Only 15 percent reported that integration was not successful.

According to the judgement of the language assistants surveyed, they also achieved an increase in competences pertaining to the other two important goals of this part of the COMENIUS Action, namely a significant improvement of their knowledge about other European States and their foreign language skills. Generally, the improvement of these
competences is dependent on the duration of the stay abroad. Almost all areas of competence development listed in the questionnaire increased and deepened the longer the respective language assistant stayed abroad. The majority of those assistants who stayed abroad for only three to four months reported that their knowledge in many areas had not improved.

It seems that a language assistantship has only little effects in terms of an increase in experiences about teaching methods. Either teacher training in Germany provides a solid practical base with regard to teaching methods which can only be enriched here and there by a stay abroad, or teaching at the host school abroad does not differ very much from teaching at a German school, or the language assistants do not receive an opportunity to develop their competences in this field due to lack of time or organisational reasons. To clarify this issue further research and analyses would be necessary.

According to the judgement of the language assistants surveyed they experienced only few difficulties during their stay abroad. Only 15 percent of the language assistants had problems in finding an appropriate place to stay.

A clear majority of language assistants is satisfied with the support and advice they received from the National Agency (PAD).

4.3 Participation of German School Education Staff in In-Service Training Courses

In the first two years of SOCRATES II more than 2,300 teachers and school education staff from German schools participated in COMENIUS supported in-service training courses abroad. After the introduction of a new COMENIUS structure in 2001/02, i.e. the integration of the former SOCRATES Actions LINGUA B and COMENIUS 3.2 into the new COMENIUS 2.2.c Action, the requirement was abolished that participants had to contribute 20 percent of the costs for such in-service training courses themselves. From then onwards, the COMENIUS support granted to German participants reached the maximum level of 1,500 € as a rule. As the overall budget of about 1.5 million € for the year 2001 remained approximately the same, this policy led to a decrease in the number of beneficiaries from 1,288 in 2000/01 to 1,045 in 2001/02.

The high proportion of foreign language teachers among the German participants in in-service training courses (more than 80%) in combination with the guidelines of the COMENIUS Action – foreign language teachers are supposed to participate in in-service training courses offered in the country in which the target language of the teacher is spoken and taught – has led to the fact that two thirds of the German beneficiaries participated in courses offered in English speaking countries.

In 2001/02, primary school teachers made up the highest proportion among the participants in in-service training courses (39%), followed by teachers from upper secondary schools (Gymnasium) (16%), teachers from lower secondary schools (Hauptschulen: 10% and Realschulen: 8%) teachers from vocational and technical schools (10%), and teachers from comprehensive schools (5%). The proportions of teachers from schools for pupils with
special needs, staff from local or regional school authorities, and staff from German institutions for in-service teacher training among the participants were only two to three percent each.

Altogether a large majority of respondents to the evaluators’ written questionnaire reported a very positive climate in their school or organisation concerning the participation in in-service training courses. 66 percent emphasised that participation in such courses is explicitly encouraged and six percent are employed at schools which make participation in in-service training courses obligatory for their staff. Among the respondents from the East German States even every third participant reported that such an obligation for in-service training existed at his or her school.

The COMENIUS & GRUNDTVIG Catalogue which is published via Internet by the European Commission and in which providers of in-service training courses can offer a description of their courses was used by only somewhat more than one fifth of the respondents to the questionnaire. However, it is noteworthy that the respective proportion of Catalogue users among participants from the East German States is more than twice as high as among participants from the West German States (40% as compared to 19%).

The application for COMENIUS support to participate in an in-service training course takes place on average 17 weeks before the beginning of the course. After about eight weeks the applicants receive a note of acceptance or rejection of their application from the National Agency (PAD). If requested and needed, a first instalment of the financial support is transferred to the participant about three weeks before travelling abroad. The application for the reimbursement of costs is normally submitted by the participants in the first two weeks after the end of the course. Approximately four weeks later participants receive their whole or their last instalment of the COMENIUS support. Altogether the duration of the various stages of the process of application, acceptance or rejection, and reimbursement can be characterised as reasonable. On average, the COMENIUS support suffices to cover 84 percent of the actual costs which are incurred by the participation in an in-service training course abroad.

The work of the Pedagogical Exchange Service (PAD), acting as the National Agency for COMENIUS is judged very positively by the participants. In particular, they praise the friendliness and helpfulness of the PAD staff, the availability (by telephone), the transparency of decisions and the exactness of information provided. Participants are somewhat more critical with regard to the comprehensibility of report forms and with regard to the rapidity in dealing with requests and documents. With respect to these issues some measures should be taken to increase “customer satisfaction”.

Almost half of the beneficiaries participated in in-service training courses abroad which were exclusively composed of Germans. This fact clearly indicates that one of the central measures of the European Commission to prevent courses in which participants come from only one country, i.e. the abolition of group support in COMENIUS 2.2.c, has had no or only little effect, at least in the first year after the implementation of this new regulation. Further
efforts and monitoring procedures are obviously necessary in order to guarantee an intercultural learning context on the basis of an international composition of participants. It is noteworthy in this context that participants in in-service training courses offered through the COMENIUS & GRUNDTVIG Catalogue generally report an international composition of course participants.

Altogether the in-service training courses received good grades from the German participants, pertaining equally to the professional teaching staff as to the working atmosphere and the quality of the provision. However, there are considerable differences in the assessment according to host country in which the course took place. Courses offered in the United Kingdom, France, and the smaller EU member states received a particularly positive assessment by the German participants. Courses in Ireland and Spain take up a medium rank in the assessment. Especially courses offered in Italy and the Central and Eastern European countries clearly received worse grades.

The problems with which course participants were confronted also differ in type and degree according to the country in which the course took place. Participants in courses taking place in Spain reported especially frequently a lack of rooms for undisturbed work (26%) and about language problems in daily life (17%). Concerning courses in France, German participants reported problems with large numbers of participants per course (21%), and differences in the level of knowledge among participants (32%). Courses in Ireland were also criticised for not providing sufficient rooms (32%), and courses in Italy comparatively often lacked content related advice. Participants in courses taking place in Central and Eastern European countries reported difficulties most often. They criticised in particular differences in the levels of knowledge among participants (39%), problems with appropriate seminar rooms (35%), unwillingness of course leaders to take the needs of participants into account (33%), and lack of content related advice (25%).

Despite all difficulties, a large majority of participants took positive stock with regard to the outcomes of the course for themselves. More than four fifth each reported a notable improvement of their knowledge about the culture and society of their host country (88%), a broadening of their foreign language skills (87%), an increase in the motivation for their own work (85%), and a knowledge improvement in their own field of expertise (83%). Three out of four participants said that they had gained extensive insight into the school system of the host country, and two thirds have learned a lot about teaching practices in the schools of their host country which stimulated them to reflect their own teaching methods. The contribution of in-service training courses to establish contacts with colleagues from other countries (48%) or to improve own career opportunities (19%) was judged by participants to be comparatively low. The most positive assessment of outcomes was found among participants of courses in the United Kingdom, in Ireland, and in France. In comparison, respondents to the evaluators’ questionnaire having participated in courses in Italy and Central and Eastern Europe reported a clearly lower usefulness.

Although participants judged the effects of their in-service training course abroad on their own professional practice and for their institution as a whole mainly positive as well, this
assessment is clearly more reserved than the assessment of personal outcomes. Especially teachers from primary and lower secondary schools declared the following consequences of their participation for their institution as relatively likely: the creation of new teaching provisions, the use of new or revised teaching and learning material, and a more lively shape of instruction. In comparison, teachers from upper secondary schools \((Gymnasium)\), comprehensive schools, and schools for pupils with special needs emphasised more often than teachers from other types of schools an increased utilisation of computers and multimedia.

A possible future participation of the school in European cooperation projects as a consequence of participation in a COMENIUS supported in-service training course was mainly reported by those teachers who had been able to establish intensive contacts with colleagues from abroad during the course. This can be interpreted as a clear indicator that more attention should be paid in the future to an international composition of the participants in COMENIUS supported in-service training courses so that the potentials of these courses can be more fully realised.

Altogether the German participants in COMENIUS supported in-service training courses take positive stock. In answer to the question about their overall satisfaction with the course in which they participated 47 percent of the respondents were very satisfied and 41 percent were satisfied. Further eight percent of the German participants gave a neutral answer and only four percent were dissatisfied with the results of the course.

5. **COMENIUS 3: Networks**

Together with Belgium and the United Kingdom, Germany belongs to those countries which are most strongly represented in the European COMENIUS networks. However, when looking at the proportion of German institutions or organisations taking over the role of network coordinator, Germany occupies just a middle rank. German participants in COMENIUS networks are mostly secondary schools, non-profit organisations, higher education institutions, and regional authorities. Thus, Germany differs somewhat from the European average. In the time frame covered by the evaluation, German institutions and organisations were active in altogether ten networks. When asked, the German contact persons involved in these networks did not criticise the application procedure very much.

For the actors involved the networks generally represent an interesting opportunity for European cooperation. For the majority of the actors the relationship between costs and benefits is acceptable. The interest of the organisations in this form of cooperation is mostly congruent with the aims of this measure of COMENIUS which envisage that the networks develop into forums for joint reflection and cooperative work. As reported by individuals involved in European cooperation projects supported under COMENIUS 2.1, almost all actors involved in COMENIUS supported networks show considerable commitment as well and contribute with a lot of idealism to the success of the project. For this success the participants are willing to make personal sacrifices. Institutions and organisations highly
value a participation in a European network and the actual individuals involved receive additional staff resources from their institution to support the work.

The networks with German participation cover a broad spectrum of themes. Only the field of foreign language acquisition in European schools is underrepresented. However, the activities of the networks correspond to a large extent to the aims of this COMENIUS measure to be a forum for joint reflections and cooperation and to identify and promote innovations and examples of good practice in the respective field.

The majority of network partners is recruited through existing contacts. Other forms of partner recruitment are rare. Within the networks analysed by the evaluators different types of institutions and organisations cooperate with each other. Their respective profiles and expertise usually complement each other well. The preparatory visits have turned out to be very useful in the stage of forming a network.

The actual product of the networks typically consists of a website. The websites convey the impression of being updated regularly and quite informative. In addition, the websites guarantee the dissemination of the results of the work and the information compiled by the networks. However, it should be critically noted that the English language is very dominant on these websites and the information is not always changeable to another language. This could be a barrier for the dissemination of network results. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the information available on the networks’ websites is actually used by individuals not directly involved in the networks. To answer this question further analyses are needed about the actual effects of and the wider knowledge about the networks. Finally, COMENIUS 3 is still a rather young activity. At the time the evaluation was carried out most networks had only existed for a year or less and still needed time to properly establish themselves.

The almost exclusive exchange of experiences and knowledge among the partners involved via the network website is regarded as rather inconvenient by the actors because it is not in accordance with their usual forms of communication.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Structure and Priorities of the COMENIUS Action

(1) COMENIUS should envisage the support of mobility for all groups of individuals active in the area of schools. This means, in particular, an extension of the mobility of pupils and in Germany the creation of opportunities for the participation of future teachers in their second phase of training. The latter issue needs clarification and regulation on the national level concerning the recognition of temporary training phases abroad and the integration of such training phases into the regular curriculum of the second training phase. The clear overrepresentation of foreign language teachers in COMENIUS projects and COMENIUS supported mobility should be reduced in favour of a higher proportion of teachers of other
subjects. The evaluators propose to rename the language assistantships (for example by calling them „teaching assistantships”) and open them for teachers of all subjects.

(2) Next to the priority of providing COMENIUS support for a school partnership at least once for as many schools as possible, part of the COMENIUS budget should be reserved to support the development of an international profile of individual schools which have a particular emphasis on internationalisation in their mission.

(3) In various respects the priorities of the COMENIUS Action should be examined. The emphasis on less widely taught and spoken languages in language projects is not convincing for all types of schools, especially not for schools in the area of vocational training. In addition, the participation of schools for pupils with special needs in COMENIUS supported activities requires special measures in order to achieve the aims of the COMENIUS Action and the outcomes hoped for.

(4) In order to assure the sustainability of COMENIUS activities and achieve the expected effects not only the results and products of the projects have to be collected and archived in a more targeted way but they also need to be disseminated more widely in cases of high quality. Furthermore, an additional implementation phase should be supported for selected projects after the end of the first phase of COMENIUS supported work in which the results of these projects could be refined in such a way that they can be disseminated more widely as models of good practice. This requires a quality assessment of the results and products. A more detailed assessment of the sustainability of COMENIUS supported activities and of the effects and potentials for innovation of the COMENIUS Action itself needs further analyses which should include a longitudinal study.

6.2 Issues of Centralised and Decentralised Measures

(5) Decentralisation of SOCRATES supported measures has only proved to be conducive to the aims of the Programme for measures which have a large proportion of routine organisation and administration. The evaluators do not support the decentralisation of measures which are expected to be pilot projects and have a potential for innovation. The aim of COMENIUS to enhance the quality of school education through European cooperation should not be suspected on the national level to interfere with the autonomy of the German States in cultural and educational affairs.

(6) Another problem also indicates that further decentralisation of COMENIUS supported activities might not be the best possible way of change. Due to the fact that in Germany applications go through a first quality check in the Ministries for Education of the respective States before being passed on to the National Agency combined with the necessity of multilateral assessment of applications for some measures, the time frames for the application phase are reduced and the risk of having an application rejected is higher. In this respect the procedures should be considerably simplified.
With regard to the centralised measures for which decisions about acceptance or rejection of applications are taken by the European Commission in Brussels, the evaluators noted some deficits in the national structures of information, advice and support. These should be more closely examined and improved. In addition, more transparency is required of the procedures of application, assessment, and funding taking place in Brussels.

6.3. Implementation of COMENIUS in Germany

The evaluation showed that existing provisions and channels of information do not always reach the target groups. It is necessary to develop more appropriate strategies which lead to an improvement of the promotion of COMENIUS and a wider knowledge about COMENIUS to such an extent that institutions and individuals interested in participation turn directly to the National Agency (PAD). Possibly the institutions of in-service teacher training could be included in the activities to promote COMENIUS.

Needs for information also emerge in the ongoing processes and activities. Individuals involved in the projects should be advised more strongly to access information which is provided on the website of the National Agency. Information brochures and guidelines for applicants should include a more visible reference to this resource.

Although the application procedure has already been modified in order to simplify it, the comprehensibility of guidelines for applicants as well as application and report forms should be examined with respect to achieve further simplification.

Some of the German States have reduced promotion of participation in COMENIUS because they receive sufficient applications to spend their respective part of the budget. This contradicts to a certain extent those aspects of selection procedures which emphasise competitive quality assessment. The evaluators recommend instead to work towards a higher number of applications and accept the rejection of “lower quality” applications as a normal option within the framework of selection procedures.

Once a COMENIUS project is accepted, educational institutions and organisations participating in it should be informed about the acceptance as soon as possible. The results of selection procedures should be made available as soon as possible after the decision has been taken. There is hope that with the introduction of the new SYMMETRY database such processes can be designed in a way which is more user friendly. Furthermore, the transparency of the centralised decision making processes as well as that of the decentralised decision making processes involving multilateral agreements should be improved. This should include information for applicants about the status of their application and the reasons for rejection and acceptance.

The time which passes between submission of an application and final decision about it is too long for many applicants. The processes need to be accelerated on both the European and the national level.
(14) The European Commission should keep schedules and deadlines (assessment of applications, transfer of financial support) and not just demand this from the applicants. A regulation should be established which allows projects to continue for some time longer without additional funding or to submit reports at a later date if there are delays in the decision making and administrative processes in Brussels.

(15) On the national level participants in COMENIUS supported projects would welcome the opportunity to exchange their experiences with participants in other COMENIUS supported projects beyond the borders of a given State.

(16) The lump sums provided to cover the costs for mobility into various countries should be re-examined more often to see whether they are still appropriate. This seems to be necessary for the Central and Eastern European countries in particular. Such an examination should cover hotel costs, per diems, and costs of living.

(17) The transfer of COMENIUS project grants needs to be accelerated, in particular for the centralised European cooperation projects, in order to avoid serious difficulties for the participating institutions and organisations. Especially smaller institutions have a problem with bridging the period in between. A fast transfer of 60 percent of the overall budget for a project is feasible. The remaining part of the budget can be transferred once the first rate has been spent to a large extent.

(18) The differentiation of COMENIUS 1 project grants into variable and standard costs should be given up. It seems to be more reasonable to introduce “global” or “lump sum” budgets in which the utilisation of financial resources for various activities is simply regulated by given percentages. This would enable an altogether more flexible use of the grants.

(19) In case of projects which are supported for more than one year there should be a possibility to transfer those parts of the COMENIUS grant which was not used up into the next year.

(20) Dissemination and utilisation of project results could be improved by central collection and cataloguing of products and creating simple accessibility. The evaluators propose a product database on the website of the National Agency for the products of decentralised COMENIUS measures and on the SOCRATES/COMENIUS website of the European Commission for the centralised measures.

(21) It should be examined whether actors involved in the projects could receive a feedback about the quality of their results and products. Currently, feedback happens predominantly as a reaction to deficits in the financial or formal obligations of the beneficiaries. In order to keep a check on the extra burden of evaluating all project results it is proposed to organise a competition addressed only to those schools which are interested in such a feedback.
6.4 Recommendations about the Various Measures of COMENIUS

(22) Concerning the COMENIUS school partnerships it should be investigated whether the **requirement to apply annually for an extension of the project can be abolished.** Acceptance of an application and support should be granted for the whole length of the period applied for or up to the possible maximum time. This would also reduce the risk of failure in cases of multilateral assessments of applications for each new year of support.

(23) A project which has been granted COMENIUS support **should not be considered a failure if one of the partners decides to get out.** Options and possibilities should be created which enable the search for substitute partners. The evaluators propose the extended use of the database for the search of partners and the establishment of a pool of substitute partners composed of schools interested in COMENIUS participation.

(24) With regard to the application procedures for COMENIUS 1 projects in Germany the possibility of **direct application at the National Agency** should be examined. This would clearly lighten and simplify the procedures of assessment and acceptance or rejection for all actors involved without excluding regular information and the opportunity for comment by local authorities and representatives of the Ministries.

(25) Improved **mechanisms for recognition** should be found for those pupils who have been actively involved in school partnerships. It might be appropriate to design certificates or other documentation which pupils could eventually include in their portfolios for job applications.

(26) The evaluators recommend that the German States find some kind of regulation or guideline which enables the schools to offer COMENIUS active teachers a specified **reduction in the number of teaching hours** independent of the number of reduction hours each school normally has at its disposal. A further revision should be undertaken of the recommendations of the Standing Conference of the Ministers for Culture and Education of the German States from 6 August 1978 in the revised version from 7 December 1990 about “Europe in school instruction” to include the COMENIUS Action.

(27) The **duration of the stay abroad** within the framework of pupil mobility in COMENIUS language projects should be handled more **flexibly.** Depending of the situation and conditions of the participating schools, shorter visits should be possible. This would clearly ease the participation of vocational schools within the dual system of vocational training in Germany.

(28) The reasons for the low **participation of German study seminars** for the second phase of teacher training in COMENIUS 2.1 projects need to be analysed in more detail. The evaluators propose to make it a national priority to promote a better participation in COMENIUS of both future teachers in their second phase of training and their trainers.

(29) Appropriate strategies need to be developed in order to improve better utilisation of **results and products** of COMENIUS 2.1 projects for **in-service training courses of**
teachers in general and for the respective offers published in the COMENIUS & GRUNDTVIG Catalogue.

(30) In-service training courses for school education staff abroad which are exclusively composed of German participants do not fulfil the meaning and aims of COMENIUS 2.2.c support. Although control mechanisms to prevent this have already been established, the evaluators noted that they were not always sufficient in the time frame covered by the evaluation.