

**Voice of
the Mayors**



Jean Luc Vanraes

Brussels

The school for more equal
opportunities and inclusion

About

Voice of the Mayors

Celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, METROPOLIS wishes to leverage the unique experience of its members, represented by the mayors of the major metropolises, presidents and governors of metropolitan regions. Too often, the expertise of these high-ranking officials is lost once their term has come to an end. However, at a time when global urban development is quickening its pace, their experience is more beneficial than ever for the new generations of local decision-makers, the entire spectrum of public and private local development stakeholders and partners in the international community.

In its capacity as a network of the world's major metropolises, METROPOLIS also seeks to make an active contribution to the current international debate concerning the revision of the Millennium Development Goals, negotiations on climate change and the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).

This is how the idea for **Voice of the Mayors** came into being, as a wealth of first-hand testimonies from local and regional leaders whose experience deserves to be recounted and disseminated. Bequeathing this legacy also conveys the willingness of METROPOLIS members to share their experiences and to enhance the exchange of knowledge, a concerted effort to contribute towards shaping sustainable urban development worldwide.

Upon the creation of METROPOLIS in 1984, the 14 founding members expressed their desire to work together to strengthen their mutual capacities to manage their cities. **Voice of the Mayors** helps to achieve this goal with the 136 members that comprise METROPOLIS today and the young generations of local decision-makers.

The testimony you are about to read serves to enhance the association's training activities and the work carried out within the framework of the METROPOLIS Initiatives, the METROPOLIS Women International Network and of METROPOLIS Youth.

The experience of the leading decision-makers in major metropolises across the world is essential. They manage the day-to-day needs of millions of citizens as regards housing, mobility, education, health, safety and energy, to name but a few. They run cities, urban areas and metropolitan regions that are sometimes larger than certain United Nations member states in terms of population, budget size and global reach. They are the main political leaders on the front line, tackling the challenges facing the planet. Nevertheless, this role has yet to be sufficiently recognised in present-day international relations.

It is Metropolis' aspiration that **Voice of the Mayors** will help these leaders' words to be better heard, listened to and taken into consideration by the international community.

Alain LE SAUX
METROPOLIS Secretary-General
October, 2014



Curriculum vitae

JEAN LUC VANRAES

Deputy Chairman of the Brussels Regional Investment Company [Gewestelijke Investeringsmaatschappij voor Brussel - GIMB/Société régionale d'investissement de Bruxelles - SRIB]

Born in Ypres, on April 10, **1954**. Resides in Uccle, Brussels. Married to Christine Robeir and has one son. Law Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (graduated in **1980**).

Mr Vanraes works as a lawyer (for the De Beir-Vanraes law firm) and has been a member of the Brussels Bar since **1980**. He was the President of the Brussels University Association (UAB) until 2009. In July **2009**, he (Open VLD party) took over from Guy Vanhengel as Brussels Minister for Finance and the Budget.

Political career:

- Member of the Council of the Brussels-Capital Region (**2000-2013**)
- Leader of the VLD political party within the Council of the Brussels-Capital Region (until **2009**)
- Chairman of the Council of the Flemish Community Commission (**2000-2009**)
- Member of the Bureau and the Extended Bureau of the Flemish Community Commission (**2000-2013**)
- Chairman of the Uccle Public Social Welfare Centre (**1999-2009; 2012-**)
- Member of the Uccle municipal council
- Member and Chairman of the College of the Flemish Community Commission, in charge of education in the Flemish-speaking Community in Brussels, and of Communications
- Minister of Finance and the Budget within the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region (**2009-2011**)
- Minister of Health within the Common Community Commission (**2009-2011**)
- Chairman of the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG) (**2010-2011**)
- Member of the Committee of the Regions (**2012-**)
- Chairman of the Council of the Flemish Community Commission (**2011-2013**)

Jean Luc Vanraes

The school for more equal opportunities and inclusion: Initiatives taken in the Brussels-Capital Region

A

brief outline of the Belgian institutional context and of the Brussels-Capital Region is needed for a full understanding of this article.

Belgium is a federal state, made up of three regions and three communities. The Brussels-Capital Region is one of these 3 regions, and it has its own government and parliament. This 161 km² urban region has 1,120,000 residents (in 2011), of which 22.2% are young people under the age of 18 and 31.5% are foreign nationals. It is the only bilingual region in Belgium: consequently, education in this region is delivered in Flemish or in French and is managed by the Flemish Community or the French Community, as

the case may be. Education has, indeed, been the responsibility of the individual communities since 1989, with the exception of the start and end of compulsory education, which continues to be a federal matter.

Schools are considered to be a key pathway to equal opportunities; the fact remains, however, that schools are all too often places of failure and inequality.

In view of this and as a Member of the Parliament for the Brussels-Capital Region, I favour lowering the start of compulsory schooling to the age of three and I supported the development of extended, or community, school concept.

Lowering of the start of compulsory schooling to the age of three

By this measure, I mean the compulsory presence at school by children of the age of three for 120 days in order to start compulsory schooling from the age of four.







Studies show that a sense of social belonging is a key factor in a child's education. On average, almost 36% of children of foreign origin between the ages of 2½ and 3 do not attend nursery school. These children, who generally come from single-parent families or have parents with little schooling, often start school with a "handicap". Studies show that they suffer from a scholastic lag that pursues them throughout their education and which can lead to them dropping out of school without receiving their secondary education diploma.

In Belgium as a whole, however, 85% of children are registered for nursery schools from the age of 2½, and only 0.3% of children never attend a nursery school. This makes our country one of the best pupils in European education.

Why, therefore, argue for lowering the age of compulsory schooling from six to three years old? Quite simply, because being enrolled in a school is not the same as attending school.

This measure will also give children the chance for greater linguistic immersion, making up for poor knowledge of the teaching language - in this case Flemish. The linguistic lag of young children who do not speak French or Belgian Dutch at home - and in Brussels this is half of all children - jeopardizes their progress at school. Children who master the teaching language find it easier to follow lessons and therefore greatly increase their chances of obtaining a diploma.

In making this proposal, I want to provide vulnerable children with greater opportunities to have earlier contact with the school environment and to receive an education. This should make it possible to break the vicious circle of intergenerational poverty for these children by giving them greater opportunities to obtain a diploma, a virtual prerequisite in our urban region for finding employment.

Parents must be provided with positive stimulus to send their children to school. Regular and punctual attendances are important factors that can genuinely make a difference. Giving structure to the lives of these young people gives

them stability and better opportunities for development and apprenticeship.

The proposal to amend the Compulsory Education Act of 29 June 1983 is nothing new. In the past, parliamentary initiatives proposed by my party, Open VLD (the Flemish liberal party), have not come to fruition. Similar proposals by Flemish socialists (the sp.a party, Socialistische Partij Anders) or by the Green party show that this is not due to ideological differences.

Reports in the press about the dearth of induction classes, the limited knowledge of Flemish among foreign nationals living in major Flemish towns and in Brussels, school truancy and the drop-out rate, make this debate more relevant than ever.

Extended schools, a tool for integration and solidarity

Extended schools provide a network of facilities close to one or more educational establishments that brings together care services, nursery facilities, induction courses, educational support, leisure activities, sports and games. As such they offer (or seek to offer) the best possible opportunities for development within and outside school.

Easier access to all these services increases the presence of children at school, which often goes hand in hand with better social integration.

As the Minister responsible for Flemish Education in Brussels from 2010 to the end of 2012, I had the opportunity to visit an extended school in Montreal and I have supported the development of this concept in our capital city.

Through this proposal and the tool it creates, I hope to contribute to the success and quality of education of our young people and thereby provide children with every chance possible for their future success.





METROPOLIS' VOICE OF THE MAYORS IS SUPPORTED BY

Cities Alliance

Cities Without Slums

The Cities Alliance is a global partnership for urban poverty reduction and the promotion of the role of cities in sustainable development. Cities Alliance Members include local authorities, national governments, non-governmental organisations, multilateral organisations, and associate members. METROPOLIS is a founding member of Cities Alliance.

www.citiesalliance.org



The Global fund for cities development (FMDV) was created in October 2010 at the initiative of METROPOLIS, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and 34 founding members (cities and city networks). It is an international political organisation which aims to strengthen solidarity and financial capacity by and among local authorities and is complementary to existing mobilisation, coordination and advocacy networks.

www.fmdv.net



Created in 2004, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the united voice and world advocate of local and regional self-government. Members of UCLG are present in 140 countries, and are organized into seven regional sections, a Forum of Regions, and a metropolitan section coordinated by METROPOLIS. UCLG's membership includes over 1,000 cities and regions, as well as 155 local government associations.

www.uclg.org



The World Urban Campaign is a global partnership coordinated by UN-Habitat, designed to promote a positive vision of sustainable urbanization and to place the urban agenda at the highest level in development policies. It is meant to build alliances with all the sectors of society in a movement to provide a knowledge and action-oriented platform to address urban challenges. It is a platform for Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to be held in 2016.

www.worldurbancampaign.org

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