Open letter for the attention of Mr Houghton-Clarke, President of the APEEE Woluwe

I hope this letter finds you well.

I would like to start by making it clear to you and to whoever else may read this letter, that we have never met and neither have we ever had the opportunity to talk and discuss any matters in person – not even by phone or via other digital means of communication. It is therefore safe to conclude that we don't know each other, or are even acquainted.

Nevertheless, something most astonishing came to my attention a couple of months ago. On the 6th of July 2021, my manager at my workplace informed me that a few days before you had called him to talk about me and about my blog, The Woluwe Diaries. In case your memory is failing you and you cannot recall the details of that call or, worse still, do not remember that it ever happened, all you need to do is call my manager (in CC); he will gladly refresh your memory.

You started the call by mentioning the meeting of the Brussels Local Staff Committee (LSC) of 30 June 2021, which I attended in my capacity as an elected LSC member and to which you were invited in your capacity as the Chair of the APEEE Woluwe (hereafter APEEE) to participate in a discussion on item 6 of the meeting's agenda. I had a comment and a question and took the floor. It was my intervention that you asked my manager about. More precisely, you asked him if my comment and question to the Head of Unit of the European Commission's (EC) Unit in charge of the European Schools (also a guest at this meeting), was the official position of the staff organisation that I represent.

When my manager expressed no alarm or concern and seemed unperturbed by your inquiry you added that I was writing a blog and publishing some posts about the APEEE. You went on to let him know that you were concerned about those posts and eventually asked him to mediate in what you described as a conflict between me and the APEEE.

At the time of your call, my superior wasn't even aware of my personal blogging activities. And, in case you have missed the obvious, whatever I publish on my private blog has no connection and no relevance to my professional life. I don't do it as an employee of a European institution, I do it as an engaged parent of a child attending EEB2, and as a rank and file member of our APEEE, who happens to be deeply concerned about what he sees. The fact that my posts are critical of the current Management and Administrative Board of

our parents´association should not, however, be construed as a conflict, not least because the APEEE has never approached me to discuss, react, comment, or otherwise engage with me on any of the matters that I write about in my blog. How can we be in conflict if there is no interaction between us, no contact whatsoever?

With this in mind I have been asking myself a few questions:

- **On whose authority did you take the liberty to interfere in my professional environment?**
  Was the decision to call my manager taken by the APEEE Board in a formal discussion and vote, or was it something you did of your own initiative?

- **What was the true purpose of your call to my manager?**
  You asked my superior to mediate in an alleged conflict between me and the APEEE. And yet, in all that time that has passed since I started to write my blog, you have never seeked to discuss your concerns regarding The Woluwe Diaries directly with me. As you must surely know, a precondition to any mediation is a prior agreement between the conflicted parties. And as I already stated, there is no conflict – I'm just expressing my opinions. Even if there was a conflict, there was no agreement about any possible mediation, mostly because... we never discussed ANYTHING together, let alone any mediation arrangements.

- **What makes you believe that my superior would be the best person to mediate in a hypothetical conflict between us?**
  I am aware that in the past you had contacts with my manager during his mandate as the president of the EC's Brussels LSC. I do hope that someone in your position knows that a mediator must be a neutral person. Therefore I do not understand how you could have proposed to my direct superior to even consider being a mediator in an alleged conflict between me, his subordinate, and the APEEE, or whoever else for that matter. I could maybe imagine a hypothetical situation when my manager might mediate a conflict involving me and another member of my team, but definitely not on a matter that is totally unrelated to our work.

  Your idea to contact my manager and ask him to become a mediator in a situation that belongs to my private life makes me highly uncomfortable. It makes me even more uncomfortable that you contacted him without talking to me first. It feels to me as an attempt to intimidate me by showing that you know my hierarchical superior and that you will not hesitate to contact him in order to indirectly put pressure on me to censor my blog.

- **Finally, I also ask myself if such interference into one's professional life is something others should be prepared for if they publicly disagree with you or with the current APEEE Board?**

Quite frankly, I would have expected a more transparent and professional behaviour from someone in your position. To be more precise I would have expected to be contacted directly with any concerns you might have had. This is actually something I am still open to, under

one condition: any discussion between us on anything related to our school´s APEEE shall be held in an open forum with a moderator (call it a mediator if you so wish) that we can both agree on. Maybe the pending Extraordinary General Meeting that the APEEE has been dragging its feet to organize could be a good venue for this debate?

I hope I have made myself abundantly clear but, just in case, I would like to stress the following:

- Your call felt as an invasive, undue interference in my professional life,
- I felt uncomfortable with the fact that in order to put your call in context I was obliged to explain to my superior what I do in my free time. I had to reveal details that are strictly personal and, as such, of no concern to my employer,
- I felt that your call was a thinly veiled attempt at intimidating me to censor my blogging activities.

I therefore ask you to refrain from any such actions in the future.

Sincerely,

Fabrício Santos
fabricio.santos@thewoluwediaries.blog
https://thewoluwediaries.blog/

CC: Mr Łukasz Wardyn, Chair of the Staff Association Generation 2004
Members of the Board of the APEEE EEB2
Ms Kamila Malik, Director of EEB2 (European School of Woluwe)
Mr Andreas Beckmann, Secretary General of the European Schools
Mr Pere Moles-Palleja, President of Interparents
Ms Helen Valentine, Vice President of Interparents
APEEE Woluwe Secretariat