

# **CREATIVE PARENTS, A RESOURCE FOR THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION**

## **EPA GA and conference**

**Vilnius, Lithuania 12-13 November 2021**

EPA's (European Parents Association) General Assembly (GA) and International Conference of 2021, took place on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of November in Vilnius, Lithuania. The members of EPA, who were able to travel to Vilnius from all over Europe (Spain, France, Italy, Estonia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Austria, Ireland, Portugal and Norway), were truly happy and blessed to physically meet again, after 2 years. They had the chance to exchange experiences, knowledge and good practices on various topics. The other members and interested parents, who were unable to attend in person due to Covid-19 restrictions or for any other reason, had the chance to join our Conference from their homes as it was transmitted live. We must all congratulate our Lithuanian colleagues for organizing and hosting an excellent GA and Conference.



Following the agenda, on Friday morning we visited 2 schools in Vilnius, Vienuolis progymnasium and Gediminas progymnasium. Both schools accept children from 6 to 14 years old. These are two high quality schools applying new teaching/learning methods and using the advances of High Technology, teaching

students how to use 3d pens, 3d printers, plotters, engravers, how to use microscopes etc. Both schools teach the importance and promote the cultivation of empathy to students. One of the schools offers a wide scope of knowledge through science subjects, Fine Arts and the use of Technology, but also promotes other abilities such as cooking and making things with their hands. Students are encouraged to discover their talents and apply in practise everything that they learn in theory. In this way they can develop and improve their skills and competences setting concrete bases for their future.



The second school puts more emphasis on maths. Their main aim is for their students to love maths by using alternative and fun ways of teaching maths, both with the traditional way and with the use of technology as well. They have even changed the classic way of naming school classes (A,B,C,D) with a very innovative way that evokes children's imagination. So, they call class A mB after Balaisis, who is a famous Estonian mathematician, class B is now called P after Pythagoras, the famous Greek Mathematician, Class C is called K after Copernicus and D class is now namedN in respect of Great Isaac Newton!

In both schools we were warmly welcomed and guided around the school by the leaders of School's Parents Associations. They both talked about the necessity and importance of cooperation between the School Board, the School's Principal, teachers and Parents in order to achieve progress for the benefit of children and education in general. They've presented their vision for their schools and the 5-year strategic plan they've set up and implement. As they said, they implement and monitor all actions of the plan and from the results that will come up they'll create their next strategic plan. Moreover, they said that this kind of improvement happened in the majority of Lithuanian schools and soon they will all be upgraded with High Technology equipment. The Funding for all these comes from Lithuanian government as the Ministry of Education forwards the necessary funds to Municipalities for this purpose. They even presented how they are facing the Covid 19 situation and what good practice they apply so that all children, even those staying at home can follow the class and get the feeling of being in the class with the rest of their comates and teachers (special devices, developed by the school students themselves purify the air 15 minutes before children enter the class, using high quality cameras and boards to connect with children at home, having children permanent in one class and teachers of each subject go there instead of having children moving around to get to different classes and much more).



In the afternoon, our GA took place in the Presidential Palace of Lithuania! We were extremely honoured to be welcomed by the First Lady of Lithuania, Lady Diana Nausėdienė. Lady Diana greeted the General Assembly and congratulate EPA's members for their work as parents and especially as active parents. She mentioned that parents have or should have the leading role regarding their children's education and Well-being. She also referred to the importance and significance of Parents Associations as equal partners of the Education System.



After the First Lady's welcome speech, the President of EPA, presented EPA's Alcuin Award which was revived by the Board on the occasion of the 30 years of its creation back in 1991. According to Award's Terms and Conditions, nominations can be submitted by an EPA member, an EU Ministry of Education or, by European Commission. The nominated projects must stand out for their **Originality**, their **Contribution to Education**, there must be **Involvement**

**of parents as a characteristic**, they must have a **Constructive approach to home-school relationships in education** and for their **Potential as a ‘role model’ in Europe**.

The Jury consisted of 4 Members, Boštjan Bobič (chairman), EPA Vice President, Johanna Schima (Head of the EU office of Make Mother Matter), Veronica Samara (Global Digital Citizenship Education Initiative - Council of Europe) and Johannes Theiner (University of Vienna - EPA Past President). In total we had 5 applications which were briefly presented to members in presence. The Board kept a very important surprise for the members for the Celebrations of the 30 years of the Award. We've managed to communicate with Australia and Mrs Rita Schwark who was the very first winner of Alcuin Award! Mrs Schwark transferred us back in time and shared with us her precious memories and experience of applying for the project and being the first winner.



election of two Board Members, Valérie Gardette and Boštjan Bobič for their second term on the EPA Board. We also approved 2 new members one from Portugal and one from Lithuania who were warmly welcomed to EPA's big family!

Next on the agenda we had the presentation of all the projects that EPA is involved in as a partner, by our Project Coordinator Mrs Arja Krauchenberg. Following that, we approved our internal rules, we had the presentation of the activity report and we also had the re-



The first day ended at a great restaurant, selected by our hosts, for the traditional Gala Dinner. Once again, our Lithuanian friends, were graded by everyone with excellency for the place, for the food, for the fun part of the evening and in general, for their hospitality. During the Dinner, in a festive atmosphere, the chairman of the Alcuin Award Jury Committee,



announced the winner of the 30<sup>th</sup> winner of the Award! As he mentioned all participations were amazing and the Jury found it difficult to decide for the winner among them. And the winner of the 30<sup>th</sup> winner of Alcuin Award is: **Carob Syrup Producers of Latsia Lyceum from Nicosia, Cyprus**. The project was submitted by our member PCPASE. EPA's Vice President Elena Odysseos and the President of PCPASE Charalambos Dionysiou received the award!





On Saturday, all members met at National Agency for Education for the International Congress of EPA, under the title of the year 2021 **Creative Parents, a Resource for the future of Education**. The manager of the Agency, and EPA's longtime friend, Mrs Ruta Krasauskiene welcomed us. The Agenda of the day included greetings from Vice minister of Education Ramunaw Skaudzius and from Ieva Cacinskaite-

Urbaniene, member of the Committee on Education and Science of Parliament of Lithuania. Next, during the morning, we were so lucky to listen to the excellent presentations of Johannes Mengel, Darius Radkevicius, Kestutis Pukelis, Lina Labzentiene, Inga Nekroziene as well as Andrius Zebrauskas on topics relevant to the topic of the year.



In the afternoon, we had a 20-minute presentation of two great projects in which EPA is participating, Creative Thinking for Parents and Beyond Project. The projects were presented by Vice Presidents Charles Krim, Elena Odysseos and EPA's project coordinator Arja Krauchenberg. Following this all members participated in two amazing and creative workshops that had to do with the externalization of our emotions and thoughts in a situation. Also training ourselves to truly listen and respect our interlocutor that might either be our children, our partner, our colleagues or anyone else, always aiming at achieving better and qualitative communication with each other.



After a long day, EPA members had the chance to meet again in a nice vegetarian restaurant, enjoy good food to get to know each other, exchange their experiences and bond together in a pleasant environment. We all admit that this was a great GA and Conference that created a warm and friendly atmosphere and arose great feelings to everyone. Apart from the inspiring presenters and the very interesting topics, the excellent organization of both days by our Lithuanian friends and the positive attitude of all the participants, contributed to maximum for this success. Our next meeting will be in Lyon in June 2022!

