

# Lithuania

## Vaiva Radasta Vebraite

### Vice-Minister of Education and Science



*Vaiva Radasta Vebraite was awarded a Bachelor's degree by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Master's in biology by Yale University. Following her studies, Ms. Vebraite raised a family – four children – while working as an university instructor, interpreter and guide, and textbook author. Her principal occupation was the activation of Lithuanian-American educational, cultural and civic voluntary organizations that helped to maintain a political threshold for U.S. support of the reestablishment of Lithuanian independence in 1990. After 1990, Ms. Vebraite established the American Professional Partnership for Lithuanian Education, a professional organization serving Lithuanian teachers through the provision of in-service education and the development of a Teacher Center*

*network. In 1997 Ms. Vebraite was appointed Head of the In-Service Division of the Ministry of Education and Science and in 1998 its Vice-minister.*

## Civic Education in Lithuania

**Citizen is a very old word that once used to define a person living within a castle's territory or taking refuge from enemies within its walls. Today we would like our citizens' "castle" to be simply that bastion which is culture, which draws together our own citizens and is equally welcoming towards others.**

Rapid change has been flooding our senses and challenging our ideas. The tasks teachers and parents face as a result of changing times are exceptionally complicated. Our children must develop skills that exceed our own old-fashioned sensibilities. Good teachers must provoke in their students the ability and will to seek, find or create entirely new solutions to the challenges facing Lithuania. Those challenges include living responsibly in freedom and living deliberately towards peace. Civic education provides us with an opportunity to better know ourselves as well as to value diversity, and to perceive our relationships with others through the societal and national structures we hold in common. Therefore, after the restoration of Lithuania's Independence, at the very beginning of the education reform (1991) a civic education program was inaugurated.

This program, taught within the framework of various subjects, is oriented towards raising students (and teachers') ethical awareness and stresses the importance of democratic experience. Its aims and objectives are to develop a student's civic orientation, moral and legal standards, to teach a citizen's freedoms, rights and duties, to teach economic and political topics as well as the perception of democracy as a way of life. We decided that the civic education system must be multi-layered, i.e. civic issues must be integrated into all subjects' syllabuses as well as taught as a separate discipline.

In order to successfully introduce the new subject and resolve problems (to publish textbooks, acquire teaching and methodical equipment, and educate teachers), a program on the implementation of civic education was developed in 1998. We very much appreciate UNESCO's assistance in arranging international workshops for training of teachers-consultants, in providing us with resources to create a Civic Education Kit comprising essential material that appeared in Lithuania in the period of 1998-1999 (textbooks, UNESCO prepared methodical material, etc.) and in implementing of the project "Philosophy for children". **We place great hopes in the Pupils' Parliament established in 2000. It is a democratically elected institution that represents pupils' interests and creates a forum for pupil involvement in education reform problems. Pupils may draft laws and submit them to our Parliament. The Pupils' Parliament now has ties to similar institutions of other countries.**

**We understand that our country's security depends on its educated citizens and that their freedom is in turn guaranteed by democratic values based on mutual understanding and trust.** "Trust serves as the basis for social virtue and economic prosperity", writes the historian Fukuyama. In his book he considers possibilities of building up fundamentals of trust from small units, within local communities. Can this idea be applied to schools? It certainly could, if teachers, when discussing a citizen's rights and

responsibilities, spark their own and their pupils' engagement to act and, by way of common experience, prove that mutual trust is worthwhile.

I remember one conversation, when a colleague asked: "What is the aim of education?" The question, though simple, is not easily answered. We might say: "to raise a citizen capable of making brave, moral and reasoned decisions as well as of taking effective action for the general good". I believe that education changes driven by our closely held dreams will help us to raise strong and kind children. Our own way of life, our culture, depends on their understanding, will, and capability to act - morally and with courage. *✍*