



Lithuania

Algirdas Monkevičius
Minister of Education and Science



Algirdas Monkevičius was born on 29 March 1956 in Rietavas. In 1979 he graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Šiauliai with the qualification of the teacher of mathematics and physics. He worked as teacher in secondary education schools in Naujoji Akmenė, and later - as inspector of the education administration department of the Akmenė regional municipality. In 1991, he defended a dissertation on sociology. In 1996–1999, he studied ICT on a part-time basis and was awarded the qualification of the teacher of ICT. In 1991–1997, he worked as school head and in 1997–2000, as head of the education administration department of regional municipality. In 1998 – 2000 A. Monkevičius worked at Šiauliai University and was responsible for the founding of the Faculty of Social Sciences. In 2000-2004, A. Monkevičius was minister of education and science in the 11th and 12th Governments of the Republic of Lithuania. Since 2000, he has been member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. On 3 July 2008, Algirdas Monkevičius made an oath in the Seimas and began work in the capacity of the minister of education and science of the 14th Government of the republic of Lithuania.

Lithuania: towards an inclusive education system

After regaining the independence in 1990 Lithuania in the first policy document - the General Concept of Education - and in the ensuing legal documents acknowledged that every person has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs, therefore inclusion is responding to the diversity of needs of all learners: everyone (the disabled, learners from national minorities, pupils with learning difficulties due to marginalization of the family or geographically disadvantaged living area) has a fundamental right to education and must be given an opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. We follow the humanistic philosophy that is based on respect of human uniqueness and dignity and we strive to apply this idea to our legislation and school practice.

I am happy that nowadays many countries (Lithuania among them) have chosen a very flexible so-called "multitrack" approach towards education of students with different educational needs, which offers a range of diverse possibilities for students to acquire education and training according to their abilities and interests. At the same time initial teacher training and school support systems are constantly being improved.

Every year in Lithuania more and more students with special educational needs choose general mainstream settings at every educational level and in all accessible educational programmes. The role of special schools is rapidly changing.

Our system places its focus on talented and gifted children, as well as on learners from national minorities, geographically disadvantaged areas or socially disadvantaged families. It is really important for policy makers to come to a common agreement that additional financial resources are required in order to ensure inclusive education system.

Striving to ensure that Lithuanian education system is really inclusive, the following major objectives for education in Lithuania by 2012 have been set out in



our National Education Strategy for the years 2003-2012, approved by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania:

- universally accessible, quality, modern education compatible with the needs of an individual as part of an open civic society and market economy;
- all children have equal opportunities to prepare for school;
- all children have a socially just learning environment;
- at least 95% of children receive basic education;
- at least 95% of children with basic education stay within the system and receive secondary education or a vocational qualification;
- all children with special needs have an opportunity to learn in a friendly environment;
- at least 60% of youngsters receive quality higher education;
- at least 85% of Lithuanian population of employable age have a real opportunity and ability to use information and communication technologies (ICT);
- the Lithuanian population has real opportunities to engage in lifelong learning.

Having the responsibility for our education systems, we should also stress the importance of:

- public awareness on inclusive education, the concept of '*A School for All*' and a broad range of educational needs;
- responsibility and accountability of local authorities for accessible and quality education;
- cross-field cooperation;
- initial teacher training, enabling every teacher to accept the concepts of '*inclusive education*' and '*A School for All*' and to be willing and competent to work with learners having various educational needs;
- early intervention service;
- system of provision of special educational material and ICT.

Therefore, I am very pleased that the International Bureau of Education has chosen the topic of inclusive education as the theme to be discussed during the 48th session of the Conference. The discussion, I believe, will pave the way towards new - both national and international - actions that will make education around the Globe more accessible and more inclusive.