

## Education and training in a period of economic crisis.

**Day 2 (1 June 2010; 10.30 – 11.00 h): Input from education councils.**

### Input from the Lithuanian Council (Emilija Sakadolskiene)

The previous Social democratic government went on a spending spree that left the present center-right government holding the bill. The subsequent financial crisis made things even worse. We could not borrow money at reasonable rates, like the larger Western countries, so Lithuania had to cut spending in every possible area. The government did not want to go to the IMF (like Latvia) since we then would then have to comply with rather draconian regulations.

The impact on education was substantial. Fortunately, the 25 percent cuts did not significantly affect teacher salaries. Educators are considered rather fortunate, since salaries in the public sector were cut across the board. Teachers now have a salary freeze, but no substantial cuts. The planned incremental increase in salaries, however, has been put off for a better day. Most of the cuts affected infrastructure and after-school programs. Also, many small schools were closed. This was a very controversial issue, since school closings affect the viability of small, rural communities. School policy can have a great impact on the demographics of Lithuania.

There have been many reforms in Higher Education, especially in financing. These reforms were begun before the onset of the crisis. About half of the students receive free tuition. The others pay rather substantial amounts, depending on their major. The costs, as well as the quality of higher education have resulted in a marked brain drain to other countries; especially the ones that offer free or minimal tuition. In Lithuania mobility is not always perceived as positive. It is a two-edged sword.

One area that is receiving great attention is the improvement of teacher education. This year motivational screening is being introduced for new students. Many teacher education programs are being restructured and include more mentoring, practicum and reflective practices. Also, the government allocation per student in pedagogical studies is being doubled to allow for improvements and expanded practicum.

The financial crisis also resulted in a "leaner" Ministry of Education and Science. However, Lithuania is still in the EU structural funds phase and the shortfall is skirted by some worthwhile projects, i.e. leadership, curriculum reform. VET, etc. These are especially needed in times of crisis, when change is inevitable anyway.