



**ECNAIS**

European Council of National Associations of Independent Schools

## Opening speech ECNAIS seminar

# *NEW CHALLENGES FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS – PANDEMIC AND OTHER GLOBAL THREATS*

Mr. Angelos Charisteas, Vice President for Digital Policy at Region of Central Macedonia

Mr. Charalampos Kyraïlidis, chairman of the Hellenic Association of Independent Schools

Dear George Linardatos and other friends from HAIS

Members of ECNAIS,

Headmasters and teachers,

Ladies and gentleman,

Dear friends,

Firstly, a special word of congratulations to our Greek members. This event is our first post pandemic, face to face, gathering. So, it was not easy to organize. Thank you for all the effort!

Secondly, a very warm welcome to our friends from the Romanian Private Schools Association. Since yesterday, they are members of ECNAIS.

On behalf of ECNAIS, I welcome you all to the seminar “NEW CHALLENGES FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS – PANDEMIC AND OTHER GLOBAL THREATS”.

To begin, I bring your attention to the absence of our Ukrainian members. The Ukrainian delegation, usually so numerous and enthusiastic, was not able to join us for the reason we all know. This brings to our minds the words of Maria Montessori: “Averting war is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of educators”. And this work is needed indeed. In an ever more polarized world, where entire countries are split in half with the impression that the two halves don’t belong together, educators have to keep strong. So, today we honor the work of educators all over the globe and hope that the aggression will stop soon so that we may again come together and start to rebuild the bridges that were burnt.

I also would like to take the opportunity to remember with you what was happening the last time we met in Greece. It was for the 2016 conference in Athens. The back then Minister of Education of Greece, Mr. Filis, had (i) declared illegal the evaluation of teachers carried out by

private schools and (ii) had announced his intention to bring back Employment Permanency Terms for Private School Teachers. Answering to a supportive email I sent him, George Linardatos wrote *“we will fight the government on all fronts and we will do our utmost to ensure that our country does not become a Third World Communist State; we count on your support and you can also count on ours”*. As it happened, while we were at that conference, the Portuguese delegation got news that back home the Government had announced the termination of contracts with independent schools. So, being in Greece, makes us remember that the freedom to offer independent education is always in need of protection.

For those of you who are less acquainted with ECNAIS, we are a non confessional, non political association based in Helsinki. ECNAIS was founded in 1988, by a group of educators who wanted to learn more about the challenges and the vision of each other for independent education in Europe. We unite national associations of independent schools from all countries of Europe and our vision is to promote dialogue within countries and the freedom of education for parents and educators.

Today, we have gathered here more than 30 representants of national associations of independent schools, from 13 European countries, and once again we pledge to stand for independent education as a hallmark of free and democratic societies. Independent education represents more than 18% of the students in Europe – more than 20 million students.

Now let me convey the reason for the theme of this seminar.

In April 2019, in Istanbul, we discussed how, since the advancement of the modern school, school systems have been adult centered and how this must change so that the learner is the originator of the learning activities.

In November 2019, in Madrid, we discussed how technology could help us with what task. At the time, we said a Copernican revolution was under way. Information and knowledge was already ubiquitous so schools had to find out how to integrate technology in the teaching and learning process, making sure that androrithms remained masters of the algorithms.

Little did we know that, only two months later, we would be navigating the uncertainty of a global pandemic. Most of us were locked in our houses, completely dependent on technology to keep on educating our students.



And when we were just out of the pandemic, a terrible war broke out, with devastating effects for the entire world.

So here we are; certain that uncertainty is the norm, but willing to learn with the experience gained with all this turmoil. That is the fate of an educator: being ever optimistic, looking into the future with wonder, always on the path of personal and societal development, looking for ways to educate even better.

So we thank dearly to all the speakers in our seminar for helping us to think about the future. Even when so much is unknown about the present.

Turning to more informative issues, let me share an issue we tackled at the General Meeting of ECNAIS yesterday. In April 2023, we will host the first ECNAIS European Debate event. Teams of secondary students from different countries will come together and debate the great issues of our times. Debating is a powerful educational tool and a way to help our students not only develop the so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills but also to really think about the themes essential to our human condition. We hope to meet you all in April and encourage those who have not yet done so to participate in the national debates.

I would like to end reading from the OECD report “The state of school education - one year into the COVID pandemic” that is really supportive of what we are doing these two days: *“the crisis has revealed the enormous potential for innovation that is dormant in many education systems, which often remain dominated by hierarchical structures geared towards rewarding compliance. (...) Governments can help strengthen professional autonomy and a collaborative culture (...). Governments can also help with funding (...). But governments alone can only do so much. (...) governments cannot innovate in the classroom”*. Let`s show the world what independent education and independent educators are capable of.

We wish you an inspirational Seminar. And please take some extra time to enjoy your stay in the beautiful city of Thessaloniki.

Thank you very much

Rodrigo Melo  
ECNAIS Chairman

Thessaloniki, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022