

Special Edition:

The 3rd EkoSkola Parliamentary Session



The EkoSkola Parliament Session is an annual event that brings together young policy makers, participating in the EkoSkola programme, face to face with the country's official policy makers in a parliamentary debate about ways of improving the quality of life in our schools and our country.

This year's session was based on the preliminary results of a questionnaire distributed to all the households of the students of all the 54 schools, in Malta and Gozo, participating in the programme ... a total of 19 thousand families. Conscious that the country's politicians will soon start their preparation for the General Elections, the students wished to present to parliament their suggestions about the environment for the consideration of the 19 MPs present for the session.



Shaun Lia and Maria Testa from Leli Camilleri, Zurrieq Primary A recited the opening prayer and the session was opened by the Hon.

Speaker, Hon Anton Tabone and the EkoSkola Co-ordinator, Dr Paul Pace during the welcoming address



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Speaker Anton Tabone. In his opening speech he said that it was his pleasure to welcome once again the children participating in the EkoSkola programme. He encouraged MPs to tangibly offer their support to these students in their quest to improve the quality of the environment. Following the opening address, Alexia Borg and Brandon Saliba, from William Baker Gudja Primary C, read the Motion about EkoSkola.

The first students to elaborate on the motion were Matthew Azzopardi and Emmanuel Felice from St Bernardette San Gwann Primary B who discussed the issue of junk mail. About half of the families receiving these leaflets do not read them. Moreover, the least read are political leaflets. In fact 73% of the families preferred not to receive any political leaflets. The children pointed out that besides having a negative impact on the environment; the practice of sending these leaflets is not effective. They suggested, amongst other, the use of SMSs as a cheaper and more environmentally friendly alternative.

The Hon. Dr Tonio Borg, Deputy Prime Minister, commented that a popular book had said that 'flowers don't grow in the parliament'. He added that today this saying was proved wrong. He invited his fellow MPs to learn from the enthusiasm and honesty of the EkoSkola children. *"These children are presenting us with an open invitation for us to actively work towards a good quality of life in schools and communities for our benefit and that of others"*.



*Hon. Dr Tonio Borg:
Deputy Prime Minister*



*Hon. Dr Charles Mangion:
Deputy Leader of the Opposition*

Alexander Borg and Daniel Xuereb from St Albert the Great College, Valletta, presented their research on waste management. They pointed out that about 65% of the families answering the questionnaire do not separate their waste, the majority pointing out the lack of availability of Bring In Sites as the main reason for this.

The Hon. Dr Charles Mangion, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, also commented positively about the interest shown by the students in environmental matters. He added that this is a challenge to face the sacrifices that we have to make to change the way we use energy and water, the amount of waste we produce ... our reliance as MPs on junk mail. *"Our commitment towards the environment is shown by our willingness to take action on these day-to-day activities"*.

Janica Zammit and Andrea Portelli of Carmelo Caruana, Safi Primary C, said that families were very much concerned about air quality because of the increase in allergies and respiratory problems. Air quality could improve by controlling car exhaust fumes; emissions from chimneys and dust produced by the building industry. However, the very large number of cars was identified as the major culprit for a reduction in air quality. So respondents suggested: pedestrian zones in towns and villages; an improvement of public transport and a reduction in the number of privately owned cars.



*Hon. Carmelo Abela:
Opposition spokesperson for
Education, Culture & Youth*

The Hon. Carmelo Abela, Opposition spokesperson for Education, Culture & Youth, said that EkoSkola has become a popular programme among school children and teachers because of the sense of commitment it generates. He said that he could personally testify that this interest is also influencing families. He thanked all those who actively support the programme and welcomed the recent call by the ministry for EkoSkola teachers. He pointed out that everyone is responsible for the wellbeing of the environment. He also appealed to

parliament to cut down on the use of paper. *"We MPs should listen more to what these children have to say and act accordingly, not just appreciate the way they speak"*.

Problems related to the construction industry were discussed by Francesca Gauci and Suzie Warrington from St Joseph Sliema Junior School. Respondents commented on several occasions that Malta has become "one big building site". Malta is losing land space at a very fast pace. The most to suffer is our countryside and our biodiversity. This industry is also destroying the characteristics of our towns and villages. When asked for suggestions families mentioned: catering for gardens and playing fields in town planning; planting more trees to develop more 'Green Areas'; better use of old buildings and more sustainable use of stone.

The Hon. Mario Galea, Whip and Secretary of the Parliamentary Group started by saying that *"In my 13 years as MP I have never experienced a more honest and heartfelt session!"* He went on to convey the Minister of Education's (who could not attend because of work abroad) thanks for the commitment shown by these children ... not just today but for all the work done on a daily basis in schools. Hon Galea told the House how his daughter, during her preparation for the EkoSkola Parliament session, told him that MPs should involve children



Hon. Mario Galea: Whip and Secretary of the Parliamentary Group

more often. Children are an underused resource because they are taken for granted. The environment is silent ... it's voice are the children. EkoSkola is allowing children to voice their concerns.



Hon. Dr Joe Brincat: Opposition spokesperson for the Environment & National Heritage

Kristian Bugeja and Neil Felice of Birzebbugia Primary B pointed out that several respondents felt that most environmental problems could be resolved if Maltese become more environmentally responsible through environmental education. Environmentally irresponsible people causing environmental problems can be brought in line by enforcing environmental law and the use of surveillance.

The Hon. Dr Joe Brincat, Opposition spokesperson for the Environment & National Heritage said that the environment is reacting violently to the years of abuse it had to endure. We have to be honest and face our responsibilities: we are living an unsustainable way of life and we find it hard to change our

lifestyles because we tend to feel comfortable that way. *"As MPs, we cannot deny children their right for a healthy environment. Children you need to forcefully remind us of this right"*.

After some additional comments by students from other schools, the Hon. George Pullicino, Minister for Rural Affairs & the Environment, pointed out how much he appreciates that the EkoSkola students are doers not just talkers. He reminded the House of the various spontaneous initiatives that school children took to counter the vandal act on the trees in Mellieha. *"With the passing of time, Maltese children a becoming an environmental force to reckon with ... particularly for us adults when we cannot justify our unsustainable actions with them."* The minister also praised the call for EkoSkola teachers who will be supporting the programme during the next scholastic year.



Hon. George Pullicino: Minister for Rural Affairs & the Environment

The session was concluded by the unanimous approval of the Motion by the House of Representatives.

The schools participating in the parliamentary session were:

- Birzebbugia Primary School B, Birzebbugia
- St Joseph School, Blata I-Bajda
- Savio College, Dingli
- Ghaxaq Primary School C, Ghaxaq
- Stella Maris College, Gzira
- William Baker Primary School C, Gudja
- St Joan Antide School, Gudja
- Maria Regina GJL, Hamrun
- Dun Guzepp Zammit Brighella, BJL, Hamrun
- Kullegg San Benedettu BS, Kirkop
- Carmela Sammut Primary School A, Mosta
- EB Vella Primary School B, Mosta
- St Joseph, Mater Boni Consilli School, Paola
- Carmelo Caruana Primary School C, Safi
- St Bernardette Primary School B, San Gwann
- Guze Delia Primary School C, Siggiewi
- Dun Guzepp Xerri Primary School C, St Julians
- Margaret Mortimer GJL, Sta Lucia
- St Joseph Junior School, Sliema
- St Albert the Great College, Valletta
- St Edwards College, Middle & Senior School, Vittoriosa
- Dr Frans Chetcuti Primary School B, Zabbar
- Antonio Sciortino Primary School B, Zebug
- Leli Camilleri Primary School A, Zurrieq



School children presenting their research data and suggestions to the MPs

Motion about EkoSkola
presented to the House of Representatives
on 6th June 2007
as part of the Environment Week 2007 activities

The EkoSkola programme is an international environmental education programme. Around 5 million boys and girls from more than 17 thousand schools spread in 37 different country participate in the programme. Through EkoSkola, we children take an active part in the decisions, planning and the implementation of environmental activities with the aim of improving the quality of life in our schools and our communities. The programme was first introduced in Malta in 2002 by Nature Trust (Malta), in collaboration with the government. Since then the number of participating schools has risen from 6 to 50. Three from these schools have also managed to get the Green Flag an internationally renowned certificate that evidences the awarded school's serious commitment towards environmental improvement.

Honourable Members of Parliament, this is the third time that we are meeting you in this activity that has developed into an annual event. We feel that we have to thank both sides of the House of Representatives for supporting EkoSkola in their respective programmes about environmental education. Like we did in previous years we would like to talk to you about our country's environment. In order to do this, we will share with you the first preliminary results of a survey about national environmental issues that was distributed to about 19 thousand families.

We have been hearing about these environmental problems for several years, therefore we feel that the time has come to, like you did when you jointly agreed to support EkoSkola, you decide collectively to resolve our country's environmental problems. As citizens we feel the responsibility to do our utmost to ensure a better environment ... EkoSkola is enabling us to achieve this goal. We would like to remind you, Honourable Members of Parliament, about your power and responsibility to decide on the quality of the environment that we will be having tomorrow. So we kindly ask you to support our efforts for a better Malta by putting our country's environment as a priority in your respective electoral manifestos.

We would like to invite you to join us in forwarding an appeal to all those involved in the acts of vandalism that are destroying the trees that we are planting:

Did you know that, during its lifetime, a tree absorbs about 22kg of carbon dioxide in a year and gives off enough oxygen to support two persons? Do you realise what you've achieved by destroying all those trees? You're making your utmost to destroy the air quality for your own children, your brothers and sisters and your own relatives. If you really love them stop all this wrong doing and join us for a better environment.



If you would like to contribute to this newsletter please contact Dr Paul Pace, National EkoSkola Co-ordinator, on paul.j.pace@um.edu.mt

Visit our website on www.ekoskolamalta.com