

## **LITHUANIA MEETING – ALMIRA KARA (TÜRKİYE, İZMİR)**

I would like to inform you about this week, which is the Lithuanian mobility of the Erasmus+ project called “Emotions and Robotics, A Study Across Different Cultures, Educational Systems and Populations”, which I think is one of the best weeks I have spent in my life.

The trip started with our departure from Izmir on April 30 and ended with our return from Lithuania on May 6. It was a very comprehensive trip for me, where we internalized both robotics and our emotions, science and travel, friendship and discipline.

### ***April 30, 2023***

We were really excited as a team during our bus journey starting from Izmir at night. Our journey was spent singing songs, and getting together. Of course, you will appreciate that we did not put our teachers to sleep because of this uproar.

After arriving at Istanbul Airport, which is the last point of our bus journey, we made an approximately 3-hour flight from Istanbul to Vilnius. We took the train from Vilnius airport to Radviliskis, where our duty station is located. It was a very quiet trip, except for a few friends who accidentally sat on the first-class side.

When we arrived at Radviliškis, our host families were waiting for us at the train station. My host Emilé and her family really welcomed me as warmly as possible. I was very excited both because I was going abroad for the first time and because I was meeting a completely different culture and people. But as the day went on, I really got used to it like they were my family. We had dinner, and after dinner we hung out and spent time at a house with my teammates and their hosts. Today ended in such an exciting way.

### ***May 1, 2023***

The day started at the Lizdeika Gymnasium. The opening ceremony took place. Portuguese, Lithuanian, Italian and Turkish students each received one of the 8 different colored cards, and the students who drew the same color formed a group. After creating groups with which we will do tasks together during the week, we have chosen two emotions that we will work on as a group.

After that, we did a gymnasium tour. The school had a simple structure, similar to most high schools in Turkey. And even if you walk around the school for five minutes, there is one feature of this place that you will notice: Owls. This animal, which is the mascot of the school, can really be seen in every way, from bauble to poster, from puppet to picture.

We played an orientation game through QR codes placed in various parts of the town. When you had the QR codes read, you had to fulfill various tasks assigned to you that is hidden in the QR code. For the tasks we took pictures, we danced, I personally really enjoyed it. Activities such as treasure hunts and orientation have attracted my attention since I was a child.

When we finished the orientation game and returned to school, an activity called soap therapy was waiting for us. To be frank, when we saw the name of this event in the programme, we had derived various ideas about what it might be. We would not have guessed that we would seriously make soap, so we had a lot of fun. We prepared a soap mixture with various ingredients such as olive oil, coconut oil, sodium hydroxide. The teachers helped us a lot. Finally we finished by adding a fragrance and color.

After completing all the activities we had to do during the day, we had free time. As almost all students, we went to a large park in town. We played volleyball and basketball, and really had fun. I dreamt of having friends from different cultures for maybe my whole life? So this was a spectacular

experience to be a part of. As the Turkish team, we went to the playground, we spent time as if we had never seen a park. This also helped us get together as a team.

### **May 2, 2023**

When we reached the school in the morning, the 8 groups I mentioned were divided in half; the first 4 groups were divided into studies called future engineering, and the other 4 groups were divided into Arduino programming. I participated in engineering studies primarily because I was in one of the first four groups. By making various measurements, we have offered solutions to many problems.

After this event, we reviewed the ARDUINO program. We have made simple projects with the materials we have, both through code and block. My bandmates didn't seem too eager for this event, but we still came up with nice simple projects.

In the afternoon, we visited the Hill of Crosses. Its history really impressed me. Besides, it was a really different experience to see so many and so many different kinds of crosses. Since Turkey is an Islamic-oriented country, the cross is not a very popular symbol. Therefore, we can say that the trip to the Hill of Crosses was one of the times in this week, when it was at the peak of cultural interaction. Of course, we didn't forget to take a lot of photos.

When we returned to school, they separated us from our previous groups into different groups. And they asked us to create a slogan for our group and a robot dance that we would create as if each of us were part of a robot. Our group created an Italian chant as a slogan and a dog walking with its owner as a robot dance.

### **May 3, 2023**

I think today was the earliest I got up. Of course, my host Emile helps me with this, I owe it to her that I can wake up directly every day. We had a really nice breakfast because the trip would be long, and Emile's mother prepared a little more food for the road than she gives every day. She really tried her best to make me taste a different traditional Lithuanian dish every day. Although these details also happened the other days, I thought it would make more sense to write them today.

Our journey to Kaunas started with our bus departing at 7 o'clock. Everyone was very sleepy on the bus (especially my friends from the Turkish group), but we were eager to get more involved with each other, as it would be a long way. We were chatting while watching the roads, which were like a green paradise, accompanied by music.

Our first stop was Kaunas College. A very sweet girl who studies there helped us take a tour of the university and gave a short lecture. It was really a university that made me want to start studying in the university as soon as possible. From its library to its laboratories, it was magical. Robot laboratories were in the majority. We had the chance to follow the working principle of several of the robots designed by the students. There was a cute robot doing a moonwalk, I was excited that it could be done with servo motors and some coding knowledge, because I also love doing creative projects like this. Also, another robot, I think this one was not made by students, it worked on a different principle. You press a button and make it do various movements, when you press the same button and then press the "start" button, it repeats the same movements that you just made to that robot. It sounds like a very simple software, but it interested me. I said to myself: "Why shouldn't I combine robotics and music?", and made the robot make its movements according to the rhythm of AC/DC's song "Thunderstruck".

After the university tour was over, we sat down at a restaurant to have lunch. A traditional Lithuanian dish called Kibinai was being made here. It's a really delicious dish with a look which is similar to a Turkish traditional dish "poğaç", mostly filled with chicken or pork. It's mostly made with pork, but I guess I don't want to try it that way :).

The next stop of our trip was Vilnius Energy and Technology Museum, which is my favorite stop. At first they showed us how the Tesla coil works. But this was not a demonstration that could be made on a table like that, they were demonstrating with two Tesla coils 3 times the size of a human! Of course, these two coils were surrounded by the famous Faraday cage for our protection. They showed how electrical energy is converted into sound energy by tuning the sounds created by electrical energy occurred from the magnetic field created between the coils to the melody of the Thunderstruck track. My mouth was left open, I'm not exaggerating at all. We have gained information about the history of energy sources, alternative energy sources and how these resources can be used. Of course, we have acquired this information through a lot of interactive activities. A wagon that carries you up by how many times you spin the machines handle, a hamster wheel-like wheel that you generate electrical energy when you turn it, and many other things that I can't count yet. When you complete each activity, you press the card given to you at the beginning of the trip to the round icon next to the activity, and it loads points on the card. Finally, if you have collected enough points, you have a separate machine read your card and it gives you a small souvenir gift. It was very difficult for me to get out of the museum. Who knows, maybe I will do works that will inspire such a museum in the future.

I remember that I said that the museum is located in Vilnius. Of course, our trip to this magnificent city was not over. Next was to see the Basilica Cathedral. Although cathedrals are kind of just a little more cooler version of churches, after reading Victor Hugo's novel The Hunchback of Notre Dame, it has become one of the main architectures that interested me.

After seeing the cathedral, our free time had begun. We used the first hours of our free time to visit Gediminas Castle as the Turkish students and teachers. Since we went up via the cable car, we could see the splendor of Vilnius from a considerable height. History is not the subject I am most curious about, but whether I want to learn about the history or the history of ancient architecture, it is an action that attracts me. Although our teachers were tired, they seemed to be enjoying the trip quite a lot. I'll be honest, we were more busy taking photos as students :D.

When we got down to the ground by cable car, we started walking around Vilnius to meet in front of the cathedral. Although it may seem like I'm exaggerating, I'll keep saying it every time, because if you ask each of my friends, they will agree with me: Vilnius is one of the most beautiful cities I've ever seen in my life. Of course, you'd be right if you said "How are you planning on understanding the whole life going on in a city with just a 4-hour trip?", and that doesn't change the fact that its architecture, atmosphere and intertwining with nature are fascinating. We went to bookstores, we walked around the streets just so we could see more places. And we didn't forget to look for a gift shop, of course. We bought souvenirs to take to our loved ones in Turkey.

Whether it was the conversations we had on the roads, whether it was thinking about the things we did and will do on the trip, on the one hand, whether it was ourselves wandering around the shops, we had a lot of fun on every part of it. But the funniest part was that after we said let's have dinner at a restaurant special to Lithuania, which is not in our country; we couldn't find a suitable place and sat down somewhere we could find anyhow in Turkey.

We gathered in front of the cathedral, which was the meeting point, and it was time to leave. We got on the bus, returned to Radviliskis with a journey where we really understood that everyone was tired. But of course, even though we were tired, we didn't stop chatting.

### **May 4, 2023**

When we arrived at the school, there were 2 LEGO content competitions waiting for us. As a group of 4 people we parted with on the first day, we were asked to make a futuristic city made out of LEGOS. This city should find solutions to at least 3 current environmental problems. We named the city "Shrinky Village". A solution has been found to both air and soil pollution in this city, and a solution has also been found to raise adequate awareness of people about environmental pollution. A robot that warns people when people throw their garbage in places, and people who ignore the warning, we

call the “environmental police”, who report people to the police dealing with environmental problems; small smoking areas that exist only for smoking (smoking is prohibited anywhere but these areas), closed to prevent air pollution; 4 hours per week of environmental lessons in schools and many other innovations, has been brought to this city.

The second competition was sumo robot wrestling. They made every 2 groups unite so that 8 groups can get do to 4 groups. Then, with the LEGO kit they gave us and the block-based coding application on the computer, we were asked to make a robot. We were going to wrestle our robot with robots designed by other groups on a runway located on the ground, whose boundaries were determined by bands. Our robot was designed to detect when an object comes near it through an ultrasonic sensor, and when it detects the object, our robot tries to damage the opposite object with the arm we designed, and escapes from the opposite object without being harmed by a maneuver. Our robot was the winner of that competition, but I was going to think that we were going to have a lot of fun whether we won or not. As soon as we gave the start command in one of the competition rounds, it will be due to the damage it received in the previous round, which suddenly fell to pieces! We still laugh at this incident every time it comes to our minds. Fortunately, after that, we put the pieces back together and continued on our way

Of course, we didn't forget to have fun between competitions. They opened the traditional dance music of each country, and each country taught each other its own dances. It is a fact that music, dance and science are universal.

After the competitions were over, we had free time. As all students, we went to the park I mentioned earlier. Every time we could find other things to have fun with. After our time in the park, we said as a Turkish group: We forgot about each other from socializing with everyone, let's go somewhere as a group this time! And we went to a pizzeria for dinner. The pizzeria we went to was making really high quality pizza, it was enough for all of us. Apart from pizza, billiards could also be played in this restaurant. I've only tried it once before, but it was really nice to try it again here, especially with my friends. After that it was time to get back to school.

When we returned to school, a great event was waiting for us. The Lithuanian folk group “Aidija” had visited the school to show us Lithuanian dances and songs. They performed the songs brilliantly with their instruments and voices. After finishing the songs, they invited us all on stage to show us the dances. Lithuanians have very nice and energetic dances I shall say. This was the first time I tried the partner-swapping dance type, and I have to tell you, you really finish the dance with a smile on your face. Because this is the kind of dance that allows you to meet even people you don't know in a few seconds. Of course, we didn't forget to take a break between dances. They arranged traditional Lithuanian dishes on a long table for us to taste these and fulfill our energy. They were really delicious, I tried most of them two days ago thanks to Emile and her family.

### ***May 5, 2023***

Right after we met at school, we visited Burbiskiai Manor House. The manor house, whose history dates back to the 1400s, hosts the tulip festival, which takes place once every year. So why is this mansion the host ? Because there is a huge tulip garden, and I think there are the most tulips in Radviliskis in this area. We didn't have a chance to get to see the festival because it was going to take place a week after we were there, but even a tour of the tulip garden was enough. There were tulips of all kinds, all colors. We took a lot of photos again.

When we returned to school, we presented the presentations we made before this trip, which introduced our school and our country. We made two presentations in which we explained Turkey and Turkish culture; BILSEM and the principle of education and training. I think we have made really successful presentations. The Italian and Portuguese teams also made their presentations, and I must be clear that I think we are cooperating with high-quality schools. After the presentations, the certification ceremony took place and they asked us to state our thoughts about the week, and with that, the week was officially over.

Even though the week was over, we students still didn't want to finish. After eating lunch at school, we went to the houses. However, our hosts had an event planned for us as a surprise: bowling at a shopping center located in Siuiali! We went to the shopping center as the Italian team, some people from the Lithuanian team and some from the Turkish team. We split up into groups to play bowling and had a lot of fun. It is normal for you to be surprised if I say this was my first bowling experience in my life. But I think I performed very well. We had a lot of fun.

We must be hungry, so we went to a restaurant to eat right after that. Most of us left to go home after dinner. However, me, a few Turkish friends and our hosts decided to go skating on the ice rink. This could also be my first real ice skating experience, I remember trying it once many years ago, but this was much more beautiful. I struggled at first, but when they showed me how to skate, I felt like I was starting to learn. I decided that I definitely want to try ice skating more. When we finished skating, we went to the houses.

Emile gave me many gifts to take to Turkey. Chocolates and Sakotis (a kind of dessert, they also served us at the folk party) were my favorites.

### ***May 6, 2023***

We got up early in the morning and it was time to go. We met in front of the hotel where the Portuguese team and all the teachers were staying. We had a tearful goodbye until the shuttles arrived. There are so many beautiful people I met and connected with in just 1 week, I didn't want to break up with any of them. It was one of the best, most science, art and emotion-filled weeks of my life for me. I've always wanted to take part in a project like this.

After the shuttles arrived, they dropped us off at the airport. Since our flights with the Italians were at similar hours, we got to say goodbye to them once again at the airport. After waiting for an hour or two, our plane finally arrived. The journey to Türkiye had begun.

When we landed at Istanbul Airport, the service that would take us to Izmir was waiting for us. We boarded the service, again spent a 6-hour journey full of noise and noise, and finally arrived in Izmir. I said goodbye to my teammates and it was time to go home. It felt so surreal to be back home. I missed my family and can't wait to tell them everything. So this amazing trip ended here.

ALMIRA KARA

*Radviliškis, May, 10, 2023*