

## **In the heart of democracy – a visit to the European Parliament**

On November 29th, a group of students from University High School in Toruń had the opportunity to visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where took place a great initiative to bring young people together to promote the idea of European integration – Euroscola. Euroscola is a competition of knowledge about the European Union aimed at high school students, in which the main prize is a subsidized visit to the headquarters of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where winners from across the European Union takes place. The event aims to weld young people from all 27 EU member states, candidate countries and former member states to debate, take sides, negotiate, vote and finally take a position on important issues related to the future of Europe. The supervisor of the Euroscola program group of students from Toruń was Robert Fleischer, who helped the school win the competition and organize the trip.

The initiative was attended by 39 schools, with 1122 participants from 25 member states. Euroscola began with a series of presentations and lectures to familiarize participants with the role of the European Parliament and the decision-making process in the European Union. The students had the opportunity to listen to a video speech by the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola, who shared her experiences and knowledge of European politics. The next highlight of Euroscola was an interview and question-and-answer session with Delara Burkhardt - Member of the European Parliament. The series of Q&A on the topics of migration, climate change, human rights, gender inequality, wars and other global changes was extremely interesting and inspiring. Michal Lawicki - President of the Student Government at the University High School in Toruń in his Q&A with Delara touched on the topic of insufficient action towards the problem of global warming.

In her remarks, the Member of the European Parliament pointed out that the younger generation feels overwhelmed by an uncertain vision of the future, and that Europe is not providing the needed stability. Young people feel that their worries are not taken into account in the general discourse. On the other hand, according to Delara, this can give needed strength and motivation to speak up, exchange opinions and implement action to initiate change. This was aptly put by Delara in the phrase “Raise your voice about what's important to you”.

Afterwards, participants were able to take part in interactive workshops and simulations aimed at developing negotiation, conflict resolution and teamwork skills. The topics of the simulations touched on aspects of human rights protection and solidarity. Students were assigned to a specific group based on the color of the armband they received at the entrance. Each student took one of four positions on the proposal “Protection of human rights and solidarity: the EU's ambition towards a world of freedom, security and justice”: in favour, against, undecided and compromise-oriented. When a student came forward to speak, he or she had exactly one minute to present arguments consistent with his or her view. This was a unique opportunity for young people to experience decision-making at the European level in practice.

During the day, participants also had the opportunity to visit the headquarters of the European Parliament. During this visit, they were able to see the plenary chamber, where debates and votes are held, and learn about the work of European deputies. It was an extremely enlightening experience that allowed the young people to see how the democratic process works in Europe. The experience gained from the visit to the Parliament shows young people that their voice matters and has an impact on the future of Europe. By representing Poland on the international stage, the students were assured that their observations, comments or concerns about the European Union would be noticed and they would get answers to their questions.

