

## Young Poetry Slammers discover the EU

A Prize Winner Trip

Brussels, 09. – 11. April 2019

What does Europe mean to me personally? How is a Europe of tomorrow going to look like? Youngsters from the western German state of North Rhine-Westphalia were dealing with questions like these in a poetry slam contest organised by the regional office of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

After winning the first round in their respective schools, the pupils took part in the finale in Düsseldorf. In their poetry, the teenagers spoke out against racism and nationalism, longing for a peace and freedom in Europe and beyond. They also unfolded critical thoughts about the current state of the Union as far as trade politics or internal needs for structural reformation are concerned.

In order to deepen their knowledge about the European Union and to discover how young people's interests are being taken care of on a European level, the finalists were invited to a study trip to Brussels. Here, they learnt about the functioning of the EU and discussed many current topics with representatives from different institutions.

*Insights into the work of the European Parliament*

In the European Parliament, the students discussed current political issues, such as possible outcomes for the special summit on Brexit. Another topic that they were very interested in was the social dimension of Europe, especially with regard to countering growing inequality.



*The group inside the European Parliament*

After the discussion we were showed around the building and learned more about the work in the committees and plenary sessions. Overall, the students were very interested and got a lasting impression of the European Parliament.

*How do actors outside the European institutions represent our interests?*

In the afternoon – not before trying true Belgian fries of course! – we found out more about further possibilities to

represent citizens' interests in European politics

First, we were informed about the work of the European Youth Forum, which acts as the political representation of young people in a variety of different European policy areas. They advocated for a membership in any youth organisation as the easiest way for young people to make their opinion heard in a lasting and institutionalised way.

Later on in the Representation of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW), the students were quite entertainingly provided with further knowledge about the interaction of European institutions. Also an old prejudice about the "Brussels bureaucracy" was debunked: there are fewer people directly employed by the European Union in administrative jobs than for instance by NRW. We also got to know why in addition to the national embassy, German states are present in Brussels as well. By explaining NRW's interests with regards to European media policy, it was easy to show the different and sometimes quite diverging interests

both on the subnational level and between the states and the national government.

This eventful day ended with a tour through the European quarter and to the city centre, where everybody was given the possibility to purchase some souvenirs and to discover the cultural and historic side of Brussels.

#### *A glimpse at our shared European history*

The last programme item was a guided tour through the House of European History. Reflecting on the long and often troublesome, violent past of this continent and the insights from the discussions the day before, the students could draw their personal conclusions about the Europe they want to live in. This trip certainly provided some new answers – even if some of the students are not yet allowed to vote in this year's European elections, it has brought their attention to European politics. And who knows? Perhaps this experience can trigger more creative poetry.

by Leonard Wessel