

Euroscola in Strasbourg

By Mairin Maher and Rachel Byrne.

After winning a prize for a short film made about 'Our Vision of Europe' this year, 25 excited Mercy Mounthawk European Studies Students embarked on the trip of a life time to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 24th May. We went by bus to Dublin airport for our flight that was at 7am. On arrival in Frankfurt we met our bus driver Gudrun, a fantastic German lady who had a passion for strict timekeeping. Our first stop was the wonderful town of Heidelberg in Germany. Here we had lunch in the sunshine compliments of MEPs Pat 'the Cope' Gallagher and Brian Crowley. Afterwards we had a quick tour of this magical town. Reluctantly, we boarded the bus to leave and onwards to Strasbourg we went. A fluvial cruise around the canals in Strasbourg provided us with many wonderful sights and the beautiful weather made everything that bit more spectacular. We were surrounded by Gothic buildings and each one had a story and an interesting history attached to it. We were awestruck as the friendly locals waved and smiled as we passed.

The next morning we went to the European Parliament. Firstly we were seated in the Louise Weiss Chamber where the MEPS meet and debate. We then had the opening speeches by the representatives from each school. Joseph Daul and Rainer Wieland then gave introduction speeches followed by a question and answer session where 500 students grilled them on topics such as The Fiscal Treaty and the situation in Greece. We were then divided into discussion groups with students from all over Europe. We debated issues such as Migration and Integration, Environment, Internet Safety and formed resolutions on them. Then we went back into the chamber and relayed our resolutions to the other groups who voted and either passed or rejected them through an electronic voting system. Luckily they were all passed. The closing ceremony then took place, it was then time to say goodbye to all our new friends.

On Saturday we visited Europa Park. It is the largest theme park in Germany and the third most popular theme park resort in Europe. The park is home to eleven roller coasters and nine water rides and whilst some of us went for the adrenaline rush of the famous Silver Star rollercoaster Mr. Behan and Ms. Carey remained closer to ground level. There was something to meet everyone's fancy. After an exhausting morning it was time to leave Europa Park to head for the airport. When we say this we feel we are speaking for the whole class, that it was an absolutely amazing trip.

On behalf of the class we would like to sincerely thank Ms. Sherma Carey for all her hard work and dedication. We felt very proud to have represented Ireland in Euroscola. We left feeling very proud to be Irish. Despite Ireland's financial difficulties it became clear that Ireland is very well regarded in Europe and by other Europeans. We really got a sense of the tremendous work that is done in the European parliament. When one of the keynote speakers reminded us of how lucky we are to be living in Europe in a time of unprecedented peace we really started to realise how important it is for Europeans to work together. We got a real sense of being European whilst not feeling any less Irish.

Sean Kelly MEP, Brian Crowley MEP, Pat 'the Cope' Gallagher MEP and ex MEP Mark Killilea gave us a huge amount of encouragement and support and we really appreciated that. We would also like to thank Ms. Carey and Mr. Behan for travelling with our class to Strasbourg, it's a trip that will never be forgotten.