

Experience Europe to understand Europe

Three Rotary clubs have launched a Franco-German-Italian project with the aim of strengthening their commitment to a common European future.

At the beginning of the year 2023, the Rotary Club of Heilbronn launched an innovative, multinational project. 18 pupils from Germany, France and Italy work together for several months on important European topics with the aim of promoting encounters and an understanding of democracy, reflecting on different points of view and familiarising young people with the European idea.

The project brings together six pupils aged around 14 from each of the three regions to work together for several months on a European project topic. They are accompanied by their teachers.

"We chose this age group because the pupils are at a crucial stage in their development as adults, when they are forming their first political ideas. They have also already acquired some foreign language skills, which they can now put into practice," says Isabella Peimann-Schaak, project manager at RC Heilbronn.

The 18 young people started the four-day kick-off event at Heilbronn Youth Hostel in mid-January. During the young people's visit to Heilbronn, a joint meeting was held between the members of the Heilbronn Rotary Club, which is organising and supporting the project and financing the kick-off event, and the pupils. Results from the first two days were presented and information was provided on the next steps. There was also a meeting in Strasbourg with members of the European Parliament and the encounter is supported by leisure activities, such as a visit to the Experimenta science centre in Heilbronn.

The participants will then work together in several online meetings. The project will come to a joint conclusion at the end of May in a three-day face-to-face event in Italy, where the results will be presented.

"We are very much looking forward to this project, as the current situation shows that a better understanding of each other and increased cooperation are important foundations for making Europe a tangible community," says Peimann-Schaak. "We also see the measure as an enrichment on the path to general personal and political opinion-forming." The aim is to stabilise the project. It will not only continue to be offered by the Rotarian clubs that are already active, but will also serve as a model for other Rotarian clubs to promote more encounters of this kind.

The following schools are taking part in the 2022/23 school year: Justinus-Kerner-Gymnasium (Weinsberg) from Germany, Lycée Saint-Pierre (Bourg-en-Bresse) from France and Istituto Superiore "Lorenzo Lotto" (Trescore Balneario) from Italy. The content

of the project fits in perfectly with the Baden-Württemberg education plans, as it promotes democracy education. This is demonstrated by the varied programme, in the course of which expectations about Europe are exchanged, different perspectives are adopted and participatory methods are used to work together, as well as a discussion with members of the European Parliament as part of an excursion to Strasbourg.

With the aim of strengthening their commitment to a shared European future, Rotary clubs from the three European partner regions of Baden-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes and Lombardy launched a German-French-Italian "Multilateral Rotarian Forum" (MRF) with several projects in 2021. The Rotary Club Heilbronn (RC Heilbronn) is also involved and has developed the tri-national school project "We in Europe - together for ...".