

When headmaster Christoph Sauer phoned me to ask whether or not I would be prepared to welcome the participants to the preliminary rounds of this year's World Schools Debating Championships in my capacity as the district co-ordinator for the Oststadt in Schwäbisch Gmünd, my first reaction was:

"Yes, of course – because there are many reasons to support a truly reliable partner!"

When I prepared this short speech and delved into what the World Schools Debating Championships are all about, my second reaction was: "What can I possibly tell students from New Zealand, Thailand, Sweden, Slovakia, Greece, Denmark, Hungary and Israel about this suburb of Schwäbisch Gmünd?"

The Eastern district of Schwäbisch Gmünd, or OSTSTADT as it is called by the locals, is as diverse as you yourselves.

It's a true melting pot, one in which people from many countries and cultures have found a home.

It's a place where more than 60 percent of the 4,000 citizens are people with migration backgrounds.

They are from Turkey, Italy, Greece, the former Soviet Union, Portugal, Africa, Syria, Kosovo, Iraq, – just to name a few.

Many of them have lived here for years, others will stay for a short time only – but others who escaped from war and terror and found refuge here are hoping that they may remain here.

All these people enrich our community life, creating a diverse neighbourhood which is vividly reflected in the motto of our district: Gelebte Vielfalt, which means Living Diversity

Diversity is not easy by definition – you have to work at it.

You have to tackle the challenges it raises, the tensions it fuels and take people's concerns and fears seriously.

The key to living diversity is to live an open culture of debate.

Debating - that is why you are here today.

You have been selected to represent your country because of your critical thinking skills, your ability to propose workable solutions and your emotional maturity as the spirit of the debate captures you with serious subject matter – and also helps you to realise how others think.

These skills are tremendously important when it comes to shaping multicultural communities that foster participation, freedom of speech, empowerment and international understanding.

The Landesgymnasium für Hochbegabte, located in the OSTSTADT, is the perfect venue for hosting the preliminary rounds of the 28th tournament.

The school is well-known for being open-minded, international, knowledge-hungry and for enriching our community.

It is a reliable partner, participating in community life, supporting local events and founding social initiatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen...

I wish you every success in today's tournament.

MAY THE BEST HOUSE WIN!

Christine Hüttmann, district co-ordinator, Oststadt, Schwäbisch Gmünd