In 2018 November 7- 14 I had an honor to participate in MIRAI 2018 (Politics and Security) program. This program has given me the chance not only to get acquainted with Japan's politics, international relations and security, but also to deepen the historical, cultural and social knowledge that I acquired during my bachelor studies. However, the most important thing for me was the opportunity - a trip to the country, which I have been studying about for more than 4 years, and dreamed of seeing it up close. 40 students from Europe countries had participated in first group of “MIRAI 2018 Politics and Security“. Despite the different study programs, we were divided into two teams: pink and blue; therefore, while working together with different teams, we always found new topics for discussion. But let's start from the beginning.

The uneasiness I felt began on November 6, when my first plane flight in my life was waiting for me. I was also worried about the fact that it was a connected flight- Vilnius-Frankfurt-Haneda, and namely at the Frankfurt Airport, I will have very little time to find the right gate for my next flight. However, I calmed down a little when, accidentally, I got to know MIRAI's 2018 Danish participant in Frankfurt. Due to a similar study programs and hobbies, we quickly found a common ground and after a “short” (only 10 hour) flight, we met again at Haneda airport.

In Haneda, everything went very fast. I have not managed to recollect my thoughts yet, and I'm already sitting with a new friend on a bus that takes us to the hotel (I did not felt the wait in line, that had more than 200 passengers, nor did I realized that we are waiting for other participants in airport). After listening for the first briefings and settling down at the hotel, we got some free time, so me and my Danish friend hopped on a city train and went to the bookstore that was located in Toyosu. I was not afraid to get lost in a new city, because my companion have visited Tokyo few year ago, moreover, his Japanese language skills we great. After we saw the spectacular skyscrapers and reached our goal, we returned to the hotel really hungry. However, I was a little disappointed. After getting acquainted with the rest of the participants, we “attacked” the food, yet the food, as my Italian colleague described, was: "a real challenge for our European taste receptors". After our interesting dinner we listened for the rest of the briefings, rules and information. There was one really important rule: after the official MIRAI program we have a free time, however we should be back in the hotel at 11 o’clock. So I used this privilege and joined the group of fellow travelers who visited the Rainbow Bridge and enjoyed the view of Tokyo skyscrapers in the night.

Next day started a little bit differently. Dressed in formal clothes, we traveled to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where we had lecture on Japan's international relations and the country's contribution to stability, peace and security in the East Asian region. The lecture (thanks to my university professor, I personally did not heard anything new) took a little longer than expected, so we went off to go to eat. After lunch, we visited the Edo-Tokyo Museum and the Sensō-ji Temple in the Asakusa district. While traveling with the bus, we saw other Tokyo “celebrities” like Tokyo Tower, Tokyo Sky Tree or sumo arena that stands out for its unique architecture. After the dinner, the daytime program ends, so we knew that from now on we can begin exploring Tokyo by ourselves. I, my Danish friend and a group of German participants decided to visit Shinjuku district, where I first time witnessed things, I have only seen in books or internet: skyscrapers, which, thanks to billboards, shine in all colors, shops that feature a variety of animated characters and movie monsters and a huge mass of people. It is a commercial center of Tokyo, and I understand for the first time that even the "pink glasses" that fell down during the study years did not diminish the impression that I will feel while traveling across this country.

The third day, perhaps, was the worst thing for me throughout the program. It was terribly rainy. We went to the prestigious Keio University. Here, we listened for the lecture by Professors of the University Michito Tsuruoka and Yuichi Hosoya- “Liberal International Order in Crisis?” As politics is my weak area, during the discussion and debate that followed, I have not managed to say a word. I was very disappointed with myself, and I realized that 2/3 of this year's MIRAI program participants have long been specialized in political science. My mood was slightly clarified during the lunch conversation with university students who, unlike most of my comrades, are interested not only in politics but also in culture, geography, history, social problems. After saying farewell to the university community, we went to the airport. There we waited for our flight to Hiroshima. It was during the flight that I saw the most impressive view in my entire life - through the almost clear sky, I saw the spectacular night-lights of Tokyo.

The next day in Hiroshima started incredibly well, a complete contrast to the rainy day of yesterday. We started our trip in Shukkei-en garden. The traditional harmony of nature is well suited to the backdrop of skyscrapers. This garden is also beautiful by the fact that it is possible to admire different kinds of trees growing in the territory on every season. In this case, most beautiful thing was reddish maple trees.

Our next destination was liquor factory „Chugoku Jozo Co.” Here, after a small presentation, we could taste the factory products. After taking this opportunity, we went for lunch and then, to the cultural center. The kind staff of the cultural center taught us calligraphy, origami and tea ceremony. A hundred times seen and tried in the university environment, but I still admire it so much. That was a lot of fun. While we were traveling to the hotel, we were waiting for such a long and free day. We were free to explore the city of Hiroshima, so, with a group of friends, we went to visit the Hiroshima Castle, which was almost closed when we arrived. The next personal discovery of this day was the Ebisu shrine located in the entertainment district, between several bars. But even in such a place, shrine was clean, tidy and respected. After adventuring in the night Hiroshima, we rushed down to sleep because we knew that tomorrow will be a serious day.

On the fifth day, after breakfast, we went to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Here we looked at the remains of the building after the atomic bombardment - the A-Bomb Dome. This place, perhaps, pushes you the most to think about the horror of war, the importance of peace and the future. After that, the conversation with the atomic bombardment survivor Kiriake Chieko followed. Having heard her story about the war tragedy, we also visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, but here we spent just a little time, because we had to hurry to the ferry. With the ferry we went to the place, which I wanted to visit even when I was in school- Miyajima Island and Itsukushima shrine.

Actually I was disappointed. The holy island, which is described in the Internet and in books as a peace and harmony with the natural environment place, has now become a commercialized, host of thousands of tourists, area (best comparison- Lithuanian Nida). I won’t deny, it was really fun to pet the deer living there and walking among people, or to admire the huge O-Tori gates in the water, but it was rather funny to crawl through a huge crowd of tourists just to see another crowd of dozens of people standing in a line at the best place for photography with water gates. A five-storey pagoda next to Itsukushima was also surrounded by crowds of tourists, so I with my Hungarian friend decided to go somewhere further and visit the small, two-storey Tahoto Pagoda. When we finally climbed the mountain and came near to Tahoto, we finally felt the peace of the shrine, as all the bustle remained at the bottom, and only a Japanese photographer stood beside us. As we walked a lot, we were very exhausted, so when we came back to the hotel after dinner we accumulated the last strength to visit Hiroshima center for the last time. Everyone enjoyed their free time differently.

The penultimate day of the program began with a long bus ride to the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force School. A cheerful representative here told us about the history, agenda, and showed us the area of this educational institution. Finally, we went to see the archive, which collected various manuscripts and relics of the Japanese army. After this visit, we waited for an even longer bus ride to Shinkansen - a high-speed bullet train with which we had to return to Tokyo. We could not relax in the bus nor train during the trip, because we had to get ready for the tomorrow’s workshop. Late in the evening we arrived at the hotel in Tokyo's Ikebukuro district, but everything around the hotel was almost closed, so I, like the most of participants, decided to rest after a long day on a road.

The last day of MIRAI 2018 program has come. The visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was waiting for us again. Having dressed up the formal clothes, we introduced the sensations we experienced during the program and outlined our plans for the future. After the presentations, we went to eat the last group lunch, after which all participants divided into groups, because this day was completely free. While everyone went to further districts of Tokyo, I, with my Hungarian, came up with a better idea to explore Ikebukuro district itself that participants forgot about, which is in fact one of Tokyo's pop-culture centers. In the evening, we went to Shibuya, where we met with other participants of the program. There we admired glowing skyscrapers in the dark, visited the statue of Hachiko dog and saw the famous Shibuya crossing. This day was really amazing and full of exciting experiences, but it is sad because it is also the last one. Although tomorrow we were waiting for an early flight, we went to bed late, because we knew that we would have to say goodbye to both Japan and our new friends.

MIRAI 2018 program was a great opportunity in my life. New friends and colleagues, greatly deepened culture, history, political knowledge, a vision of a totally different society, and most importantly the first trip in my life to Japan, the country I want to teach about others in the future. Of course, as always, there were slight unexpected problems or little troubles, but it is also a newly acquired experience. This week was one hell of an adventure, that I will never forget.