

Europe without borders – society without borders?

Warsaw, November 15, 2010 – for the third time now the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* extended invitations to a meeting within the series called “The Political Club”, the aim of which is to discuss current political issues. The special guest this time was Dietmar Nietan, member of the Bundestag and chairman of the Federal League of German-Polish societies. The discussion was led by Agnieszka Wiśniewska, editor of the leftist journal *Krytyka Polityczna*.

On the main topic of “Europe without borders” Nietan addressed the meaning of migration in a Europe without internal borders, what role Germany, Poland, and the EU play in this, and the question of how to better integrate immigrants. The German politician first spoke of Europe’s economic



attractiveness, stressing that immigration concerns not only one country, but rather all the Schengen countries together. “For Poland in particular this means having to face intensified immigration in the future.” This is why, Nietan explained, migration and integration must become pan-European topics and must be discussed at the European level. The Deputy to the Bundestag then presented a broad description of the latest German debate on integration. He noted that rising Islamophobia, in conjunction with fear of social degradation and the feeling of political marginalization, is spawning an atmosphere that is unfavorable to all forms of migration.

All participants of the Club agreed that the key to fruitful integration is education. Thus, easy access to education is crucial. Nietan called for a more open educational system, one that would offer lifelong opportunities for continuous development and for social and professional advancement. Essential in this aim is an improvement of the system of recognizing foreign and non-institutional education and qualifications.



The second main topic concerned the limits to integration. “Both sides must devote attention to the other culture and meet each other halfway”. For that to happen it is important that each side know its own history. Many Germans are not aware of their Christian traditions and those people have

almost nothing in common with Christian faith. This is part of the problem in understanding other religions. “In our secularized world we often forget that for many people religion is something around which identity is built”, Nietan noted. And without identity young people in particular are left lacking stability and support. For this very reason young Muslims are often more religious than their parents’ generation. Nonetheless, Nietan stated that Germany is doing a better job of political integration than in the 1990s. The current debate, he added, has highlighted a societal perception of the problems that does not conform to the real circumstances.

The situation in Poland, in turn, is quite different. Given Poland’s 97% ethnic homogeneity the matter of integrating immigrants is not at all high on the political agenda. The Club’s participants were therefore very interested in Nietan explanations concerning the German debate and took active part in the discussion. Generating fervent exchange were the remarks of one participant, who defended France’s strict policy that often does not permit recognition of immigrants’ identity, and praised it as a better solution.

In the end the participants arrived at a shared conclusion: integration is a topic of utmost importance for Europe, and therefore must be discussed throughout the continent.