



## Discussion on Belarus in Berlin

The days of Belarusian culture were organized in Berlin. Belarusian and German journalists took part in panel discussion "Belarus - the Europe's Door to the East?", which was held in the frame of the project "Focus on Belarus-Terra Incognita".

The days of Belarusian culture were organized in Berlin. The project "Focus on Belarus-Terra Incognita" was carried out by the German association "Citizens of Europe" in cooperation with Belarusian NGO Kalegium and Berlin cultural centre ACUD with the financial support of Robert Bosch Foundation.

Belarusian and German journalists and also NGO representatives took part in the discussion "Belarus - Europe's Door to the East?", which was a part of the of Belarusian CULTural days programme.

"Belarus - Europe's Door to the East?"

To the opinion of the German journalist Ingo Petz, the headline issue highlights the West's primitive view on the borders of civilized Europe.

Irina Herasimovich, cultural manager of Robert Bosch Foundation, was also disappointed: "The aim of such activities is to get rid of stereotypes concerning Belarus. It seems it has not worked really well. To my regret, the discussion was held on quite a stereotypic level".

Ingo Petz agrees with Ms. Herasimovich: "The West still associates Belarus with Chernobyl catastrophe and "the last dictatorship in Europe". I hope that recent events will change the attitude of not only journalists but also common Germans towards Belarus".

The German journalist expects the final results of serious steps for rapprochement, made by EU and Lukashenka, with certain skepticism. "I don't believe in democratic changes in the country ruled by Lukashenka. But let us see," stressed Mr. Petz.

### Attempt of a dialogue

Current political and economic changes in Belarus became the centre of the discussion. Photographer Andrei Liankevich mentioned such positive events as legalization of two oppositional newspapers and the creation of the governmental commissions, where NGOs and independent media representatives were invited to work together with state experts.

"Half a year ago it was hard to believe in the possibility that such platforms of opinion exchange could be created," Liankevich said. "Unfortunately so far I have seen no results of such meetings. But at least an attempt to start a dialogue has been made".

The issue of rapprochement between Belarus and Russia has also been discussed. To the opinion of Irina Herasimovich, the fact that Lukashenka has turned his face to Europe doesn't mean that he must turn his back on his eastern neighbour. "The third variant is possible", Irina said.

Discussion through the prism of politics

"I definitely stand for the conception of 'changes through rapprochement'," declared Ms. Herasimovich, the culture manager of Robert Bosch Foundation. "The fact that the stereotypical image of Belarus in Germany has been changed must be considered as a favourable change."

After political and economical reviews the participants of the discussion shared opinions about joint cultural projects between German and Belarusian NGOs. Although the attempts to pass to nonpolitical talk failed, this comes with no surprise as in a country where state control is comprehensive even cultural activities are viewed through the prism of politics.

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