



# east forum Berlin

18 & 19 April 2016



Berlin, 19 April 2016

## Press release

### Record turnout of 4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin sends strong signal of international cooperation

- more than 400 participants from 40 countries use the Berlin economic forum as a platform for dialogue between East and West
- advocating a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok and closer partnership with China

**Philipp Rösler**, former German Economics Minister and current Managing Director of the World Economic Forum in Davos, concluded the 4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin with his afternoon speech on 19 April. More than 400 participants from 40 countries had travelled to Berlin for the international economic forum on 18 and 19 April 2016 at the invitation of UniCredit, the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations and METRO GROUP, making for record attendance. Panel speakers included **Natalie Jaresko**, Ukrainian's Minister of Finance up until a week prior to the conference, the Armenian Vice President **Vache Gabrielyan**, BDI President **Ulrich Grillo** and the First Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, **Alexey Likhachev**, as well as management board members of large German and international companies.

In the light of numerous crises within the EU and its immediate neighbourhood, there is a growing concern about unilateral national action, isolation and protectionism. The 4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin thus deliberately focussed on the benefits of closer international collaboration under the motto of “**An economic area in transition – Shaping the future between Europe and the East**”. “A fragmented Europe will lose its importance internationally”, the Chairman of the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations, **Wolfgang Büchele**, warned. “We want to build alliances with those who are interested in an open dialogue, crossborder solutions and a common economic space in Europe.” **Giuseppe Vita**, Chairman of the Board of Directors of UniCredit, calls for action by European politicians: “it is time that we managed crises together, that we preserved the Schengen area - in its extreme importance to the economy - without internal border controls, and that we found a mutual footing in international crises.”

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**Olaf Koch**, Chairman of the Management Board of METRO GROUP, said: “The interdependent world of today does not only entail risks such as those we have experienced in the past few years. Above all, it also provides great opportunities. Therefore, we must find ways to restore trust and rebuild mutual respect. We need a dialogue that clearly identifies positions and develops commonalities. It is part of our self-conception as a trader and as a responsible actor in our society to create spaces for such dialogue and to work continuously to improve it.”

Wolfgang Büchele, Chairman of the Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations, **Giuseppe Scognamiglio** (Executive Vice President for Group Institutional Regulatory Affairs UniCredit & Editor Eastwest magazine) and **Ivonne Julitta Bollow** (Director Eastern Europe & International Affairs, Corporate Public Policy, METRO GROUP) presented the results of this year’s **east forum Berlin barometer**, a survey among the participants of the **4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin**, with 180 respondents.

More than 80 percent of these declared themselves in favour of a direct dialogue between the EU and the Eurasian Union on the topic of a common economic space. “If two competing economic blocs, the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union, arise in Europe, tension will build as a consequence, especially in those countries that are caught in the middle. We have to overcome this situation”, Wolfgang Büchele commented on the result. 70 percent of the respondents also desire both economic spaces to cooperate more closely in the energy sector. Only nine percent regard mutual energy projects, such as the planned Nord Stream II Pipeline through the Baltic Sea, with scepticism.

The participants of the **east forum Berlin** are cautiously optimistic regarding mutual economic sanctions of the EU and Russia. 35 percent are expecting first sanctions to be lifted in 2016 already. Another 27 percent expect this in 2017 at the latest. 38 percent, however, do not expect any changes before 2017 in regards to sanctions.

Negotiations between Brussels and Moscow should be dedicated to overcoming trade barriers, the standardisation of norms and standards and the improvement of crossborder infrastructure. The participants expect the EU itself to increase their efforts in cutting the red tape in particular.

The majority of respondents (48 percent) rate as positive the potential of the Chinese Silk Road “One Belt, One Road” initiative (OBOR), which may improve the transport infrastructure between China and the EU and which may upgrade Central Asia and Turkey to new hubs of trade.

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“The OBOR initiative has positive implications for peace and security: in fact, it encompasses some of the most unstable countries and regions in the world, including Middle East, that constitute the EU’s extended neighbourhood and have a significance for European security”, said Giuseppe Scognamiglio.

“Not only does the New Silk Road entail enormous economic potential for all participating states, it can also serve as a driver of integration for the economic area,” said Ivonne Julitta Bollow. “In order to derive concrete chances for Europe and Eurasia from this vision, we have to create an understanding that ‘one belt, one road’ is not just a Chinese initiative. The New Silk Road can only realize its full potential if it is seen as a common project.”

Only 14 percent of all participants warn of the potential dangers, such as the growth of the Chinese influence and fiercer competition. 20 percent of all respondents, however, did not feel sufficiently informed on the Chinese project thus far. The **4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin** attempted to rectify this situation in two panel discussions, which included Chinese experts having travelled to the conference to attend.

This year, the **4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin** followed up on the activities of the German OSCE chairmanship. Both major topics of the **east forum** – China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative and a common economic space with the Eastern EU neighbours and Russia – will be discussed further within the framework of a large OSCE Economic Forum at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin at the end of May.

The **east forum Berlin** is held by **UniCredit**, the **Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations** and **METRO GROUP**. The **German Industry Association** (BDI) and the **German Chamber of Industry and Commerce** (DIHK) joined the forum for the first time as cooperating partners in 2016.

Furthermore, the **east forum Berlin** also took place in collaboration with the **Federal State of Berlin** in 2016. The forum opened at the Berlin City Hall in the evening of 18 April with speeches from the Senator of Finance in Berlin, **Matthias Kollatz-Ahnen**, the State Secretary **Stephan Steinlein** and the Polish State Secretary **Aleksander Stępkowski**. Many embassies had their own stalls to present themselves to the participants. The second conference day took place at the Axica, in close proximity to the Brandenburg Gate. It was also in front of the Gate that the participants gathered for a grand final photo of the **4<sup>th</sup> east forum Berlin**.

You can find up-to-date information, the survey on the east forum Berlin and photos of the events on [www.eastforum-berlin.de](http://www.eastforum-berlin.de).

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