

## Press release

Berlin, 07.05.2020

### **End of the Second World War 75 years ago: United Europe remains a common task**

- **OAOEV commemorates victims of the war from its partner countries**
- **Hermes: Particular responsibility of German industry**
- **Grateful for a second chance**

On 8 and 9 May 2020, the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe and the millions of victims of Nazi crimes will be commemorated around the globe. "The anniversary is a strong reminder to us Germans of our particular responsibility to do everything we can for peace and understanding in Europe," said Oliver Hermes, President of the German Eastern Business Association (OAOEV). "The fact that reconstruction after 1945 was successful and that states against which Germany had waged terrible wars reached out to us remains a miracle. We must always be grateful to these countries for this second chance. "

The German economy continues to play a key role in shaping a common European future: "The founding of the German Eastern Business Association in Cologne in 1952 served to build new bridges from divided Germany to Eastern Europe. Today, our association works together with the governments and business representatives of 29 countries in a spirit of trust. Together we prove every day that strength comes from international cooperation and understanding, not from conflict," says Hermes.

#### **Against protectionism and national egoism**

However, not everything has been achieved in the past 75 years: "Especially in recent times, conflicts within Europe and between individual states have become dangerously worse. The Corona crisis has damaged the European internal market and the freedom of movement in the Schengen area. Now is a good time to remember that protectionism and national egoism lead to dead ends, and that we in Europe can only succeed together." That is why the German Eastern Business Association continues to advocate the integration of all the states of the Western Balkans into the European Union and promotes close dialogue with the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union. "Our great goal remains a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok", stressed Hermes. "The

geographical centre of Europe is not in Brussels, but on the eastern edge of today's EU. May 8th in particular reminds us Germans that close partnership with countries such as Ukraine, Belarus and Russia remains our historic task".

The Second World War began in September 1939 with the German invasion of Poland. Already months before, under pressure from Hitler-Germany, the Czechoslovak Republic had been shattered and partially occupied. On 6 April 1941, German occupation of the Balkans began with the German Wehrmacht's attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. On 22 June 1941, the German attack on the Soviet Union followed. In addition to Poland and the Balkans, it was all the territory of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and western Russia as well as the three occupied Baltic states that became the venue of war and the scene of the worst German crimes through the enslavement and murder of the local elites, minorities and entire ethnic groups.

Hermes recalls German entrepreneurs such as Otto Wolff von Amerongen and Berthold Beitz, who led the way in the reconciliation process in the 1950s and established new networks to Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union and many other countries. They had thus been pioneers of a new eastern policy in the Federal Republic of Germany. The role played by many East Germans in the reconciliation process with neighbouring states should also be particularly appreciated. "It precisely owes to their contacts, which have grown over a long period of time, that tens of thousands of German companies are now successful and have established close partnerships and friendships in Eastern Europe. Even in times of crisis, these companies and their partners form foundation for peace and stability on our continent. According to Hermes, maintaining and further strengthening this foundation is the most important task of the German Eastern Business Association.

#### **About the OAOEV:**

The German Eastern Business Association (OAOEV) has been pooling the expertise of the two traditional associations Ost-Ausschuss (founded in 1952) and Osteuropaverein (founded in 1990) since May 2018 and promotes German economy in 29 countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. German trade with Eastern Europe accounts for around one-fifth of Germany's total foreign trade and is thus more important than trade with the USA and China combined. OAOEV has about 350 member companies and associations and is supported by six leading associations of German economy - BDI, BGA, Bankenverband, DIHK, GDV and ZDH.

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