

## Press release

Berlin, 21 June 2021

### German invasion of the Soviet Union – a reminder and an obligation

- **German Eastern Business Association commemorates 80th anniversary of the attack on the Soviet Union**
- **Oliver Hermes: “The understanding with Russia and the other countries in the region is unalterable”**
- **Warning against new walls**
- **Economic and peace area from Lisbon to Vladivostok**

80 years ago, on 22 June 1941, a particularly bloody and cruel chapter of the Second World War began with the German invasion of the Soviet Union. “The German warfare in the East and the unimaginable crimes committed by Germans in the process are deeply rooted in the collective memory of the states of Eastern Europe,” writes the Chairman of the German Eastern Business Association, Oliver Hermes, in an essay commemorating the 80th anniversary: “For us Germans, this horrific war remains both a reminder and an obligation to make reconciliation and understanding with Russia and the other countries in the region an unshakeable guideline of our policy.” Mr. Hermes points out that the German campaign in the East was designed as a war of annihilation from the very beginning. “With the expulsion and murder of national elites, the targeted extermination of Eastern European Jews, the starvation blockade of Leningrad or the Commissar Order, Germans brought unimaginable suffering to Russia and the other states of the Soviet Union.” This must never be forgotten.

The war in Central and Eastern Europe had already begun in September 1939 with the German invasion of Poland. The German attack on the Soviet Union followed on 22 June 1941. In addition to Poland and the Balkans, the present-day territory of Western Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the three Baltic states and even parts of Georgia

became the theatre of war and the site of the worst German crimes through the enslavement and murder of the elites, minorities and entire ethnic groups there.

Mr. Hermes explicitly recalls the joint responsibility of the German economy at the time:

“Far too many German companies were part of and profiteers from the war in the East, whether as producers of military goods, purchasers of raw materials or by employing forced labourers.” It is therefore also a historical responsibility for the German economy, as an important social force, to build and expand bridges to Central and Eastern Europe.

“Especially against the background of increasing political tensions between Russia on the one hand and the EU on the other, we must also continue to work on the part of the business community to ensure that understanding remains possible,” writes Mr. Hermes.

Mr. Hermes recalls that the German Eastern Business Association has been promoting the reconciliation process since its foundation in 1952 and established networks with the Soviet Union at an early stage. “Building economic bridges to the East has been a core concern of the German Eastern Business Association for almost 70 years,” writes Mr. Hermes. The close and growing economic ties with Russia and the other successor states of the Soviet Union are an active contribution to securing peace and understanding. “Thousands of German companies are successful in the region today,” writes Mr. Hermes. “Opponents have become business partners and in many cases friends.”

In this context, Mr. Hermes urgently warns against the current global economic decoupling tendencies: “Decoupling means that multinational cooperation is decreasing more strongly, alliances are crumbling, economic bridges between states and thus also politically different systems are being destroyed,” writes Mr. Hermes. “We must therefore do everything possible to tear down walls instead of building new ones.” The Chairman of the German Eastern Business Association calls for the successful model of economic integration in Eastern Europe to be promoted further. “Our vision remains an economic and peace area from Lisbon to Vladivostok,” writes Mr. Hermes. “This is both our historical mandate and the imperative of sound economic policy.”

***You can find the essay in English [here](#)***

***If you are interested in a print, please feel free to contact us.***

**About the German Eastern Business Association:**

The German Eastern Business Association (Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft e.V., founded in 1952) promotes German business in the 29 countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia. German trade with Eastern Europe represents approximately one-fifth of all German foreign business. This is a larger proportion than Germany's foreign trade both with the US and China. The German Eastern Business Association has around 350 member companies and associations and is supported by six leading German business associations – BDI, BGA, Bankenverband, DIHK, GDV, and ZDH.

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