

Press release

Berlin, 1 April 2020

Forsa survey:

Considerable understanding for travel restrictions due to Corona

- **Hermes: Crisis response requires greater coordination with the EU's eastern neighbours**
- **Majority of Germans generally in favour of closer cooperation with Russia**
- **Clear support for Nord Stream 2**

There is considerable acceptance among the German population for the current travel restrictions in Eastern Europe: 93 per cent of those surveyed support the entry bans and quarantine measures that all the eastern neighbouring countries have now adopted to counteract the spread of the coronavirus. Only four per cent of Germans regard such measures as excessive. This was one of the findings of a representative survey conducted by the opinion research institute forsa on behalf of the German Eastern Business Association (OAOEV) and with the support of Wintershall Dea.

“There’s a tremendous good will among the population to accept substantial restrictions on public life now in order to prevent the worst from happening in the coronavirus crisis and to quickly turn the tide,” said OAOEV chairman Oliver Hermes in response to the survey. “It’s crucial to optimise cross-border goods and commuter traffic so that the risk of infection is minimised, but at the same time ensuring that supplies to hospitals, shops and businesses are always guaranteed. To this end, we propose passing lanes at the border for trucks carrying medical or perishable goods. Furthermore, the newly introduced EU entry and exit regulations for passenger transport should be carefully followed across Europe. That ensures reliability.”

The OAOEV also believes that the coronavirus crisis requires close coordination with the neighbouring countries of the European Union. “Now is not the time for EU export bans on protective clothing, but for signs of solidarity in practice. Goods must get quickly to where they are most urgently needed,” says Hermes.

“The coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout do not stop at the EU borders. In particular, many European countries that are not EU members are facing existential challenges and need the support of the EU.”

Desire for closer cooperation with Russia

The fact that the German population is generally very willing to cooperate with neighbouring countries east of the EU is shown by the further results of the forsa survey:

61 per cent of respondents can envisage a common economic area stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok, while only 20 per cent oppose this idea. 55 per cent of respondents would specifically like to see intensified cooperation with Russia. Only 28 per cent reject it. “These results are encouraging for all those who, despite the existing sanctions, continue to call for dialogue with Russia and seek shared interests. There are many of such interests, ranging from securing Europe’s energy supply and climate protection to increased digitisation of the economy and a collective response to the coronavirus,” said Oliver Hermes, commenting on the survey results. “For instance, it would be important to expand the time-proven energy cooperation with Russia to a German-Russian energy and climate alliance.”

The survey respondents’ assessment of the European-Russian Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which has become subject to US sanctions with reference to Russia’s harmful influence, is particularly clear: more than three quarters (77 per cent) of respondents are in favour of completing Nord Stream 2, despite US opposition. Only four per cent object to continuing its construction. Supporters of the SPD (93 per cent), the CDU/CSU (89 per cent), the Left Party (89 per cent) and Alliance 90 / The Greens (86 per cent) are particularly enthusiastic about the project. Commenting on the findings, Mario Mehren, CEO of Wintershall Dea and spokesperson of the OAOEV Russia Working Group, said, “Despite existing political conflicts, the close partnership we have had with Russia for 50 years to secure energy supplies is broadly supported by the population.”

The US sanctions regime has generally not been well received by the German public: 86 per cent of respondents oppose unilateral US sanctions against European companies without consultation with the EU, with only five per cent expressing their understanding for this.

Future issues: Hydrogen and climate protection

Mehren proposes using the existing pipeline infrastructure for transporting climate-friendly hydrogen in the near future. German and Russian companies

could collectively establish the necessary conditions in Russia for producing hydrogen from natural gas and invest in sustainable energy production in the world's largest country by landmass. "While there is a shortage of land for wind energy and hydropower in Germany, countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan have an almost inexhaustible potential."

Almost two thirds of the survey respondents (62 per cent) are in favour of cooperating with Russia on hydrogen. Less than one in four of German citizens oppose such a partnership. The result is even clearer in view of the "Green Deal" envisaged by the EU in order to build a climate-neutral economy in Europe: 84 per cent of Germans surveyed by forsa are in favour of the EU including its eastern neighbours such as Russia in its climate strategy.

On behalf of the German Eastern Business Association (OAOEV), forsa Politik- und Sozialforschung AG interviewed 1,006 representatively selected women and men over the age of 18 between 16 and 19 March using computer-assisted telephone interviews. The survey results can be transferred to the total population with an error tolerance of +/- 3 per cent.

Further information and graphs relating to the survey are available on the OAOEV website: www.oaoev.de

About the OAOEV:

The German Eastern Business Association (OAOEV), which in May 2018 pooled together the expertise of the two longstanding associations, *Ost-Ausschuss* and *Osteuropaverein* (respectively founded in 1952 and 1990), promotes the interests of the German business in 29 countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as well as in 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 the combined trade with the USA and China. The OAOEV has around 350 member companies and associations and is supported by six leading organisations representing the German business community – the BDI, BGA, Banking Association, DIHK, GDV and ZDH.

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