



Karin von Bismarck:

Strengthening dialogue and faith between businesses and people

The Economic Club of Russia (Wirtschaftsclub Russland e.V.), a German association in the Russian Federation, unites workers from German-speaking countries such as Austria, Germany, and Switzerland who currently reside in Russia, as well as Russian representatives. The main goal of this club is developing business connections, deepening relations in different spheres, including science, education, culture, and sport, as well as setting up and supporting interpersonal contacts.

Wirtschaftsclub Russland e.V. conducts various events in both German and Russian cities. Many of these events have become major events in the colorful palette of relations between Germany and Russia. Dr. Karin von Bismarck, the club's representative and founder, discussed the day-to-day functioning of Wirtschaftsclub Russland e.V. in an interview with Capital Ideas journal.

Over the past eight years, your association have conducted so many events that it would most likely be impossible to count. Which of these have become milestones in the activities of the Economic Club of Russia?

In the past few years we have organized roughly 470 events, and our goal and motto has always been "We unite people and cultures." It is difficult for me

to name all of our Highlights, but our series "Business meets culture," "Business & Sport," "Themes of the Future," as well as our Charity Engagement under "One-World- OneSky" and "New Silk Road Partnership" initiative demonstrate that the spectrum is rather wide. During preparations for World Cup 2018 in particular, we are working with the Eintracht Frankfurt soccer club and initiated the first German-Russian football meeting. We also initiated a youth soccer training ex-

change between Locomotive Moscow and Eintracht Frankfurt U21.

Hope for a thaw in relations between the West and Russia, unfortunately, remains illusive for the time being. The cycle of anti-Russian sanctions continue. Has this situation impacted negatively on the activity of the Economic Club of Russia, or is it continuing to follow its course unwaveringly?

Yes, sanctions are a burden on all of us and we hope that they will soon disappear. However, our Economic Club of Russia (Wirtschaftsclubrussland.e.V.) understood early that, most of all, our task is to support and develop personal contacts and relations between Russians and Germans during this difficult period. We are doing this with all our strength, and we are successful. We are not responsible for the sanctions, and we are also not capable of terminating them, but we can organize and support dialogue and faith between businesses and people. This will lead to the success of business, and this is our main success.

Has anyone left your association recently? Or, perhaps the other way around, have any new members joined the Club?

Of course, like any association, the Economic Club of Russia e.V. has its outflow of members, but we can state definitively that from the moment the sanctions were introduced in 2014 the number of members in our club has grown. This testifies to the, as before, significant interest in Russian-German relations and is an absolutely optimistic development.

Representatives of German business circles for the most part relate negatively to sanctions against Russia. How serious is the damage they bring to German-Russian cooperation? What do the members of your club think about this?

Of course, many medium-sized business companies have partially or fully lost their business with Russia, and this hurts any employer. German economic representatives in Russia rather stated their support for ending sanctions rather early and will further do so. Some optimism is given by the fact that the volume of trade between Germany and Russia in 2017 once again grew by more than 25 percent.

Regardless of sanctions and crises in the Russian economy, German business is not leaving Russia and is continuing to invest in this country. How can this be explained?

Like the German economy, we, and our German business members are interested in a stable economic relationship with Russia, as it has been for many years be-

fore. It is because of exactly this that Germans did not leave the country during the economic crises of 1997, 2003 and 2009. Our entrepreneurs are convinced that engagement with Russia should not be determined by short term gains, but rather be built only on the basis of long-term conceptions of mutual benefit. Russia is a growing market of interest with very compelling tax conditions, and our entrepreneurs understand that.

Trade between Russia and the European Union between 2013-2016 was reduced by more than 40 percent- this is an unfortunate fact. However, inspiring news is starting to appear: according to the Federal Statistics Agency of Germany, German exports to Russia have risen over the past five years. It increased by 21 percent over 11 months in 2017 in comparison with analogous periods of the previous year, reaching marks of 24.1 billion euros. Do you believe that this trend will continue?

We are very much hoping for this. When we listen to members of our club, and when we also see what exactly the large part of German companies are planning for 2018, we are convinced that this growth will continue. There is a lot of potential for this. It's important for entrepreneurs who are considering investments in Russia to not be afraid. We are doing our part to achieve exactly this.

Are economic relations once again normalizing? Will the German economy once again actively work with Russia?

Of course. There is no alternative to this. Germany and Europe need a significant source of raw materials which are found in Russia and the Eurasian Union. We are in need of cooperation in the digital, mobile, and new energy spheres if Europe and Russia do not want to be left behind the global competition. We are also located on the same continent and we can only benefit from each other.

Certain foreign representatives in the Russian Federation try to live in Russia "according to the Russian calendar," following the habits of the country they have arrived to. Does your club follow the renown German saying "When there is a holiday, celebrate" (holidays need to be celebrated when they occur)? For example, on the 8th of March Russia observes International Women's Day, which was started in the start of the 20th century in the USA, and then later officially instituted in Germany. But your country does not currently celebrate this holiday. Does your club conduct events in concurrence with any sorts of holidays in the Russian Federation?

Culture and traditions play a very important role in our club, but we are not talking about holidays here. With



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the help of concerts, exhibits, and presentations we very much try to provide impressions of each other's cultures. Take this for example: on 13/01/2018 we celebrated the Old Russian New Year with our partner RDHG (Russian-German Trade Guild in Hamburg) with a few hundred participants. And, of course, we also congratulate the women on March 8th, International Women's Day

Apropos women. In your opinion, do the West and Russia differ from each other in their understanding of the role of women in society? Is the topic of harrasment, which has been so actively discussed recently, especially in the US, relevant in Russia?

Equality plays an enormous role in a dynamically developing world. Here we are concerned less with obligatory bouquets for women, but rather first of all with equal education and management opportunities for women in business and society. Of course, we are also talking about an open discussion of any discrimination against women here- and we are planning an event on that topic in 2018- openness, dialogue, and empathy are absolutely important here, and that affects every country, including Germany and Russia. But due to historical development, women already have had their place in the business world in Russia, when in other countries, also in Germany the concept of a women as housewife and mother dominated.

You are in Russia not just because you are the head of the Economic Club. How did you first end up in Moscow and what else do you do in this country?

I arrived to Russia in 2003 and worked in the pharmaceutical industry in Moscow. I dedicated more than 10 years to executive search personnel consulting as a Stanton Chase partner, including for the Russian mar-

ket. A lot happened during that time, and the need for qualified managers grew more and more. This is a good sign for the Russian economy, and the generation of Russian specialists growing up now is developing positively. As Stanton Chase International, we supply 98 percent of positions in Russia with Russian experts, including positions in foreign companies. Over the past 15 years Russia has developed a real talent pool with international trained managers and experts, which is a development Russia can be proud of.

Miss von Bismarck, you have the proud surname of a famous German state politician- the first chancellor of the German Empire Otto von Bismarck, who was very popular in Russia, not least because he was at one point a Prussian envoy in Saint Petersburg and spoke Russian fluently. He is famous for his expresions, which became popular saying and aphorisms, such as "Politics is the art of the possible," or "With the Russians you should use fair play or no play at all." Which of Otto von Bismarck's saying is closest to you?

Because of my name I am frequently asked about Otto von Bismarck. I live in a different time with different challenges. However, I also try to speak in Russian, I have plenty of friends in Russia, and I am convinced that dialogue, respect, responsibility, and trust are very important thing between Germans and Russians, and that they are worth to be developed further. In this sense, I willingly pursue the positive ideas and thoughts of Otto Bismarck in relation to Russia. If you are asking me about a quote, then here is one: "Let us not commit the mistake of doubting in the sense or good will in a person who thinks in a different way." ■