



December 7, 2007

Presse Release

Forsa study on Russia's image in Germany

Old stereotypes still affect how we view others

- **86 percent of Germans are interested in Russia**
- **Majority of Germans think media reports are coloured by prejudices**
- **Two out of three consider Russia a reliable economic partner**

The results of two new studies on how Germans see Russia and the Russians have just been presented in Berlin to coincide with the exhibition "Our Russians – Our Germans." What the studies clearly show is that old stereotypes still linger.

Berlin, 7 December 2007: Russia is Europe's largest and, undoubtedly, most important neighbour and a key economic partner for Germany. Therefore, it is not unsurprising that the joint exhibition "Our Russians – Our Germans. Images of the Other Side. 1800 – 2000", organized by the German-Russian Museum in Berlin-Karlshorst and the National Historical Museum in Moscow and on show from 8 December in Berlin's Schloss Charlottenburg, is enjoying so much attention. The exhibition is being sponsored by WINGAS GmbH, Kassel. To coincide with the exhibition, the European energy provider commissioned two studies on Russia's image in Germany. The key results of these studies were presented today at the exhibition opening. They show that the Germans' ideas about Russia and the Russians are still very much characterised by prejudices and outdated stereotypes, even long after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

In a representative survey, the forsa institute for public opinion research randomly selected 1003 people over the age of 18 and asked them about the image they have of Russia and about

German-Russian relations in connection with the much debated issue of supply security on the energy market.

According to the survey, the majority of citizens (84 percent) think the current image of Russia is coloured by prejudices to a great extent. Just 10 percent believe that the predominant view of Russia is based on facts and informed opinions. While only one in five (20 percent) describes their own image of Russia as negative, 45 percent of those asked believe that the Germans overall have a negative image of Russia.

Typical spontaneous associations with Russia include “a vast country” (96 percent) and “social inequality” (90 percent). 70 percent of those asked associate Russia with growth. 42 percent of Germans still think of the planned economy when they think of Russia and just a quarter of the population (26 percent) associate it with the free market economy. The Russians are considered hard drinkers, hospitable, bold, emotional and generous by the Germans.

There were also particularly strong associations with music and literature (ballet, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Netrebko, the Choir of the Don Cossacks and Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Pushkin, Gorky, etc.). Just over half (51 percent) of Germans would like to find out more from the media.

Trust through cooperation

Overall, a majority of 56 percent of citizens rate current relations between the two countries as good or even very good. And an overwhelming majority of Germans considers the economic cooperation with Russia very important or important (36 and 55 percent respectively). At 62 percent, almost two out of three view Russia as a reliable economic partner. What’s more, this trust is growing: in March 2007 the figure was ten percent.

A large proportion of the German population thinks that relations can be improved by joint business projects. 78 percent of Germans believe that cooperation with Russia in the field of energy can contribute to improving political relations between the two countries as well.

However, the Germans are much more critical when it comes to the German media’s reporting on Russia. A minority of just 36 percent of the population considers itself by and large objectively and accurately informed about Russia. A media content analysis of the F.A.Z. Institute PRIME research international commissioned by WINGAS on Russia's image in leading German media verified that reports in this area in particular have been coloured, and that they play heavily on emotions by using explicit and implicit stereotypes (based on 1,143 reports containing a total of 5,916 key statements about Russia). 36 percent, i.e.,

more than a third of writers, resorted to stereotypes and these tended to be negative (70 percent of the reports that used stereotypes).

Meeting instead of harbouring prejudices

Positive reports on Russia can generally be found in the areas of art, culture, science, geography, tourism and infrastructure. However, they receive comparatively little media attention. Stereotypes focus on Russians' drinking habits and mentality, whereby the latter also triggers positive associations like hospitality and cultural interest.

“It is quite natural that Germany not only maintains good business relations with Russia, but also cultivates a political exchange. At WINGAS, with our German-Russian background, we consider it our social and political responsibility to encourage people to think about stereotypes and deep-seated ideas,” WINGAS Chairman Dr. Rainer Seele explained. “It is our wish that our commitment to the exhibition and the studies will trigger a debate on stereotypes and prejudices between Germans and Russians and provide a forum for these discussions. The ultimate goal is to promote understanding and openness towards each other.”

+ + +

Reprint for press purposes free of charge. Reference copy requested. Charts of the forsa study are available at <http://www.wingas.de/pi-07-24.html>.

+ + +

WINGAS

European energy provider **WINGAS GmbH** is active in natural gas trading and distribution in Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Austria, the Czech Republic and Denmark. Its customers include municipal utilities, regional gas suppliers, industrial firms and power plants. Since 1990 WINGAS has invested more than 3 billion euros in the development of a natural gas transport and storage infrastructure. WINGAS TRANSPORT pipeline network, which is over 2,000 kilometers long, connects the major gas reserves in Siberia and in the North Sea to the growing markets in Western Europe. In Rehden in North Germany, WINGAS has the largest natural gas storage facility in Western Europe – with a working gas volume of over four billion cubic meters, and the company also participates in Central Europe's second largest storage facility in Haidach, Austria. Additional natural gas storage facilities are currently being built in Great Britain and Germany in order to secure the supply of natural gas in Europe.

Contact person for journalists:

Michael Sasse
WINGAS GmbH
Head of Press/External Communications
P.O. Box 10 40 20
34112 Kassel
Phone: +49 561 301 3301
Fax: +49 561 301-1321
E-mail: presse@wingas.de