

70 years of the German Near and Middle East Association

A region in the centre of the German business world's attention / By Helene Rang

*Hamburg (Dow-Jones-VWD) – The German Near and Middle East Association is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday today in Berlin and is looking back on its long tradition. It was founded in 1934 by leading businessmen in Berlin for the purpose of the non-profit-making promotion of the economic and cultural relationship between Germany and “the Orient”. Just two years later, the German-Iranian Chamber of Commerce was founded by the Association, as Iran took on a particular significance.*

Besides the printing of various publications containing comprehensive information on the Near and Middle East region, the association offered its members a wide range of services to assist them in entering the region's markets: establishing contacts, promoting the exchange of information and experiences - all this has remained part of the association's responsibilities right up to the present day.

The founding of the “German-Orient Foundation” in 1960 meant a significant expansion and deepening of the German Near and Middle East Association's activities. The “German-Orient Institute” (DOI) was also established under the Foundation's umbrella, and quickly became Germany's leading institute dealing with questions relating to the modern Orient. The institute serves “the promotion and protection of the relationships between Germany and the countries of the Orient in all areas of culture, in particular art, science and modern history” and among other activities, also publishes the magazine “Orient”. The Association is the umbrella organisation for the Foundation and the Institute and has as its own goal the promotion of economic relations.

NUMOV performed pioneering work towards the end of the 1960s with its business delegations to the Gulf countries. During the 1970s, the number of firms who were newly engaged in the markets of the Near and Middle East grew rapidly with NUMOV's energetic support. More and more large and middle sized firms became members of the association. Within just a few years, the German Near and Middle East Association (NUMOV) became the largest and most important organisation for bilateral relationships in the region. The non-profit association was financed exclusively through memberships, and this continues to the present day. In the course of its history, the association founded the German-Egyptian Economic Council and the “Saudi-German Businessmen's Dialogue”, which was jointly coordinated by the Saudi Finance and Economics Ministry and NUMOV. The country committees continue to have a particular significance for the associations work; they are reserved for members and serve first and foremost the exchange of information and experiences between members.

A representative office was established in Berlin, the site of the Association's founding, to direct the attention of politics and the media to the region's great potential and to maintain political contacts.

Leading personalities of German business such as the Hamburg businessman Alfred C. Toepfer and the Deutsche Bank board members Hans-Otto Thierbach and Rolf-E. Breuer stood at the forefront of the association. Federal Minister Dr. Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski, who did great service to relationships with the Arab world, became honorary board member in 1999. Members of the association's board and management, who represent renowned companies and organisations of the German economy, are often called upon as leaders of delegations and economic commissions. Up to the present, NUMOV's contacts, market knowledge, specialised know-how and familiarity with the cultural norms of the Islamic world make it the most important contact in Germany for economic relations with the Middle East region.

In the course of the economic expansion of the region, the association has strongly expanded its work and capacity to provide support in recent years, partially in cooperation with other associations. Thus the association acted as a founding and supporting organisation of the “North Africa Middle East Initiative of German Business” in 1996.

Through their publications, the association informs its members and policy makers in Germany about current developments in the region. The association's work does not just consist of the fostering of developed economic relationships, but also of the detection of new markets with development prospects. In this way, the relationship to the nation of Qatar, which has the third largest natural gas

reserves in the world, was recognised by NUMOV early on and constantly strengthened. It has also been considerably expanded by the founding of the “Qatar-German Business Forum”.

Today, the German Near and Middle East Association is not just the oldest, but also the leading organisation for relations between Germany and the countries of the Near and Middle East. The importance of this region, which has over 60% of the world’s proved oil reserves and 40% of the world’s reserves of natural gas, will continue to grow in the future.

German companies have very good chances to successfully make their mark in these markets, for which the German Near and Middle East Association is well qualified to provide support.

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Contact: A comprehensive presentation can be found in the internet under <http://www.numov.de>.