

# About APK

## The Asia-Pacific Conferences of German Business and the APA – A Joint Success Story

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The first Asia-Pacific Conferences of German Business (APK) took place in the 1980s and early 1990s: 1986 in Tokyo, 1988 in Jakarta, 1990 in Sydney and 1992 in Seoul. They were initially regional meetings of the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad in Asia-Pacific (AHKs), attended from Germany by only a few representatives of the Federal Government, the Federal Agency for Foreign Trade (BfAI) as well as the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and other business associations. The aim was to make the German network of foreign trade promotion in Asia more tight-knit. The first APK in Tokyo had 52 participants, the fourth APK in Seoul had 95.

One of the first top managers to recognise the importance of these conferences was Berthold Leibinger, a mechanical engineering entrepreneur known for his great commitment to Asia. He took over the leadership of the APK in Seoul and gave it an importance far beyond a regional conference: the APK 1992 in Seoul even paved the way for the Asia-Pacific Committee of German Business (APA). The 'Seoul Resolution' announced the establishment of a high-level committee of German Business to lift the opportunities of the Asia-Pacific region as a new growth region and to promote the region's potential in Germany. Leibinger was not only a pioneer of the APK, he is also considered the 'inventor' of the German Centres abroad and advocated a bundling of instruments for foreign trade promotion under the working title 'Magna Charta of German Foreign Trade and Investment'.

The year 1993 was marked by a spirit of optimism regarding Asia. From 18 February to 3 March 1993, the then Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl led a trip with a large business delegation to India, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea. Immediately after the trip, the key points of the Federal Government's first Asia concept were drawn up, which was published in October 1993. At the same time, preparations were made for the founding of the APA. The driving forces were the Federation of German Industries (BDI), the German Asia-Pacific Business Association (OAV), the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (then DIHT) and the AHKs in Asia-Pacific. The foundation was supported in particular by then OAV-Chairman Edgar Nordmann and then BDI-President Tyll Necker. On 11 May 1993, a debriefing on the February/March trip took place with Helmut Kohl at the Chancellor's Bungalow in Bonn, where Kohl asked Heinrich von Pierer, then CEO of Siemens AG, to chair the APA. The APA was founded on 24 September 1993 at the BDI in Cologne by leading representatives of German industry with the aim of "making up for the lead of companies from important competitor countries in their engagement in Asia". The sponsors of the committee were initially the BDI, the DIHT and the OAV. In 1999, the Federation of German Wholesale, Foreign Trade and Services (BGA) and the Association of German Banks (BdB) joined as further sponsors. The founding management board consisted of F. Stefan Winter (BDI), Hans-Bernd Giesler (OAV), Liesel Quambusch (DIHT), Jürgen Oberg (Siemens) and Jürgen Franzen as APA-coordinator for Asia.

After the founding of the APA, the Asia-Pacific conferences were systematically upgraded; since then, the conference chair has always been the APA-Chair together with the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs. The vital role of the German AHKs in Asia has not changed: Together with the APA and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK), they are still the organisers of the conference, and the respective host AHK is an indispensable building block for a successful APK.

One of the milestones in the history of the APK was certainly the call by APA-Chairman von Pierer, enshrined in the 2004 'APK Bangkok Resolution', to strive for bilateral free trade agreements between the EU and the Asia-Pacific region in addition to the efforts within the World Trade Organization (WTO). The network of EU free-trade agreements

in the region is now an indispensable part of EU trade policy. Jürgen Hambrecht then ensured a 'reformation' of the APKs with a series of changes in 2007 in Seoul and 2010 in Singapore: the 'resolutions' were abolished, the English language was introduced as the conference language, the country forums were ceased in favour of topic-oriented exchanges, and instead of long speeches, discussions moved to the foreground. Peter Löscher's time at the APA was marked by the special occasion that the APK was spatially and temporally linked to the Germany Years in India 2011/2012. The opening evening of the APK in the pavilion city 'Urban Mela' designed by Markus Heinsdorff in the Millennium Park in Delhi created fantastic images.

Extraordinary for the organising team were the conferences that were set up together with APA-Chairman Hubert Lienhard from 2014 to 2018 in Ho Chi Minh City, Hong Kong and Jakarta. These conferences were characterised by a chairman who, as a project leader for many years, has project management 'down to a tee'. There was no decision on conference organisation that did not bear his stamp. He was the driving force behind the cooperation on security policy issues with Wolfgang Ischinger and the Munich Security Conference. In Hong Kong and Jakarta, the organisers managed for the first time to have speakers from Asia in all forums and workshops. Lienhard's motto was: Don't talk about Asia, but with Asia. Groundbreaking was the APK Jakarta and the emphasis by Lienhard and then Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Sigmar Gabriel that clearly pointed to a reassessment of China's role. The new tone on China, for which the BDI's China paper of January 2019 received a widespread response, was already reflected in the speeches of these two thinkers.



*[From Left] The late Mr Roberto R. Romulo, former Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the Philippines, Dr Juergen Hambrecht, former Chairman of APA and current Chairman of Supervisory Board at BASF, and Mr Lim Hng Kiang, former Minister for Trade and Industry, Singapore.*



*[From Left, First Row] Mr Thomas Lembong, Chairman of Indonesia's Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), Dr Hubert Lienhard, Chairman of the Asia-Pacific Committee of German Business and CEO of Voith, Mr Mathias Cormann, Minister for Finance, Australia, Dr Eric Schweitzer, former President of the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), Mr Prijono Sugiarto, President of EKONID, and Mr Jürgen Fitschen, former co-CEO of Deutsche Bank. [Second Row, behind Mr Mathias Cormann] Dr Jürgen Heraeus, former CEO of Heraeus Group. [Second Row, behind Dr Eric Schweitzer] Dr Heinrich v. Plierer, former Chairman of the APA and Siemens CEO.*

Joe Kaeser had been a long-time companion of the APKs even before his APA-Chairmanship. With him, the team of APK organisers led by Sabrina Netzer steered the 'APK digital' through the COVID period in October 2020. What we all learned during this time: Delivering content can work well in a digital format, as it had at the APK digital. But conference atmosphere and networking fall by the wayside. The willingness of Tim Philippi and his team at the SGC to host the APK in Singapore in November 2022 under difficult planning conditions has been consistently applauded by leading APA managers.

The APK will continue to adapt to changing conditions. The fact that the current Federal Government had included the upgrading of the APK as a goal in the coalition agreement was a welcome opportunity for the APA to invite the Federal Chancellor to attend the conference. With the APK, we will continuously strive to contribute to Germany and the EU, being perceived as indispensable economic partners in Asia-Pacific.