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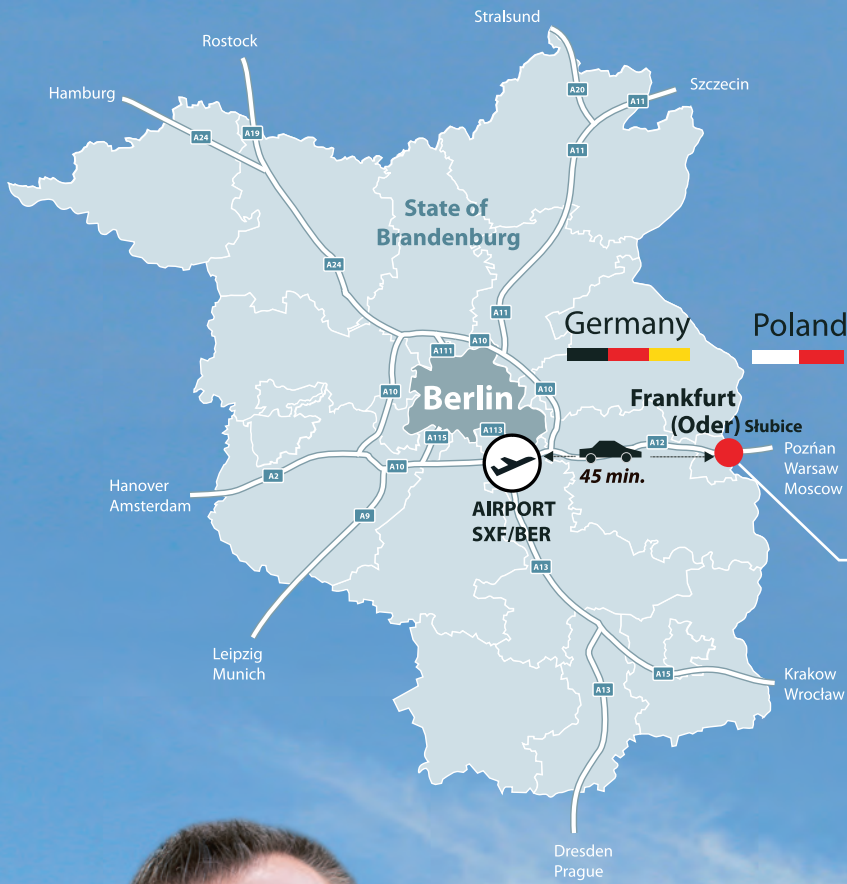
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## A SMALL CITY WITH BIG AMBITION

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## FRANKFURT (ODER)

# A small city with big ambition

LOCATED ON THE GERMANY-POLAND BORDER, FRANKFURT (ODER) STANDS WITHIN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO BERLIN AND OFFERS EXCELLENT CONNECTIONS TO MUCH OF EUROPE. HOWEVER, IT IS ITS INNOVATIVE THINKING – COMING FROM ITS TECH-SAVVY WORKFORCE OR, ON A GRANDER SCALE, THROUGH ITS 'TWIN CITY' ARRANGEMENT WITH SŁUBICE – THAT IS ATTRACTING THE INTEREST OF INVESTORS. NATASHA TURAK REPORTS

**T**he small, riverside city of Frankfurt (Oder), situated on the border between Germany and Poland, is on a mission to raise its profile as a 'gateway to the East'. Not to be confused with major German city Frankfurt am Main seven hours westward, Frankfurt (Oder) is so named thanks to its geographic position on the Oder River, which serves as

a natural border between Germany and Poland to the east. A main city of Brandenburg, one of Germany's 16 federated states, its seat next to Polish city Słubice and proximity to the capital Berlin – one hour away by train - makes it well positioned to attract business.

Frankfurt (Oder) is located directly on the east-west transport route of the North Sea-Baltic Corridor, a pivotal part of the Trans-European Transport Networks. It is at the interface of two major national markets, with easy access to the emerging markets of eastern Europe. The city also benefits from the human capital in Berlin, 90 kilometres away, from which more than 1000 workers commute into Frankfurt (Oder) every day. In total, more than 13,000 people commute into the city to work each day. Berlin Schoenefeld airport is located a 45-minute drive away.



# IN MANUFACTURING, EASTERN GERMAN LABOUR COSTS ARE ON AVERAGE 33.4% CHEAPER THAN IN WESTERN GERMANY



Despite these advantages, Frankfurt (Oder) has struggled to grow, particularly since German reunification. With a peak population of about 87,000 in 1989, resident numbers have steadily fallen to nearly 57,000 today as a result of the massive demographic shift that came with the opening of what was East Germany to the rest of the world. For East Germany as a whole, mass migration to Berlin and the old West Germany – as well as unemployment, which stands at 10.2% in Frankfurt (Oder) today – has thinned out regional human capital, according to research from the Free University of Berlin.

## Bouncing back

Undeterred, Frankfurt (Oder)'s pitch as a logistics and research destination at the centre of Europe is strengthened by its highly specialised technology facilities, a new university, and crossborder co-operation efforts. It was recognised in *fDi Magazine's* 2016/17 German Cities of the Future ranking for cost effectiveness, largely due to its significantly lower worker and rent costs than Berlin, as well as the highest subsidy levels in Germany – up to 40% grants for investments. In the manufacturing sector, eastern German labour costs are on average 33.4% cheaper than in western Germany.

Its twin-cities initiative with next-door Słubice is one of many steps it has taken to present an attractive investment destination to foreign businesses. This means a broader and more affordable workforce equipped with multiple languages. The Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice Co-operation Centre, located in Frankfurt (Oder), calls the crossborder city “a trailblazer of the European ideal.”

In addition to the logistical and linguistic advantages of being a border city, the position offers both Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice mutually beneficial infrastructure. The cities share a joint district heating system and waste water

treatment plant in Słubice that serves both towns, saving money on both sides. Słubice residents gain from their relative proximity to Berlin – trains to Berlin depart Frankfurt (Oder) every 30 minutes, and the Polish town is a mere 15-minute drive from Frankfurt (Oder)'s city centre. More than 1000 people use the crossborder bus service, which links the two cities' town centres as well as their universities, on a daily basis.

About 200 Polish companies operate in Frankfurt (Oder), the largest being cargo terminal operator PCC Intermodal, which has engaged in a public-private investment of more than €10m into the terminal in the city's Freight Village. With four tracks, the terminal helps transport 60,000 containers of cargo yearly from the region to Europe's main ports.

Bernd Meewes, managing director of PCC Intermodal, says: “We've been in Frankfurt (Oder) for more than 10 years. The city is at the centre of all our operations and the administration supports us very well in marketing. We are quite satisfied to be here; it's really a great place for our network, so we took over this terminal and we'll be here for the next 25 years.”

## Tech development

During the Cold War era, the former East German republic had a thriving semiconductor industry which largely dissipated after the Berlin Wall came down and investors headed westward. Recent efforts, however, have seen the formation of a small cluster of highly specialised enterprises and business incubators throughout the former East Germany, which are fuelling start-ups and gaining attention from investors.

Central to the life of Frankfurt (Oder)'s scientific community is the Leibniz Institute for Innovations for High Performance Microelectronics, or IHP, a leader in high-frequency electronics. With more than

300 employees from 23 countries, it is a buzzing centre of R&D for systems design, circuit design, technology and materials. "The focus of research at the institute lies in economically relevant issues, resulting in applications for telecommunications, medical engineering, security, aerospace, and automation technologies," says IHP scientific director Bernd Tillack.

IHP has numerous partnerships with international science and technology firms, including Cisco, Alcatel, Philips and IBM Research. The institute recently won an award for its apprenticeships for young people, and runs collaborations with local kindergartens in Frankfurt (Oder) to foster youth enthusiasm for science.

One budding company with a vested connection to IHP is Silicon Radar, a Frankfurt (Oder) start-up developing radar sensors for applications in industry, robotics, drones and more. The company's founder was a researcher at IHP, and now uses the knowledge base to fuel its work. Anja Bolicke, CEO at Silicon Radar, says: "We have co-operation contracts in place to use IHP's equipment. We need the know-how of the staff there, and it is one of our most important customers and our most important supplier."

Frankfurt (Oder)'s largest foreign investor is Chinese energy giant Chint Group, which purchased the assets of a former German photovoltaics company for €6m after it went into insolvency in 2013. The company now trades under the name of Chint Group's subsidiary, Astronergy Solarmodule, and produces solar modules for the European market, boasting an annual turnover of €130m. Astronergy has 3000 employees in seven solar module production facilities worldwide, and its European base in Frankfurt (Oder) employs 250 people.

"The lord mayor, the city administration and the state of Brandenburg have been very supportive, especially during the M&A process," says Dietmar Gutzmer, director of business administration at Astronergy Solarmodule. "Financially there are many opportunities for subsidies, and [regional investment promotion agency] Investor Center Ostbrandenburg has been very helpful as well."

#### Home for everyone

A particularly interesting spot for growing companies is the publicly owned TeGeCe technology park, which houses more than 50 national and international companies and more than 3000 employees. TeGeCe enables SMEs to start local production by leasing facilities at affordable costs, from 20-square-metre rental offices to multi-level factory buildings. The park has 80,000 square metres of space for commercial and industrial use, and offers facility refurbishing specific to companies' needs.

TeGeCe's tenants cover numerous sectors, including electrical component manufacturing from the likes of Japanese company

Yamaichi and Germany's ChipCard Solutions. Its companies also work in civil engineering, building services, health services, BPO, online trade start-ups, warehouses (such as local start-up AsGoodAsNew Electronics) and Belgian plastic production company New Product Packlab (NPP).

NPP began operations in 2014 and by 2015 had achieved a turnover of €5m, with sales facilities in Belgium and production in Frankfurt (Oder). "The investment climate in this region is very positive – a lot of effort has been made to attract FDI," says NPP's finance director, Dirk van Donink. "The Investor Center has helped us tremendously. We try to be a world player and we feel that Frankfurt (Oder) is at the centre of Europe." NPP exports 90% of its production internationally.

#### Academic promise

One of Frankfurt (Oder)'s gems is the European University of Viadrina, opened in 1991. It stands on the site of the former Brandenburg University Frankfurt, which was originally founded in 1506 but has been closed for centuries. Focused on business, law and humanities, the university embodies Frankfurt (Oder)'s international ideals with a student body of 6500 representing 95 countries. It has a robust research and foreign exchange programme through partnerships with 263 universities worldwide and offers courses in multiple languages. It also works in collaboration with neighbouring Stubice's Collegium Polonicum, which specialises in German-Polish studies and international law. Viadrina was recently ranked among Germany's top six universities for business administration. The university's Centre for Entrepreneurship and Research provides support for start-up development and aspiring entrepreneurs, helping would-be entrepreneurs stay in the city beyond graduation.

A scenic riverside dotted by the architectural gems that survived the Second World War's bombings, Frankfurt (Oder) provides a quiet and idyllic setting for families and students. "You have a small town welcome and a very active cultural scene," says Frankfurt (Oder) mayor Martin Wilke. "You have the state orchestra, singing academies and natural surroundings. And on the other side, you have Berlin for shopping, nightlife and more." Indeed, the city is home to the Brandenburg State Symphony Orchestra Frankfurt (Oder), which has performed all over the world since its founding in the mid-19th century. A point of pride for the city's residents, the orchestra sponsors educational projects and youth arts initiatives.

"Here you have a smaller city; it's less crowded and more relaxed," adds Mr Wilke. Capitalising on crossborder co-operation and attractive incentives for companies and entrepreneurs, Frankfurt (Oder) is bolstering its reputation as an open, international city with room to grow. ■

# Domestic bliss

TECH START-UP ASGOODASNEW ELECTRONICS WAS FOUNDED IN FRANKFURT (ODER) IN 2008 AND HAS BEEN HAPPY TO KEEP ITS BASE IN THE CITY, EVEN AS ITS GLOBAL REPUTATION EXPANDS. NATASHA TURAK SPEAKS TO THE COMPANY'S MANAGEMENT ABOUT WHY THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME

**F**or Daniel Boldin, it pays to stick to your roots. A Frankfurt (Oder) native, Mr Boldin has been CEO of local start-up AsGoodAsNew Electronics since 2014. He cites the city's pool of talent, technology base and low costs as good reasons to stay in the neighbourhood.

Founded by another local, Christian Wolf, in his living room in 2008, AsGoodAsNew buys used electronic goods, reconditions them and sells them online to individuals and businesses around the world.

The company now employs 130 people in two sites, Frankfurt (Oder) and Berlin, with its headquarters and most of its employees located in the former. In 2015, turnover increased by 40% to more than €30m. The company's biggest investors are French venture capital firm Ventech and German firm Brandenburg Capital.

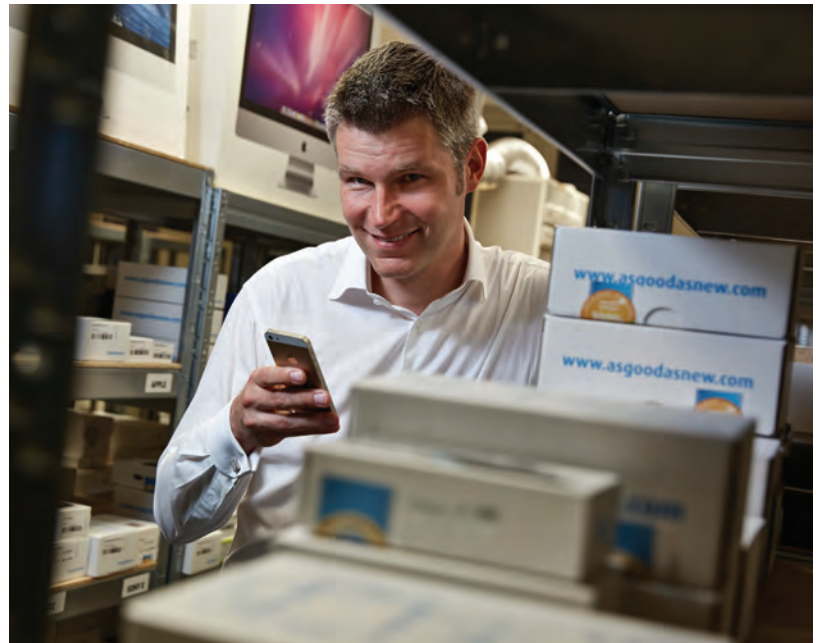
Site director Jens Heine says: "Our specialty that set us apart from our competitors in the refurbishment market was the refurbishment of parts of products – we wouldn't just take the product as a whole and sell it on. We take it apart, replace the damaged or old parts, and resell it."

AsGoodAsNew sells on its own website as well as international platforms eBay and Amazon. "At the moment we're number one in the [device] refurbishing business in Europe," says Mr Heine.

## Homegrown talent

Mr Boldin says: "A lot of our employees came from Viadrina University, the European business school here, so [the company] was a local baby born in Frankfurt (Oder)."

"We feel very comfortable in Frankfurt (Oder) because we are in



Photographer: Christoph Michaelis

On familiar ground: AsGoodAsNew Electronics CEO Daniel Boldin is a Frankfurt (Oder) native and is happy for the company to stay rooted in the city

technology and consumer electronics and we have really good access to people here."

AsGoodAsNew is located in Frankfurt (Oder)'s TeGeCe tech park, which houses companies in sectors from business process outsourcing to renewable energy, and leases facilities to companies at affordable rates, providing services such as refurbishment, electricity and security.

"What we offer is comparable quality at a much cheaper price, and that drove our business really, really fast," says Mr Boldin. "We've grown quickly and we have enough space to grow. From an investor's perspective, you are looking at attractive structural costs regarding rent prices, wage levels, and especially access to people of a certain quality. That's a reason why we are still in Frankfurt (Oder) and why we intend to stay here."

## Room for expansion

In 2014, after two years at the TeGeCe, the company needed more space and worked with the tech park's management to move into a larger facility on the campus, a former semi-conductor plant which was fully refurbished for them within six months.

"That was really important,

because we want to concentrate on business, on increasing volumes, and certainly not on moving sites," says Mr Boldin. The company plans to move into part of this additional space by the end of 2016, and will need even more room next year.

"If you had that situation in other parts of Germany, you would never have a partner saying 'well, you are currently one of the biggest companies in Frankfurt (Oder), we appreciate your being here and building opportunities for the people here, and we keep space reserved for your growth'," Mr Boldin adds. "This story wouldn't happen in Munich, for example."

The CEO attests to also receiving strong support from the city's administration. "We are starting to internationalise our business and increase the power of our workshop, increase capacity and skill in Frankfurt (Oder) so that we can win international investors," he says.

"When closing fundraising, sometimes it's beneficial to get quick registration to have quick flow of funding volumes. Frankfurt (Oder) is always working very quickly and supporting us so we don't lose time and we get good access to additional funds to keep on growing." ■

**Q&A: MARTIN WILKE**

# The best of both worlds

FRANKFURT (ODER) PROVES LOCATION IS KEY, POSITIONED AS IT IS ON THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER NOT FAR FROM BERLIN. THIS MEANS INVESTORS CAN BENEFIT FROM GOOD LOGISTICAL ACCESS TO EASTERN AND WESTERN MARKETS AS WELL AS A MULTILINGUAL WORKFORCE, AS LORD MAYOR DR MARTIN WILKE TELLS NATASHA TURAK



**CURRICULUM VITAE**

MARTIN WILKE  
2010

**Frankfurt (Oder)**  
Lord mayor

**Previously**

Investor Center Ostbrandenburg,  
head: Technologiepark  
Ostbrandenburg GmbH, manager

**Q** As a small city of 60,000 people, Frankfurt (Oder) might be unfamiliar to investors outside of Germany. What does it have to offer businesses?

**A** We have some interesting aspects for investors, primarily our logistics and geographic location. We are not far from Berlin – just one hour away – and we have access to the infrastructure of the city, with the new Berlin airport currently under construction. On the other side we are close to Poland.

We're also very international. We are home to the European University of Viadrina, which has students from more than 80 countries.

We also have companies from different countries using this location to access two markets: the eastern European market on one side – with Poland, which is a growing market with about 38 million inhabitants – and Germany on the other side with a population of more than 80 million.

With these two countries you have access to eastern and western Europe, which is also supported by a strong logistics infrastructure as the main road between east and west and the railway from Moscow to Paris go through here.

We have also developed a strong industrial and R&D base, particularly in the fields of microelectronics, solar power and semiconductors, thanks to our IHP [Innovations for High Performance Microelectronics] Institute, which helps attract companies or support start-ups.

And we're also in a position where we have a lot of subsidies financed by the state or federal government, which is very interesting, especially for very large investments.

**Q** You market yourself under the 'Twin Cities' concept [which links Frankfurt (Oder) with its Polish neighbour Stłubice]. What makes your location on the border with Poland attractive for FDI?

**A** In this location close to the Oder river you can see Poland on one side and Frankfurt (Oder) [in Germany] on the other, so we have

crossborder co-operation and we can offer a bilingual workforce for logistics, distribution activity and more.

We have access to two labour markets. If a company comes here, we can offer administrative support from both the German and Polish sides to give permissions or allowances.

It is also great for German-Polish families and companies, as they can grow within both environments. This is also beneficial for countries from all over Europe because you have the university, which is very international, and workers here often speak three or more languages.

**Q** What types of industries would you like to attract in particular?

**A** Logistics and technology-based industry, especially in the fields of solar and microelectronics – we have a long tradition in microelectronics and a lot of experienced people. The IHP Institute of about 350 engineers and technicians is able to support such settlements of companies or start-ups.

But companies also require a robust infrastructure, in case they need large volumes of electricity and water. We can offer that, and the costs are relatively moderate. To do that in Cologne or Hamburg would be much more expensive.

**Q** What are your biggest challenges in attracting FDI to Frankfurt (Oder)?

**A** Sometimes it can be a problem hiring the right people. As in every region, there is a limit to the availability of people with the right, specific qualifications. But we have access to the neighbouring labour market of Berlin, so a lot of people come from there, and we try to reduce the problem by attracting people from the surrounding areas.

What we need for the future is a better economic platform. We need more income and more taxes, and for that we offer companies a lot of benefits. It's a win-win situation.

We offer the environment and the right circumstances, and on the other side, we are hoping for more taxes and for more jobs. ■





Bridging the divide: although they sit on opposite sides of the Oder river, Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice work together to create a 'double city' to give citizens and investors twice the benefits

# Twin benefits

EVER SINCE GERMANY OPENED ITS BORDERS TO POLAND IN 2011, THE ONCE JOINED AREAS OF FRANKFURT (ODER) AND SŁUBICE HAVE BEEN WORKING TOGETHER TO ENSURE THAT THEIR POPULATIONS GET THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS. NATASHA TURAK REPORTS ON THIS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL ARRANGEMENT

Once part of the city of Frankfurt (Oder), the town of Słubice, now home to 18,000 people, became a part of Poland in 1945 at the end of the Second World War. It sits directly across the River Oder, only a 15-minute drive from Frankfurt (Oder)'s city centre, and residents from both sides cross the border freely and easily to work, shop and study.

This was not always the case, however. Rigid border controls were enforced throughout the Cold War, and even after German reunification all the way to 2007, when the controls were removed three years after Poland's accession to the EU. In 2011, all barriers were removed for Polish workers entering Germany. Now, about 2000 Poles live in

Frankfurt (Oder) and about 500 cross into the city to work every day. The representatives at the Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice German-Polish Co-operation Centre believe this symbolises openness and collaboration and presents a unique offer for investors, students and families.

"During the past 10 years we have tried to make use of this crossborder location for the inhabitants, tourists and investors to create a double city where you can feel there are two different cities, but [also] one city on the ground where you can live, work and shop on both sides," says Soeren Bollmann, director at the Frankfurt-Słubice Co-operation Centre in Frankfurt (Oder)'s old town centre.

"The crossborder location is one very important reason for companies to come here, because they have the possibility to choose either the German or Polish side, and it's a very central location in Europe, well linked to Berlin and Warsaw." The cities also share important infrastructural elements such as a joint district heating system and a cross-border bus route.

## **Crossborder education**

Among the perks of this twin-city arrangement is the fact that compa-

nies have access to a pool of workers capable of speaking German, Polish and English – and often other languages as well.

Frankfurt (Oder) has invested in bilingual schools, universities and kindergartens where students can learn both Polish and German, making it an attractive potential home for Polish families. More than 200 Polish children attend school in Frankfurt (Oder), with equal access to their German counterparts.

"Our strategy is to open not only the working sector but the education sector – our idea is that Polish families can live close to Poland but have the opportunity for their children to learn German and work in the region, whether in Frankfurt (Oder) or Berlin," says Mr Bollmann.

Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice collaborate on further education and research initiatives, notably the Collegium Polonicum, which is located in Słubice. "The Collegium Polonicum is a joint university between Frankfurt (Oder)'s Viadrina University and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland," says Mr Bollmann.

The Collegium Polonicum hosts about 500 students on the Polish side studying law, international

affairs and regional studies. This is of particular note, Mr Bollmann explains, because up until recently the whole European study market was not open to Poles.

“Now it is open, and you can study everything,” he says. “The Collegium Polonicum and Viadrina University are about to establish a common faculty to establish more German-Polish international studies and a joint-degree system. The idea is to provide a local market with very attractive employees on a university level,” adds Mr Bollmann.

#### **Logistical advantage**

International investors have taken note of the twin city arrangement, and this includes those in Poland. A prime example of this is Polish cargo terminal operator PCC Intermodal. As part of a private-public partnership, the City of Frankfurt (Oder), the State of Brandenburg, the German government, the EU and PCC Intermodal have invested about €10m in upgrading and developing the cargo terminal in Frankfurt



Photographer: Leif Kuhlert

On the right track: the expansion of Frankfurt (Oder)'s Freight Village has resulted in a modern intermodal road-to-rail transfer location

(Oder)'s Freight Village, which has been in operation since 2004.

PCC recently invested an additional €3m in new equipment for the facility. The expansion of the terminal, which provides intermodal freight transport, has resulted in a modern intermodal road-to-rail transfer location for the region with direct trains to Europe's international ports and commercial centres in eastern Europe.

“Why Frankfurt (Oder)? It's the area,” says Bernd Meewes, PCC Intermodal's managing director. “It's very close to the Polish border, and directly in the middle of our network. Our trains are coming from all over Poland and the Brandenburg area through Frankfurt (Oder) and going to Hamburg, Antwerp, Rotterdam – it is connected to all the main European ports.”

The terminal has four tracks which handle about 60,000 containers worth of cargo – oil, gas, construction materials and more – each year.

“Frankfurt (Oder) is well connected with Belarus and further east to China – the trains here can go all the way to China on the freight routes,” adds Mr Meewes.

#### **Improving connections**

Mr Bollmann laments the fact that more Polish workers do not stream into Frankfurt (Oder). This, he believes, is due to Germany's

slowness in opening its borders to Polish workers. “The number of Polish inhabitants here is growing by no more than 200 each year because most Poles who wanted to leave the country are already in England. It was Germany's mistake to open the borders so late – we were afraid of cheap workers, but for the border region it was a bad decision,” he says.

This is why initiatives such as Interreg VA, an EU programme designed to unite parts of European populations across borders, are often proving vital for Frankfurt (Oder)'s growth.

The programme, which has funded projects such as the Øresund Bridge connecting Denmark and Sweden, is providing €100m over six years for part of the German-Polish border region. Those funds go toward buildings such as the Frankfurt (Oder)-Ślubice Co-operation Centre, German-Polish kindergartens and cross-border cultural events. Further infrastructure projects are planned to improve commuter connections and crossborder communications.

“We hope to see more people coming to Frankfurt (Oder) and Ślubice to live and work here,” says Mr Bollmann. “The most important challenge is the language challenge, and with that, the mentality to become attractive as a German-Polish town, to bring the Polish side closer to the German people, and vice versa.” ■

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