

Germany

Debanking of an independent journalist

Ulrich Heyden's account frozen after more than 30 years



Ulrich Heyden. (Picture Screenshot RT DE from 20.3.26)

(CH-S) Ulrich Heyden is one of the few independent German journalists reporting from Russia. His stance is independent and therefore critical. He has been working

in Russia for many decades and, thanks to his language skills, personal connections, experience and extensive knowledge of the country and its people, is able to present high-quality reports, features and analyses to his readers in the German-speaking world (<https://ulrich-heyden.de>). This is one of the reasons why Ulrich Heyden is also a welcome contributor to "Swiss Standpoint".

Now, the "Hamburger Sparkasse" is closing his account, which he has held there since the early 1990s and through which he generates part of his income. This is not solely the fault of this savings bank, but rather the result of blindly following arbitrary directives from the German government and the EU. His case is not an isolated one. It reflects the decline of a constitutional state into a regime of arbitrariness. Below you will find the open letter from Ulrich Heyden to the German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

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Moscow, 13 March 2026

Dear Mr President *Frank-Walter Steinmeier*,
I am a Russia correspondent and am writing to you because, as of today, I have been affected by the closure of my bank account. This measure is not only capable of destroying my livelihood; it also contravenes the principles of democracy and press freedom. I ask you to intervene to ensure that the account closure is reversed.

* *Ulrich Heyden* has been reporting from Russia since 1993. He sees himself as a journalist who depicts what he sees and experiences in Russia and the neighbouring states. He wants to serve neither positive nor negative expectations, but to deliver reality. (<https://ulrich-heyden.de/page/1>)

I have held my account with *Hamburger Sparkasse* since the early 1990s. Yesterday, a member of staff at the bank explained to me over the phone that the closure was linked to the EU sanctions against Russia. The bank employee claimed that I live in a "high-risk country".

If I live in a "high-risk" country, shouldn't the German government and the European Commission be supporting me? Instead, they are putting a spoke in my wheel.

The termination letter I received today merely refers to a "review" of all our "business relationships with customers residing in Russia". No specific allegations are being made against me.

I am not the first German journalist living in Russia to have my account closed. Before me, my colleagues *Thomas Röper* and *Alina Lipp* had their accounts closed, thereby depriving them of their livelihood.

It is obvious why, of all people, the three of us were singled out for account closures and not the Moscow correspondents of "Die Zeit", the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", ZDF and ARD. The three of us report on Russia with understanding and not with froth at the mouth. Yet understanding does not go well with the war-preparedness demanded by the Federal Government.

How does that work, Mr Steinmeier? Projects by Russian opposition figures and journalists living in Germany are supported by funding programmes from the Foreign Office, yet a German journalist like myself, who lives in Moscow and has been providing German readers and radio listeners with information and background reports from Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia and the Caucasus for 34 years, is having his livelihood taken away?

I live exclusively on income from German, Swiss and Austrian media, which I have collected in my account at the *Hamburger Sparkasse*. Over the last two years, the *Hamburger Sparkasse* has already stopped allowing online transfers to Moscow, on the grounds that it is a "regional bank".

I will be 72 this year. What am I to say to my great-uncle, *Ulrich Wilhelm Graf Schwerin von*

Schwanenfeld, when I meet him in heaven? He was murdered in September 1944 in Berlin-Plötzensee, as a resistance fighter against the *Hitler* regime, by means of a wire noose. I bear his first name in his honour. What will my great-uncle say? He will say that murder and terror against dissenters also existed during the Nazi era, and that he could never have imagined that such a thing would happen again in Germany.

About myself: For ten years, I contributed radio features on Russian topics to Deutschlandfunk as a freelancer. For 13 years, I was the Moscow correspondent for the "Sächsische Zeitung". For 30 years I reported for the weekly newspaper "Der Freitag". I have also written for the "Tagesspiegel", the "Rheinischer Merkur",

the "Financial Times", the "Märkische Allgemeine", the "Thüringer Allgemeine" and the "Mittelbayerische Zeitung". Today I work for "Nachdenkseiten" and other German internet portals. I am the author of several books on Russia, Ukraine and German post-war history. In 2024, my book "Mein Weg nach Russland. Erinnerungen eines Reporters" was published by "Promedia-Verlag".

Kind regards
Ulrich Heyden

(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")

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First published: <https://overtone-magazin.de/top-story/kontosperrung-in-deutschland-weil-ich-als-russland-korrespondent-in-einem-hochrisikoland-lebe/>, 14 March 2026