

‘Dirty’ Unilever flies in face of mass Russia exit

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Vladimir Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine triggered a mass exit from Russia for hundreds of fmcg suppliers. Within weeks, giants such as Coca-Cola and Starbucks suspended all business activity, while Imperial Tobacco has sold its operations there and McDonald’s is in the process of flogging its 850 restaurant sites.

British supermarkets also took action, removing Russian products from their shelves, in a mark of solidarity with Ukraine. Going in the opposite direction was Mere, the Russian discounter, which pulled out of the UK due to the “political situation”.

The political situation was no barrier for Unilever, however. For all its talk of ethical credentials and its “brands with purpose”, it continues to operate in Russia, insisting it’s providing “essential food and hygiene products” to Russian citizens. Not all agree. It was called out in December as one of the “dirty dozen” of high-profile multinationals still heavily involved in Russia by the Moral Rating Agency (MRA), alongside BP and HSBC. The MRA said it was using “loopholes” in the sanctions regime to continue operating. “Companies are hiding in shades of grey – doing little but looking like they are doing a lot,” said MRA founder and city grandee Mark Dixon.