

# **1. Visa**

## **Intro**

Business visas are a substantial financial and time burden. The financial and intangible damage to companies in both the EU and MENA region caused by visa requirements each year are completely disproportionate when compared to the underlying objective of visa procedures.

Furthermore, Research by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) show that G20 economies could boost their international tourist numbers by an additional 122 million, generate an extra US\$ 206 billion in tourism exports and create over five million additional jobs by 2015 by improving visa processes.

## **Key challenges**

We recognize that the states are confronted with the challenge of balancing national security and immigration concerns on one hand, while promoting economic activity and fostering political relations on the other. The existence of visas, however, constrains reciprocal investment decisions and visa barriers are an impediment to the exchange of ideas and values.

## **Recommendations**

We welcome the introduction of the biometric procedures, where the missions will electronically scan applicants' fingerprints when accepting visa applications. The procedure will accelerate the visa procedure further. This biometric procedure is expected to be introduced gradually towards 2013. Once a person's fingerprints have been scanned in, an interview at the mission will only be necessary in exceptional cases when submitting a visa application. Even though the introduction of the biometric procedure is an important step, further measures are needed to unleash the full economic potential of a closer economic cooperation among the two regions.

We therefore ask the governments and parliaments of the Schengen area and of the MENA region, as well as the European Commission and the European Parliament, to accelerate the visa application process by means of:

- A gradual reduction of the number of required documents
- Abstaining from requesting original source documents
- Abstaining from requesting the applicant to appear in person at the consulate

- Increasing the issuing of multiannual visas up to 5 years
- Reducing visa fees
- Providing the opportunity for simplified quick business visas for short trips

We recommend that the states exempt frequent travelers from the requirement to personally lodge a visa application. We furthermore recommend that the states - in accordance with Schengen regulations – issue multiple entries visas with long-term validity to frequent travelers who have proven their integrity and reliability inter alia through the regular use of previously issued Schengen visas. An increase in the number of multiple entries visas, which entitle holders to multiple short stays in the Schengen area over a long period of time, means it is no longer necessary to submit visa applications repeatedly. This option is of particular benefit to persons who have to travel frequently for professional or private reasons and have proven their reliability by using previous visas legally.