

Press Release

Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Istanbul, Madrid, Paris, Prague, Rome, Warsaw

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Economic Growth instead of Visa-Barriers **Common Position of nine European Business Associations**

As of July 27th, the residents of the Kaliningrad district and its neighboring Polish voivodeships will have the possibility to cross the border between Poland and Russia without any visa requirements. Leading European business associations from nine different countries have taken this opportunity in order to give a fresh impetus to the discussion on visa requirements and ask for large scale liberalization with European neighboring countries as a whole.

According to the "common position", business visa requirements are a substantial impediment to international business; hence, their liberalization is a precondition for growth and job creation.

The signatory organizations, representing more than one million companies in the EU, are therefore asking the governments of the Schengen area, as well as the European Commission to conclude negotiations with the Republic of Moldova, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, aiming at reciprocal liberalization of business visa requirements, the sooner the better and furthermore to launch negotiations with all remaining Eastern Partnership countries, including Kazakhstan, as soon as possible.

The common appeal is an initiative of business organizations from Germany and France. It is supported by the leading business associations of Denmark, Finland, Poland and Italy. Later on business associations from the Czech Republic, Spain and Turkey joined the initiative.

The "common position", which is attached to this press release, will be published simultaneously in Brussels as well as in the countries of the respective participating business associations.



Quotes from participants:

“In order to avoid an economic relapse of Europe within the global competition, we have to work towards a common economic space. As a first crucial step, the removal of visa barriers with our neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe is required”, said **Eckhard Cordes, the Chairman of the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations (Ost-Ausschuss)**. “Visa barriers constrain investment and produces red tape costing hundreds of millions of Euros per annum. We have no time to lose as regards the weak economic growth in Europe at the moment.”

“Companies need new markets to develop themselves and to contribute to national and global economies ‘growth. Visa liberalization is a first and simple step that will leverage the European growth potential, from Lisboa to Vladivostok, and bring mutual advantages to all countries and all partners, private sector as well as governments!” underlines **Thierry Courtaigne, Vice President and CEO of MEDEF International** (French Business Confederation).

Thomas Bustrup, Deputy Director General of the Confederation of Danish Industry, commented that “Boosting economic and commercial relations beyond the borders of the EU is an important avenue for growth that we have to pursue persistently. A necessary initial step would be to deregulate visa requirements. This would, for instance, enable European companies to reap the full benefits of Russia's accession to the WTO.”

And **Mikko Pukkinen, Director General of the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK**, remarked: “The Confederation of Finnish Industries EK is a strong supporter of all efforts to improve the conditions for doing cross-border business. Transition to a more liberal visa regime with Russia and Eastern Europe is an important step for further growth of EU business in this area.”

His Spanish colleague **José María Lacasa Aso, Secretary General Confederation of Employers and Industries of Spain** remarked: “The liberalization of the current visa regime and the removal of important cross-border barriers in this specific area would reinforce economic bilateral relationships and boost trade and investment”.

Jaroslav Hanák, President of The Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, commented that “the Confederation of industry of the Czech Republic supports the liberalization of the business visa-requirements for Russia and other neighboring countries of the European Union. Visa barriers are one of the major obstacles to trade and investment and complicating interaction between Russian and EU citizens and there is a significant negative impact on the EU companies. The liberalization of visa regime with Eastern Europe will support the competitiveness of the EU companies.”



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Supporting Institutions:

The **Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations** (Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft - OA) was founded in 1952 as the oldest regional initiative of the German economy. It represents the interests of German enterprises and associations in 21 countries in Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe and Central Asia. One of the key supporting institutions is the Federation of German Industries (BDI) which represents 100,000 companies in Germany with more than eight million employees.



MEDEF International is a non-profit organisation founded in 1989, which represents the French Business Confederation (MEDEF) and its 800,000 companies in the world, at bilateral level, promotes the know-how and the interests of French international companies from all sectors and contributes to improving the business climate in the emerging and developing countries.



The **Confederation of Danish Industry (DI)** is the strong voice of corporate Denmark. On behalf of 10,000 member companies, DI works to provide the best conditions for Danish businesses in order to improve the opportunities for growth and overall competitiveness.



The **Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)** is the leading business organisation in Finland. It represents the entire private sector, both industry and services, and all sizes of companies. Its member companies produce more than 70 percent of Finland's gross national product and over 95 percent of Finland's exports.



Founded in 1910, **Confindustria** is the main organisation representing Italian manufacturing and services companies. A total of 149.288 companies of all sizes - employing a total of 5.516.975 workers - are voluntary members of the organisation. Confindustria represents the interests of Italian companies to leading political and administrative institutions, including parliament, the government, trade unions and other social partners.



The **Polish Confederation of Private Employers Lewiatan** is a nation-wide representation of Poland's private sector employers to the state and trade unions. Today it is an organization of more than eighty sector and regional associations and individual members. Thus in total there are about 3,750 companies employing over 750,000 workers. LEWIATAN promotes the interests of the private sector in the legislative process and media.



The **Confederation of Employers and Industries of Spain (CEOE)**, founded in 1977, is the major representative institution of the Spanish business community. It has a voluntary membership of public and private companies in all sectors (agriculture, industry and services), whose affiliation to the CEOE is channelled through 200 regional and trade organizations.



TÜSİAD is the non-governmental representative organisation of the Turkish private sector (industry, finance and services) established by Turkish businesspeople in 1971 to represent the business world. At the national level its member companies represent over 55% of the economic added-value, 80% of exports and 85% of corporate tax revenues of the Turkish economy.



The **Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republik (SP)** is a voluntary, non-political and non-governmental organisation that brings together employers and enterprises in the Czech Republic. It is the largest alliance of employers in the country, participates in shaping the Czech Government's economic and social policy in order to create optimal conditions for business development in the country and represents Czech employers and enterprises in international organisations.

