

Press Release

Berlin, Brussels, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Paris, Rome, Warsaw
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Economic Growth instead of Visa-Barriers Common Position of European Business Associations

On June 3rd and 4th the next EU-Russia Summit is going to be held in St. Petersburg. Leading European business associations, representing more than one million companies all over Europe, will take this as an opportunity to call for the liberalisation of business visa-requirements with Russia and other neighbouring countries of the European Union.



The appeal is an initiative of business associations from France and Germany with more than 900.000 member companies in the two strongest EU economies. The appeal is already supported by the leading industrial associations of Denmark, Finland, Poland and Italy. Finland and Poland are EU member states having borders with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Denmark currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Italy is the third largest economy in the Schengen area. Business associations of further Schengen countries are expected to join the initiative.



“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."

The joint appeal, attached to this press release, will be published simultaneously in Brussels and in the countries of the participating industry associations. It addresses the parliaments and governments of the Schengen countries as well as the European Parliament and the EU Commission.

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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.

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.

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