

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/26/business/global/26bribery.html?emc=tnt&tntemail1=y>

Russia Is Invited to Join O.E.C.D. Anti-Bribery Pact

MOSCOW — A group of nations working to outlaw bribery in international trade invited Russia to join their pact at a ceremony Wednesday in Paris, after the Russian Parliament passed a law this spring prohibiting Russian companies from bribing foreign officials.

The ceremony was the beginning of Russia's application process to join the [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's](#) anti-bribery convention, which began as an initiative to ban kickbacks and corruption in transnational deals.

It was also a step toward full O.E.C.D. membership for Russia, because acceptance into the anti-bribery convention is a requirement for aspiring members. Russia first asked to join in 2007, along with Chile, Estonia, Slovenia and Israel. The other four are already members.

All 34 members of the O.E.C.D., as well as four nonmembers, have signed the anti-bribery convention. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended the ceremony at the organization's headquarters in Paris, highlighting

the convention's importance to the United States.

"This is an important step for Russia and for all members and partners of the O.E.C.D.," Mrs. Clinton said. "Russia has removed a major obstacle to doing business and advancing economic growth."

She also spoke broadly about state-owned enterprises, without mentioning Russia specifically. "We recognize that countries will make different choices about how much of their economies to keep in the hands of government," she said. "Still — whether they are owned by shareholders or states — all companies should operate on a level playing field."

A working group will now gauge whether Russia's new legislation adheres to its standards. Bribery and other forms of corruption are a scourge inside Russia. The new law, however, addresses bribery outside Russia's borders. Similar to the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in the United States, it criminalizes the payment of a bribe by a Russian to an official of a foreign government.

Russia has not committed to stricter measures against bribery at home. Transparency International, the anticorruption group, ranks Russia 154th in the world on its 2010 Corruption Perception index, tied with Papua New Guinea, Laos, Cambodia, a number of

African countries and Tajikistan.

The United States encouraged other O.E.C.D. countries to adopt legislation similar to its own law as it became clear that however helpful it was in diminishing corruption in other countries, it was putting American companies at a disadvantage.

The O.E.C.D. convention took effect in 1999. Since then, governments have made headway in pursuing companies that pay bribes.

The new law in Russia raises the existing fines that can be levied on Russian companies that bribe foreign officials and imposes new criminal responsibility. But, recent cases have called into question Russia's commitment to transnational prosecution of bribery infractions. Even in instances where Germany and the United States have prosecuted their own citizens or businesses for bribing Russian officials, Russian law enforcement agencies have not picked up the lead.

Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Paris.