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Business Lobby Urges Western Fashion Retailers to Return to Russia

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Moskva News Agency

An organization representing hundreds of shopping malls in Russia has called on international fashion retailers Uniqlo, H&M and Inditex to return to the country, citing struggles faced by their local replacements, state media reported Monday.

“We’d like to address possible changes in the current political landscape and their implications for the return of your brands to the Russian market,” the Shopping Centers Association wrote in a letter seen by the state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

News of the letter comes as U.S. President Donald Trump pursues talks with Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, which the Kremlin has described as a potential step toward restoring bilateral relations.

The association, which represents 800 malls in Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, noted that “not all” Russian brands that replaced departing Western retailers have been successful, with some even closing stores.

“That’s probably why more than half of the shopping center representatives we surveyed expect [Uniqlo, H&M and Inditex’s] return and are ready to provide locations for their stores,” RIA Novosti quoted the letter as saying.

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The news outlet did not specify when the letter was sent, but the Shopping Centers Association reportedly offered mediation and logistical support to facilitate “unhindered reintegration” into the Russian market for interested companies. However, it acknowledged that their return remains unlikely unless Western sanctions are lifted.

“The return could be complicated,” association vice president Pavel Lyulin said over the weekend, adding that current discussions are at an “unofficial” early stage.

Last week, commercial real estate representatives said they had received “feelers” from unidentified Western fashion retailers regarding a potential return to Russia by the end of 2025.

Hundreds of Western companies exited or scaled back operations in Russia following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Later that year, Moscow introduced steep mandatory discounts and exit fees for departing firms — figures that have since increased as remaining Western companies face criticism for contributing to Russia’s war economy.

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