

## Criteria Caixa Corp increases stake in Erste Group

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[Back](#)

**04.06.2009**

Criteria Caixa Corp SA, the investment vehicle of Caja de Ahorros y Pensiones Barcelona (la Caixa) announced today that it has increased its stake in Erste Group and now owns 16.2m shares or 5.1% of the total outstanding voting shares.

In addition, cooperation agreements between Erste Group's majority shareholder ERSTE Foundation and Criteria Caixa Corp as well as agreements about a business cooperation between the two banking groups, were signed yesterday. This latter agreement will offer both institutions access to each other's clients in their respective home markets. The envisaged cooperation will allow la Caixa to support those of its 10.6m customers who have specific business interests in CEE, thereby offering Erste Group access to retail and corporate customers in Spain.

A key element of the cooperation agreement is the common roots of the two institutions, both of which were founded as savings banks with a benevolent purpose.

Criteria Caixa Corp sees this investment as an opportunity to participate in the future potential of the CEE region and has indicated the possibility of increasing its stake in Erste Group over time. "Erste Group is the best possible partner for us to enter a region of Europe, which continues to offer long term growth perspectives", commented Juan María Nin, President and CEO of la Caixa, who was also elected as a member of the supervisory board of Erste Group in its recent shareholders meeting.

"We are delighted that one of the most successful retail banks in Europe, and one with a similar background and philosophy as Erste has chosen to become our partner. Moreover, la Caixa has a long and proven track record of strategic partnership as a reliable and supportive minority shareholder", said Andreas Treichl, CEO of Erste Group.

This announcement is also made pursuant to Section 91 of the Austrian Stock Exchange Act (Börsegesetz).

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1) Criteria Caixa Corp is a listed subsidiary of Spain's largest savings bank la Caixa and holds investments in industrial and financial companies. The company has a strategic commitment to invest in regions that offer long term growth opportunities.

[Back](#)