

1.5/13/3

2 March 1998

**UNICE OPINION ON THE FIFTH RTD FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME,
FOLLOWING THE AGREEMENT AT THE MEETING
OF THE "RESEARCH" COUNCIL ON 12 FEBRUARY 1998**

UNICE congratulates the Council of Research Ministers in reaching a common position on the Fifth Framework Programme. Further discussions and views are required from the European Parliament before full agreement is reached and the programme can commence at the end of 1998. We hope that the following comments are viewed in a constructive light to assist with gaining a final agreement.

UNICE agrees that the fundamental objective of the whole Framework Programme should be to support the competitiveness of European industry thereby creating wealth and employment and improving the quality of life for European citizens. The ability to innovate successfully from our science and technology base will be a significant factor in determining the future competitiveness of European industry.

UNICE believes that there is scope for a compromise between the budgetary allocations proposed by the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council of Research Ministers. In particular, UNICE:

- believes that overall RTD funding should increase in real terms and have a larger proportion of the total EU budget, in recognition of its importance for future competitiveness;
- therefore strongly recommends that the increase in the budget is focused specifically on the key actions which are directly devoted to the improvement of European Industry's competitiveness such as, for instance, "Innovative products, processes, organisation";
- urges that significant improvements are made in efficiency and administration across the whole Framework Programme; and
- supports the view put forward in the recent Commission proposal that the Joint Research Center (JRC) should participate, in a competitive approach, in the context of consortia, in carrying out research activities foreseen by way of indirect actions. Opening up the possibility for the JRC to participate in indirect actions should go hand in hand with a decrease in its direct funding.

In conclusion, UNICE believes that we are nearing final agreement on the structure of the Fifth Framework Programme and hopes that a common position can be reached in the budget and improved management procedure. If successful the Fifth Framework Programme will be a helpful mechanism in ensuring that Europe can capitalise on its scientific and technological capabilities.

*
* * *