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**UNICE MEETS SPANISH PRIME MINISTER AZNAR:
CALL FOR QUICK END TO EU CRISIS**

Mr. Georges Jacobs, President of UNICE, accompanied by Mr. José Maria Cuevas, President of the Spanish Employers' Organisation (CEOE) and Vice-President of UNICE, expressed his concerns about the current situation in the EU, at his meeting today with the Prime Minister of Spain, José Maria Aznar, in Madrid.

Reacting on the resignation of the European Commission last week, Mr. Jacobs underlined the fact that it also provides an opportunity for reforms and better management of European policies, which UNICE welcomes. However, he warned of the dangers of a political vacuum within the EU. Facing enormous challenges – for example Agenda 2000 and the trade crisis with the USA – the Union should continue to carry out its executive tasks to the full. “This is especially important for European business and industry. Companies must be able to operate in a stable, secure and predictable environment”, Mr. Jacobs stated. UNICE hopes that the institutional crisis will be resolved quickly and a new and fully-mandated Commission will be installed as soon as possible.

Looking ahead at the EU Summit in Berlin later this week, Mr. Jacobs urged the European heads of state and government to reach agreement on a full and sustainable deal on the Agenda 2000 reforms. Given the political and economic importance of enlargement, “any delay would hurt the interests of the Union as a whole. The applicant countries should not become the victims of the institutional and political problems in the EU. Too much is at stake”, UNICE's President said to Mr. Aznar.

Finally, the UNICE delegation discussed the problem of persistently high levels of unemployment in Europe. This structural problem requires structural reforms. “Now that EMU is a reality, improving competitiveness and job-creation should be top priority. Member States must urgently take the necessary actions to raise employment rates and flexibility of labour markets, stronger efforts in innovation and education and a reduction of excessive overall tax and regulatory burdens”, Mr. Jacobs concluded.

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