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UNICE SETS OUT NEW WTO PRIORITIES

Addressing the REX-Committee in the European Parliament today at the Public Hearing on “The European Union and the agenda of the WTO Millennium Round”, UNICE’s Secretary General Mr. Dirk F. Hudig has set out European business’ priorities regarding WTO.

Mr. Hudig called on the EU to take the interests of European business and industry into full account in its WTO policy. “Companies are the most affected by the WTO rules, they are the end-users of this trade system”, the Secretary General stated. UNICE is in favour of reinforcing the WTO. Only a strong WTO can meet the challenges of economic instability, protectionism and public support for further trade liberalisation.

UNICE supports a comprehensive Millennium Round, dealing with a broad range of subjects. This Round should be concluded within three years by a single undertaking; all WTO Members should accept, respect and implement the results of the negotiations.

European business’ priority for the new Round is: an improvement in access to third country markets for European good and services. To that end, UNICE wants to see included in the Millennium Round:

- **Investment:** a global regime for foreign direct investment;
- **Services:** reduction of exceptions and discriminations against EU;
- **Trade facilitation:** simplification, harmonisation, computerisation of customs procedures;
- **Improved market access commitments:** reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers;
- **Government procurement:** elimination of restrictions to European business;
- **Trade and environment:** guidelines for recourse to trade measures in multilateral environmental agreements and for ecological labelling;
- **Electronic commerce:** provisions in appropriate WTO agreements;
- **Dispute settlement:** clarification and improvement of provisions.

Liberalisation of services is one of UNICE’s main priorities in the new WTO Round. UNICE has strongly supported the creation of the European Services Network (ESN). The ESN is determined to promote the interests of European services at GATS 2000, to encourage world-wide liberalisation of services markets and to remove trade and investment barriers for the European services sector.

UNICE is opposed to any attempt to set up an international competition body within the WTO. However, UNICE would welcome a multilateral agreement on objectives for competition rules, aiming at the prevention of foreclosure of markets by anti-competitive practices, Mr. Hudig said in the European Parliament today.

UNICE hopes that the EU will be able to speak with one voice on the various WTO issues, which are crucial to Europe’s economic position. “Since WTO rules finally apply to business and industry, which is the motor for employment and economic growth in the EU, the WTO is of major interest to Europe as a whole”, Mr. Hudig concluded.

For further information, please call : Monique Julien (32 2 237 65 22), Christophe de Callatay (32 2 237.65.15) or
Wytze Russchen (32 2 237 65 62).