

**UNICE Council of Presidents: message for Göteborg Summit
(15-16 June 2001)**

UNICE's Council of Presidents met in Stockholm on 8 June 2001, to set out key business priorities ahead of the Göteborg EU summit in mid-June.

Meeting against the background of declining international economic prospects, Europe's **business leaders reiterated the need to improve Europe's competitiveness**, both by encouraging entrepreneurship and carrying out structural reforms. Without these reforms, the EU will not be able to fulfil its economic growth potential. Furthermore, ageing populations will place a great strain both on the public purse and on society at large: governments must not be complacent about the challenges ahead, and must maintain a coherent and sustainable approach to public finances. UNICE's Council of Presidents calls on EU Member States to continue to implement the Lisbon agenda, and thus create the conditions for long-term competitiveness and higher economic growth throughout Europe. In particular, action is required at Göteborg on the following priority areas:

1. European business is a strong supporter of enlargement of the European Union.

It is convinced that a successful enlargement will bring significant overall benefits to the EU and candidate countries alike in terms of economic growth and political stability. It is concerned that this opinion is not shared by large parts of public opinion in the Member States and candidate countries. To effectively tackle the concerns expressed and thus strengthen support for enlargement, the time has come for the political leaders of the countries concerned to actively engage in the public debate on enlargement and show determination and political leadership to move the process forward with realism, pragmatism and vision. Member States should now tackle the complex yet vital issues to ensure competitiveness and cohesion in an enlarged EU. The Göteborg European Council should be a significant step in that direction and initiate new actions to keep the momentum and limit to the greatest extent the negative effects of the necessary adjustments enlargement inevitably entails. UNICE is committed to pursuing its action to support the process actively and to facilitate a smooth enlargement.

2. The Göteborg talks on the European strategy for sustainable development should be genuinely inspired by a concern to promote economic, social and environmental progress in a balanced manner, in order to achieve the greatest global progress in the long term. Innovations and investments by companies play a major role in environmental progress. It is essential to create an economic climate conducive to these initiatives. The Göteborg summit is crucial, because the orientations and priorities defined there will determine whether or not the essential balance between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development is actually achieved.

UNICE endorses many points in the Commission's communication on future EU strategy for sustainable development, for example the idea of submitting major legislative proposals to an assessment of the potential economic, environmental and social benefits and costs.

For UNICE, well thought-out market-based instruments can help promote sustainable development. However, the Commission's proposals regarding energy taxation would result in very poor environmental effectiveness and have a very negative impact on the

competitiveness of European companies. UNICE urges the Göteborg summit not to approve these proposals.

Sustainable development clearly requires better coordination between the different EU thematic policies. However, implementation of the policies decided at Lisbon must not be overburdened by this coordination.

To deliver sustainable development as a global objective, future EU policy in this field must be linked to international negotiations aimed at sharing tasks and obligations in a balanced way at world level. Environmental effectiveness, for example in the climate change and chemicals policy areas, depends on concerted international action, whilst unilateral actions by the EU could be damaging, and would also seriously undermine the ability of European companies to strengthen their on-going contribution to sustainable development in many areas.

The headline objectives and policies proposed by the Commission should be a matter for discussion with stakeholders, in line with the Commission's own recommendations. In particular, objectives proposed for climate change must be based on sound analysis. UNICE calls on the summit not to prejudge the results of the analysis and consultations that need to be organised in this context.

3. UNICE sounds the alarm regarding the forthcoming Doha WTO ministerial. Five months before the meeting, the conditions for success are a long way from being met. It is high time for all supporters of the WTO multilateral trade system to mobilise and work actively and with determination towards a shared objective: the improvement and strengthening of a system that has proved its worth and which many countries want to join in order to enjoy all the benefits in terms of economic development and employment. Tangible progress towards reaching agreement for an agenda should be realised as soon as possible. Among UNICE's priorities for a new broad-based round are: the development of a reference framework for international investment; further opening of service markets; simplification and harmonisation of commercial and customs procedures; and reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. UNICE is resolved to play its part in ensuring that the new WTO round is successful, and calls on all the players concerned, governmental and non-governmental, to engage positively in the work to be done. Time is running out.

Strong bilateral relations between the US and EU must remain a top priority. The two regions have many areas of common interest for which strong and effective transatlantic dialogue and cooperation are essential. There is in particular a pressing need to defuse tensions in trans-atlantic trade. A convergence of views on WTO issues is also very important in the run-up to the launch of the next round.

4. With only seven months to go until the introduction of euro notes and coins, business continues to be concerned about the lack of awareness of and public confidence in the euro. It calls on Member States concerned to take all necessary steps to facilitate distribution and circulation of notes and coins as early and smoothly as possible. Smaller-sized companies with fewer resources face particular challenges in dealing with the technical, logistical and training issues involved. For the population at large, it is clear that the main messages about the benefits and implications of the euro are not getting through. Member States of the euro-zone are urged to step-up public awareness and information campaigns in order to ensure the successful introduction of the physical currency.
