

22 May 2002

The business community promotes dialogue in the Mediterranean
UNICE and UMCE meet the President of the European Commission

Brussels, 23 May 2002 – A delegation of the Euro-Mediterranean business community met today the President of European Commission, Mr Romano Prodi, and the Commissioner in charge of Enterprises, Mr Erkki Liikanen, in order to formally present the Union of Mediterranean Confederations of Enterprises (UMCE), a newly-created confederation that intends to promote the interests of the companies from the twelve Mediterranean partner countries, and to reiterate their common commitment for the success of the Barcelona Process. The delegation was headed by Mr Georges Jacobs, UNICE President, Mr Hassan Chami (Morocco), UMCE President, François Perigot, UNICE honorary President and its Special Representative for the Mediterranean, Mr Jacques Sarraf (Lebanon), UMCE Vice-President and Mr Hédi Djilani (Tunisia), UTICA President.

These meetings are part of the follow-up to the 5th Euro-Mediterranean Business Summit (Istanbul, 1 and 2 March 2002), in the margin of which UMCE was officially launched. UNICE and UMCE since participated to the three Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conferences organised by the Spanish Presidency of the EU (Trade, in Toledo on 19 March; Industry, in Malaga on 9 and 10 April; Foreign Affairs, in Valencia on 22 and 23 April). In occasion of these conferences, Euro-Mediterranean governments recognised private sector's crucial role for the success of the Barcelona process and welcomed the creation of UMCE as a particularly encouraging signal in the present context.

In their message to the Commission, UNICE and UMCE ask for:

- A stronger consideration of economic operators' real needs in the definition and implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's strategies and economic programmes, in order to strengthen their active participation to the ongoing reforms in the partner countries;
- A renewed political commitment in order to achieve the objective of creating an Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area by 2010;
- An active support, politically and technically, to the promotion of South/South trade (notably by dealing with the issue of investments in infrastructures in the region), a necessary condition for a successful economic integration in the area.

In the next few months, UNICE and UMCE will continue their joint action, notably in view of presenting new recommendations in occasion of the "UNIMED Business Network" project's final conference, which will take place in Italy at the beginning of the year 2003.

Note to the editor:

UNICE, the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, is the voice of European business. It brings together 34 industrial and employers' organisations from 27 countries.

UMCE, the Union of Mediterranean Confederations of Enterprises, established on 1 March 2002, is the association that brings together the main horizontal business organisations of the twelve partner Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and the Palestinian territories). It has been created in the framework of the "UNIMED Business Network", managed by UNICE and co-financed by the MEDA programme, whose mission is to strengthen employer organisations in partner Mediterranean countries and network them with their counterparts in the European Union.

For further information, please contact:

Mrs Selma Sqalli, CGEM, tel. 00212 22 25 26 96, e-mail : cgem@iam.net.ma

Mr Paolo Nicoletti, UNIMED, tel. 0032 (0)2 237 65 72, e-mail: unimed@unice.be

Mrs Monique Julien, UNICE, tel. 0032 (0)2 237 64 22, e-mail: rex@unice.be