

Brussels, 15 November 2000

UNICE supports Commission guidelines to realise European Research Area

UNICE expressed its clear support to the general content of the Commission communication, "*Towards a European Research Area*".

On the eve of the meeting of the European Research Council (16 November), UNICE welcomes the fact that the Commission has started a more in-depth discussion of the objectives, priorities and instruments which should serve as a basis for achieving a genuine European Research Area. UNICE reiterates the great involvement and interest shown by the enterprises in research, development and innovation and having the right policy mix.

UNICE sees in the different instruments and methods mentioned in the recent Commission communication new opportunities to improve the cost-effectiveness of research in Europe by suppressing unnecessary duplication and fostering synergies and to better direct research efforts towards innovation. This is a key factor for the competitiveness of our enterprises, for sustainable development and for the creation of stable jobs.

The **networking of national research programmes** on a voluntary basis will require a strong involvement of the Member States and is certainly one of the more promising instruments that could lead to unquestionable European added value, a win-win situation for all participants. The networking of existing European scientific and technical competences in "virtual" **networks of excellence** should be a major opportunity to foster university-industry co-operations.

UNICE has long pleaded for concentrating the (too) limited resources devoted by the European Union to R&D in favour of a limited number of priority themes corresponding to real European socio-economic needs. Industry is ready to participate to the identification of these themes that should be the basis of the 6th Framework Programme. Such themes could focus on **large programmes** in which **large scale projects** and smaller ones, selected for their scientific and technical merits as well as their relevance to European socio-economic objectives co-exist in a balanced way reflecting the actual needs of enterprises of all sizes.

UNICE strongly supports all efforts towards a better integration of **R&D and innovation** policies including "*the dissemination and exploitation of knowledge and results*" as well as "*research for and in SMEs*". Adequate support for the latter to adopt innovative technologies to improve their competitiveness.

UNICE urges the Member States to join their efforts to make the **Community patent** a reality; it is an essential instrument for innovation and competitiveness that European enterprises demand for a long time. They want to benefit from a similar level the protection for their intellectual property rights as their American and Japanese competitors.

UNICE appreciates that large **research infrastructure** which exists in Europe could be made more accessible to scientists and engineers of the Union. This would avoid expensive duplication of investments. Extending such an opening worldwide could be the basis of international exchanges benefiting European science and technology.

European business has for long supported all efforts to improve the mobility of **human resources**, probably the most efficient way to disseminate new knowledge and technologies. Member States have a unique role to reduce legal, social, practical and educational obstacles to transnational mobility of scientists and researchers.

UNICE considers also that a high priority should be given in all Member States and adhering countries, to the education of the citizens, from their early age on, in the fields of science and technology. Special encouragement should be given to the young to start careers in science and technology, as Europe presently is far behind its major world competitors.

For further information, please contact: UNICE:	Mr Wytze Russchen:	+32(0)2.237.65.62
	Mr Daniel Cloquet:	+32(0)2.237.65.41
	Website:	www.unice.org