

26 March 2001

STOCKHOLM SUMMIT: STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

European business welcomes the conclusions of the Stockholm summit, though insufficient progress was made in some areas. "It is important that the EU's political leaders keep the momentum of economic and structural reforms which they began in Lisbon last Spring. This is essential for building Europe's competitiveness", said Daniela Israelachwili, Acting Secretary General of UNICE.

UNICE welcomes the commitment to adopt the telecoms package by the end of 2001, and the recognition by political leaders of the need for improved IT skills. In this context it underlines the role that business, education and the social partners can play in the high-level task force on skills and mobility. Identifying and removing barriers in the European labour market will bring employment benefits. The objective of more jobs is not in conflict with that of better jobs. Benchmarking key areas of enterprise policy is a welcome development, as is the Council's call for an increase in public sector efficiency and a reduction of red tape.

The Council's commitment to achieving an integrated securities market by the end of 2003, in line with the recommendation of the Committee of Wise Men, is an important achievement, although progress should also be made in other areas of the Financial Services Action Plan.

UNICE welcomes the open method of coordination in the field of pensions, and supports regular monitoring of the sustainability of public finances, including the impact of ageing populations on these. European leaders are urged to make progress in this area, as an essential factor for sustainable development in Europe.

UNICE shares the Council's concern on the lack of progress on the Community Patent and urges Member States to adopt a more constructive approach on this dossier which is of paramount importance for boosting EU innovation and competitiveness.

Liberalisation of gas and electricity markets remains a priority for business. UNICE hopes that the discussions on energy liberalisation have cleared the ground for rapid progress in the Energy Council. It was disappointing to see some slippage in the timetable for railway liberalisation, a necessary step for increasing efficiency of Europe's transport system.