

**UNICE * statement on preparation of the
4th WTO Ministerial Conference**

Time is running out!

UNICE sounds the alarm regarding the forthcoming WTO ministerial conference which is to be held from 9 to 13 November in Doha (Qatar). Five months from this meeting, the conditions for success are a long way from being met. Preparatory work in Geneva is marking time in the absence of leadership and because of dissensions between members on whether or not a new round should be launched. Anti-globalisation movements are organising to upset the smooth functioning of the conference and permanently hold back the pursuit of trade and investment liberalisation in the framework of WTO multilateral rules.

It is high time to react. UNICE calls on all WTO members and supporters of the multilateral trading system to mobilise, at the highest level, to redress the situation and to work actively and with determination towards a shared objective: 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 a situation of highly integrated and interdependent markets, the alternatives to reinvigoration of the multilateral liberalisation process would only produce partial and limited solutions which, without a strong multilateral framework, are likely to result in discriminatory situations and even greater imbalances between developed countries and developing countries. Opposition - of principle or systematic - to proposals designed to promote more equitable and more sustainable development of trade and investments around the world is not a constructive approach. The time has come for all parties, at their own level, negotiators, governments, parliamentarians, social partners, representatives of civil society, to assume their responsibilities and to engage, without delay, in the work under way with a view to promoting solutions which will benefit all in terms of economic development and employment.

European companies have been following this route resolutely for many months. They have endeavoured to submit balanced proposals capable of :

- ? encouraging and facilitating the development of private initiative and the activities of companies involved on the international stage, engines of economic growth and employment, and
- ? responding to the concerns of developing countries and the part of public opinion that sees in trade and investment liberalisation threats relating to health and safety, the environment and sustainable development.

* UNICE is the voice of 16 million small, medium-sized and large companies active in Europe vis-à-vis the institutions of the European Union. Its members are 33 central industrial and employer federations in 26 European countries

They remain convinced that the best way of obtaining results that are satisfactory for all is to launch a new comprehensive round of negotiations in Doha which will pursue the process of market liberalisation, improve the existing framework of rules and include on its agenda the trade-related questions for which WTO is in a position to provide solutions. By contrast, it would be inappropriate to ask it to address environmental, social, public health or development challenges for which it has neither the competences nor the resources, and for which other institutions exist or other approaches are needed.

For UNICE, the priorities in a new broad-based round are:

- ? development of a reference framework for international direct investment, whose benefits are widely recognised and which all WTO members seek to attract,
- ? further opening of service markets, which is a powerful factor for development,
- ? simplification and harmonisation of commercial and customs procedures, and
- ? reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade.

Progress in these areas, and on the other subject on the built-in agenda, agriculture, would release significant economic growth potential, in the general interest.

With a view to reducing the discrimination that characterises some markets and preventing misuse of trade measures for protectionist ends, UNICE also hopes that a new round will result in progress on liberalisation of public procurement, clarification of the links between trade and environment, a lowering of barriers to electronic commerce, implementation of the agreement on intellectual property, improvement of the rules for the dispute settlement mechanism, harmonisation of procedures for implementation of the anti-dumping agreement and transparency in WTO's functioning [♦].

UNICE is resolved to pursue its action actively to try and ensure that the Doha conference is a success. It expects all the stakeholders concerned – governmental and non-governmental – to do the same. Time is running out!

[♦] Its detailed positions are available on UNICE's Internet site <www.unice.org>