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**New Italian Minister for Productive Activities invites  
SME entrepreneurs to discuss business growth**

Brussels / Rome. Under the umbrella of Europe's business confederation, UNICE, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) from nine EU countries had the opportunity to discuss their vision of conditions for growth in Europe with the newly appointed Minister for Productive Activities, Mr. Antonio Marzano. Heading a new ministry, which combines responsibilities for industry and foreign trade, Mr. Marzano will champion the cause of SMEs in the new Italian administration. *"We need to foster the spirit of enterprise and give entrepreneurs the freedom to decide how big their company should grow"*, he said during the informal working breakfast with UNICE entrepreneurs on Tuesday this week. Pointing to the situation in Italy, where the vast majority of companies are SMEs, he reflected on the causes for the "trend towards small businesses". Either, he suggested, companies with few employees are best suited to the economic situation in Italy, or, companies are prevented from growing further due to excessive legal requirements that discourage growth and development.

Francesco Bellotti, Chairman of UNICE's activities for SMEs and Vice-President of Confindustria, the Italian Industrial and Employers' Organisation, shared the Minister's vision, which converges with UNICE's efforts to improve business conditions for SMEs in Europe. At a recent high-level conference for Euro-MPs held in Brussels, UNICE called upon decision-makers to *"make it simple"* for SMEs.

In reply, Minister Marzano said to the UNICE delegation *"Enterprises will remain small if this is the optimal size for them, but they must be able to grow if they want to"*. Too much red tape, he worried, could hamper SMEs in growing at their own speed. He expressed a commitment to abolish legal disincentives to growth. These promises were welcomed by UNICE entrepreneurs, who pointed out that the taxation framework often favours large companies, which can also afford to run back offices to deal with administrative and often bureaucratic obligations, while SMEs cannot.

The UNICE entrepreneurs also stressed the importance of SMEs for fostering innovation in the economy. In reply, Minister Marzano announced for July a new initiative aimed at relaunching the economy. He will propose to grant inventors from the public sector, such as universities and public research centres, the ownership of invention – and a significant percentage of royalties. This, he expects, will ensure more inventions to reach the market and ultimately boost productivity. UNICE welcomes the ability of universities and research institutes to collaborate with business in the commercialisation of new ideas.

**Note to the editor:**

UNICE is the official voice of more than 16 million small, medium and large companies active in Europe, employing over 106 million people. Active in European affairs since 1958, UNICE's members are 33 central industrial and employers federations from 26 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.

For more details on UNICE's initiatives for SMEs, please see: [www.unice.org](http://www.unice.org),

The conference for SMEs, entitled "Make it simple!" was held on 29 May, and a full report is available on UNICE's web site.