

14 March 2002

**EUROPEAN BUSINESS LEADERS MEET AZNAR TO PUSH FOR MARKET  
LIBERALISATION**

On the eve (today) of the "spring summit" in Barcelona, presidents of Europe's industrial and employers' organisations, united by UNICE, told EU President Aznar that Europe's economic recovery much depends on political will to liberalise markets when meeting with him. Under the wing of UNICE, European business has established a detailed analysis report of progress made in liberalising markets. UNICE's high-level delegation handed a copy of this report officially to EU President Aznar.

"Europe's competitiveness is too important for us to ignore the impact on business that results from delaying the Lisbon process. For example: Had the EU achieved the same rate of growth as the US over the last 10 years, its total GDP would have been roughly 17% higher in 2001 than it actually was. Time is running out. Business cannot wait any longer for 'the right time to take decisions'. That is why we decided to come to Barcelona personally and to demonstrate our support to EU President Aznar. We encouraged him this morning during our meeting not to let political compromises and national egoisms dilute the Lisbon process. If "Lisbon" is not revitalised in "Barcelona", the whole process risks a political death," said UNICE President Georges Jacobs, addressing President Aznar. "We need more market liberalisation. For example, we need energy for production to be available at competitive prices. That's why we urge member states to go ahead with liberalising energy market by 2003 (for electricity) and 2004 (for gas)."

"We welcomed the Lisbon declaration, but since then, the business community in Europe is disappointed about the lack of political action taken by member states of the European Union," President Jacobs said.

Uniting presidents and executive directors of Europe's current and future member states, UNICE organised a special meeting prior to the spring summit in Barcelona, to express the urgent need for reforms. "Making Barcelona a success is indeed our top priority," said Georges Jacobs. "We have concentrated all our efforts, together with our members, in analysing the so-called Lisbon process, and have pointed out 15 issues where action is needed. Member states are lagging behind the Lisbon targets.

UNICE's full analysis report is available on [www.unice.be](http://www.unice.be)

*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 34 central industrial and employers federations from 27 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.

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