

8 April 2002

EUROPEAN BUSINESS FEARS UNNECESSARY BARRIERS ON THE INTERNET

The European Parliament will be deciding on the future of a well known web tool called "cookies" during the final stages (second reading) of a lengthy legislative process concerning data protection in the electronic communications sector.

UNICE is fully aware of the importance of adequate privacy protection throughout the Internal Market, but fears that an indiscriminate ban of cookies, a tool which facilitates the use of web sites will shy off consumers and harm business.

Although the Council of Ministers recognises that cookies can be a "**legitimate and useful website tool**", European business warns that by making a general requirement for website operators to provide "prior" information about the use of cookies, this will create barriers and reduce the user-friendliness of websites: the risk is that Internet users will be confronted by multiple pop-up windows providing them with information "prior" to the sending of each cookie. Such a solution would make the Internet experience extremely cumbersome and create a disincentive for European citizen's to use the Internet. This is contrary to the European Commission's goal of "getting Europe on-line".

UNICE supports the principle of informing the consumer of the possibilities of personal data being processed and the principle of allowing users to reduce this processing. However, the principles in the Council of Ministers' Common Position would not add to making the Internet more accessible and user-friendly.

UNICE calls on the European Institutions to refrain from creating unnecessary barriers to the Internet and to seek to improve the Council of Ministers position which will provide a workable solution.

Note to the editor:

Cookies are short pieces of computer text generated by a web-server and stored in the user's computer to facilitate his/her movement between pages and visits of a website by, for example, removing the need to re-enter information already provided or selected by the consumer. In short, cookies serve to facilitate the use of the Internet and make web browsing a more 'user-friendly' experience.

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 further information, please contact:

David Coleman: +32(0) 237 65 56
Susanne v. Bechtolsheim +49 7000 2272927
Website : www.unice.org