

Brussels, 28 January 2003

UNICE MEETS PRIME MINISTER COSTAS SIMITIS

A UNICE delegation headed by the UNICE Secretary General Philippe de Buck and the President of the Federation of Greek industries and Vice-President of UNICE Ulysses Kyriacopoulos today met the President to the EU Council Costas Simitis. On behalf of the business leaders of 27 European countries, UNICE encouraged progress towards realisation of the Lisbon strategy. The document *Lisbon Strategy/status 2003, "Time is running out, action needed now"* was handed in to Costas Simitis. In addition, UNICE presented its work on the Convention, corporate governance, international trade as well as the recently adopted work programme 2003-2005 for the social dialogue.

UNICE presented its assessment and conclusions on the state of progress of the Lisbon strategy to the Greek Presidency in a letter in late December 2002. However, the meeting enabled a discussion on concrete examples of what can be achieved at the EU Spring Summit in March. UNICE confirmed that the Lisbon Strategy is the right route to enhance competitiveness and dynamism in Europe. However, the "implementation delivery gap" remains. Three years will have gone by in March 2003, without key measures to achieve the Lisbon goals being decided or implemented.

The lack of real action to pursue the Lisbon goals is critical in an economic environment with the European economy failing to break out of its lethargic state. Growth rates will remain low, at least throughout the first half of 2003. This is due to a high degree of uncertainty in the international economic climate. But Europe's problems are also due to the fact that our economy is unable to be its own growth motor. Whereas monetary policy has achieved its goal of maintaining price stability, governments have been lagging behind in implementing structural reforms in Member States. Since labour costs are much too high given the current slow growth in labour productivity, pursuing moderate wage policies in Member States is also necessary to redress the economy. Finally lower taxes and less red tape are necessary.

The President of the Federation of Greek Industries and Vice-President of UNICE, Mr Ulysses Kyriacopoulos: *"Europe has to undertake the following measures in order not to be outperformed by competitors at global level: remove excessive obstacles to the flexibility of the labour market with the participation of social partners, adapt educational and training systems to market needs, and promote entrepreneurship through a simplification of the regulatory environment. Furthermore, we support the introduction of a European day of Entrepreneurship."*

Philippe de Buck, Secretary General of UNICE: *"We have also brought to President Simitis the active contribution of UNICE to the Convention. A prosperous, competitive and social model of Europe has inspired the business community's input during the consultation phase that is now coming to an end"*.

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.