

6 February 2003

Business reaction to the report of the working group on social Europe in the Convention

Reacting to the recommendations in the report presented during the plenary session of the Convention today, the President of UNICE, Georges Jacobs recalled that: *“Economic and social progress can only go hand-in-hand. The text of the future constitutional Treaty must find the right balance between economic and social aspects. The promotion of competitiveness is as important as social protection or employment policy for the well being of Europe’s citizens.”*

Member States have a lot in common in terms of values and objectives. However, the best way to live up to these values and achieve these objectives varies. Social policy is, by nature, rooted in strong national specificities. Variety will be even greater in an enlarged Europe. It is a valuable asset to be preserved.

President Jacobs’ comments on the report’s conclusion’s can be summarised as follows:

- The two articles on values and objectives should be short, concise and avoid ambiguous terms such as “social market economy”.
- UNICE fully agrees that existing competences are adequate and that action at the EU level should focus on issues related to the functioning of the single market and areas with considerable cross-border impact.
- The current wording of article 16 on services of general interests conveys the right balance between economic and social goals. UNICE is not in favour of re-drafting it.
- Including a reference to the open method of coordination in the Treaty could be useful, provided that the flexibility of the method, which is applied differently depending on the policy concerned, is preserved.
- UNICE agrees that decisions by QMV should become the general rule. However, the four exceptions for areas subject to unanimity vote in article 137 of the Treaty are still justified, especially since the Nice Treaty opens a possibility for the Council to decide to pass to QMV for all those issues, except for social security.

Last but not least, UNICE welcomed the recognition of the specific role of the social partners and recalled the proposals it has made together with ETUC, CEEP and UEAPME in a joint contribution on the role of the social partners (attached).

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