

Brussels, 7 May 2003

Industry supports action plan to boost research efforts in Europe

Last week the Commission published a Communication with action lines intended to encourage public and private players in the EU to increase their research efforts. "Investing in research: an action plan for Europe" follows the Communication "More research for Europe – towards 3% of GDP" which sought to launch a broad stakeholder consultation in order to develop best practices to increase EU research investment from the current 1.9% to 3% of EU GDP as called for by the Barcelona European Council in 2002.

UNICE supports the 3% objective, especially actions to establish an environment which is more attractive for industry to invest in R&D in the EU. Higher and more effective R&D is an important element for innovation but what counts is the effectiveness of the whole value chain.

The Communication outlines a wide range of new actions at European level and in Member States which are mainly in line with UNICE's main recommendations that resulted from workshops organised jointly by UNICE and DG Research. UNICE welcomes in particular actions set out in the Communication to:

- develop a more coherent policy approach to R&D between Member States, as well as more coherence between R&D policy and other policies,
- refocus and increase public spending for supporting research and innovation,
- improve the range and effectiveness of financial and fiscal measures to encourage increased private investment in R&D,
- revise EU rules on state aid for R&D.

In its Communication the Commission calls for rapid adoption of a revised block exemption for SMEs which is a good signal in principle. UNICE however underlines that widening the scope of block exemption for state aid is of importance not only for SMEs but for industry as a whole.

There is now an urgent need for implementation if the Barcelona 3% objective is to be achieved by 2010. The Commission announces that it will closely monitor implementation of the action plan and progress towards the 3% objective, publishing a report each year in advance of the Spring Council. The proposed monitoring system is particularly important to make sure that public authorities:

- improve framework conditions for business research and innovation,
- increase the volume of actions to support R&D and innovation,
- improve the quality of the support instruments deployed.

Note to the Editor

UNICE represents 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 35 central industrial and employers federations from 28 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.