

Brussels, 22 January 2004

**IDENTITY, EFFICIENCY, GOVERNANCE
- UNICE MEETS IRISH PRESIDENCY -**

At the beginning of the Irish Presidency, UNICE President Jürgen Strube, Secretary General Philippe de Buck, and IBEC President Maurice Pratt, and Turlough O'Sullivan, IBEC Director General, met in Dublin Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, President of the European Council. Business expectations regarding competitiveness and better governance were on the agenda. The UNICE President also called on the Irish Presidency to come to grips with better regulation. With a view to the Spring Summit on economic reform on 25-26 March, Dr Jürgen Strube recalled the importance of the Lisbon strategy as the cornerstone of the European project.

The European Union is at a crossroads: in 2004, with all its important political events, the European Union will set the course for the next few years. The Irish Presidency is in a prime position to steer the European Union through the political currents of 2004.

IBEC President Maurice Pratt said: *"Europe is in danger of losing sight of what is really important. Competitiveness defines our welfare, and there is real concern among European business that the EU is now struggling not to be the least developed economy in the developed world."*

UNICE President Strube: *"2004 is a crucial year. The European Union currently lacks identity, efficiency and governance. The Irish Presidency has the opportunity to bring about a real commitment to issues of pan-European concern, above all European competitiveness!"*

The UNICE delegation presented to the Taoiseach a memorandum with key business demands for the coming months:

- **Enlargement:** to ease integration of the new members, European business is in favour of a moratorium concerning the implementation of new EU legislative measures which are not absolutely necessary for the internal market
- **EP elections:** the Irish Presidency should encourage the mobilisation of European citizens to make this year's elections genuine European elections and not 25 different national ones
- **IGC:** European business continues to press for an urgent agreement on the proposed constitution and update of the treaty's policy provisions
- **New Commission:** as almost half of the time until 2010 has passed, the new Commission must make a real commitment to the Lisbon strategy. A Competitiveness Commissioner with the rank of Commission Vice-President to deal with all competitiveness issues should be envisaged
- **Better regulation:** to ensure good governance, UNICE proposes the creation of an independent body assessing the business impact of EU regulation
- **Spring summit on economic reform:** UNICE expects a revitalisation of the Lisbon strategy with a strengthening of the special mandate of the Competitiveness Council

Dr Jürgen Strube: *"We have high expectations on the Irish Presidency. They have already shown their commitment to a competitive Europe in Ireland and we look forward to their work."*

Note to the editor:

UNICE represents more than 16 million small, medium and large companies active in Europe. 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.