

Brussels, 8 March 2004

**COMPETITIVENESS ACTION PLAN 2004:  
A GREAT DEAL OF HOMEWORK FOR EU COUNTRIES**

Half the time has already passed for making Europe the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world. European competitiveness needs action at national level. In its "Competitiveness Action Plan 2004", comprising contributions from national business organisations, UNICE urges policy-makers to deliver on three different levels: actions linked to the EU agenda, a real commitment to complete the internal market, and implementation at national level. At the Spring Summit on 25-26 March significant progress must be made in the areas of fostering entrepreneurship, sustainable development, REACH and the Community patent.

The UNICE study gives individual recommendations for action in seventeen European countries:

- **better regulation:** reduce existing regulation substantially and set up compulsory impact assessments for new legislative proposals. The real cost of legislation for business must be clear before political decision-making procedures are started.
- **public finance:** encourage social protection reform and decrease structural government deficits in view of meeting the challenge of an ageing population and unsustainable public expenditure levels.
- **innovation:** develop research policies focused on stimulating R&D and innovation, also in view of industry cooperation with knowledge institutions.
- **employment:** accelerate reform of labour-market regulation in order to introduce more flexibility, in order to increase the number and quality of jobs, and productivity at work.
- **internal market:** boost internal market efficiency through tackling the transposition deficit and timely realisation of trans-European networks but without further straining public budgets.

At a press conference today, UNICE asked the Competitiveness Council and the European Council for a commitment to European competitiveness and the Lisbon strategy. Policy-makers are urged to make significant progress on the following key issues:

- **Entrepreneurship:** act on the recently presented European Agenda for Entrepreneurship.
- **Kyoto:** prepare to revisit EU climate change policy for the case that the Kyoto Protocol is not ratified.
- **REACH:** carry out further impact assessment of the proposal.
- **Community patent:** reject the latest compromise and present new project responding to business needs.

Philippe de Buck, Secretary General of UNICE: *"Heeding the Lisbon agenda means providing European citizens with more jobs and prosperity and, as a consequence, improving public acceptance of the EU – which, ahead of enlargement and a possible new Constitution, it badly needs at the moment."*

The "Competitiveness Action plan 2004" also features a survey of 200 companies on the internal market. The results show that, ten years after the Internal Market came into existence, companies still encounter barriers that hinder free movement of goods and services.

The full version of the "Competitiveness Action plan 2004" is attached.

*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.*