

29 June 2004

**European Multi-stakeholder Forum on CSR
Plenary meeting 29 June 2004**

**Speaking Notes
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Businesses, large or small, play an important role in contributing to sustainable economic, environmental and social development in the societies in which they operate. The business contribution to sustainable development and the related CSR-debate have been subject to increased attention in recent years at local, national and international level, and also at European level.

UNICE has engaged in this debate at EU level, following publication of the Commission's Green Paper and Communication on CSR, because it felt it important to foster a better understanding of CSR. This has also been our main aim within the Forum.

The Forum now comes to an end. This is the occasion to look at what has been achieved throughout this twenty-month process and to evaluate it.

Looking at the process from an organisational and procedural point of view, the UNICE assessment is not very positive. The process has been unnecessarily complicated, complex and heavy, resulting in an almost unworkable amount of organisational and coordination implications, between stakeholders, between stakeholders and the European Commission, and between the members of the different constituencies.

The assessment of the methodology chosen, particularly for the Roundtables, is more positive and in our view has helped the process. The rapporteurs have played an important and positive role as facilitators.

Looking at it from a content-oriented point of view, it is fair to say that discussions within the Forum have not been easy, particularly because of

- the high complexity of the subject;
- very different understandings on some issues and diverging views, resulting in situations in which Forum participants seemed to speak no common language;
- very different expectations.

However, despite these difficulties, discussions within the Forum have triggered a learning process, which has enabled participants to benefit from dialogue and to explore a number of issues to the largest extent possible in this particular EU-level setting.

It is against this background that UNICE assesses the final Forum report which delivers the summary and conclusions of this learning process and complex debates. The final report is not perfect. But is a joint report and joint contribution to the CSR debate by the stakeholders that have participated in the Forum, and it builds on the common understanding that has been gained. As such this report constitutes an achievement and provides added-value to the CSR debate at EU-level in general on which all stakeholders should be able to build in the future.

The report responds to the double objective¹ set for the Forum:

- It provides a clearer understanding of CSR: of the concept by offering a base-line understanding between stakeholders and of what motivates and influences business, of obstacles and success factors for CSR, based on findings from case-studies and discussions.
- It also highlights a number of references for companies that can provide guidance in the development of CSR approaches, but confirms the need for approaches and tools that are adapted to companies' circumstances (their size, capacities, specific situation and operations, and expectations of stakeholders). It also emphasises the importance of stakeholder dialogue and communication/transparency policies, when it comes to enhancing the credibility and success of CSR practices.
- In addition, the report offers a number of recommendations to different players, which can usefully contribute to CSR development.

¹ The Forum was set up in 2002 with a double objective:

1) to improve knowledge on CSR by facilitating the exchange of experience and good practices;
2) to explore the appropriateness of establishing common guiding principles for CSR.

UNICE urges the Commission to take account of the Forum's final report and findings for its own Communication. It stresses however that public policies in support of CSR must respect the voluntary nature of CSR, support dynamism and the development of a competitive edge and should not be mixed up with other policies pursuing different objectives.

UNICE will publish the Forum report on its website as an important contribution to the CSR debate and, moreover, play its role in raising awareness and knowledge about CSR and in promoting the concept. Its member federations are already engaged in numerous activities at national level and will also play their role.

Finally, UNICE is looking forward to meeting again in two years' time to review progress in the areas of recommendations and more generally also look at trends, developments and innovations with regard to CSR.

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