

8 December 2004

**Competitiveness Day – 9 December 2004**  
**Introductory address by Dr Jürgen Strube**  
**10.00 - 10.10 hours**

***“European companies at the heart of a stronger Europe”***

I welcome all of you coming from the entire spectrum of the European business community but also from politics, media and trade unions. The range of interests represented should ensure that we have a lively and fruitful exchange of views on the key issue for business: competitiveness. I would also like to thank our sponsors for their generous contribution to organising this second Competitiveness Day.

Today's theme is "Play to win". As you saw in the introductory sequence, we have chosen to illustrate Europe's potential in global competition using images from this year's Olympic Games in Athens. European athletes have what it takes to win. The same is true of European businesses. Based on their own efforts, clearly, but also with the help of a culture that encourages success by not placing obstacles in their way. In many areas, European business people still feel that policy-makers have not quite understood that Gulliver needs to be freed, to release companies' potential.

I would like to say how heartening it is to see that entrepreneurs have found the time to demonstrate in force in Brussels today. I hope that the presence of so many creators of prosperity knowing and demanding that conditions in Europe can and must be improved will urge policy-makers to handle competitiveness as the key objective. The delivery gap between fine words of our political leaders and European reality needs to be closed.

In 2000 the European Council set the objective of making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. We are now almost at mid-term and progress towards that goal has been patchy at best. In particular, there has been a disconnect between policy statements at all levels and concrete implementation in the Member States, where most of the problem areas have to be addressed. There is universal agreement that more needs to be done, but a tendency nevertheless to do too little too late.

The second Competitiveness Day of UNICE takes place while new windows of opportunities are opening. The newly elected European Parliament has proved its strength,

its assertiveness, and its willingness to compromise. The new Commission is staking its future on implementing the Lisbon strategy: President Barroso and Vice-President Verheugen proclaim their commitment to the Lisbon Strategy convincingly and show the political will to tackle the challenges in front of us with priority.

We find ourselves in the European Parliament's Hemicycle, at the heart of European democracy, in the presence of a good number of MEPs and Commission representatives. Our task today is to show that companies are at the heart of a stronger Europe. Businesses produce the prosperity that underpins our societies. Economic growth and jobs are dependent on a healthy private sector. With the goal of helping European companies play to win, UNICE recently set up the Alliance for a Competitive European Industry together with eleven European associations representing industrial sectors. This alliance seeks to promote a healthy industrial base in Europe, as a solid foundation for research, development and innovation in both goods and services. Regarding services, it is one of our priorities to help creating an internal market for services as soon as possible. EU-policies must go with the grain of business in order to release companies' full potential.

In the chemical business where I come from the so-called C<sub>4</sub>-cut is the basis of one of our most important value chains of the industry. Important products like polymers, dispersions, solvents or fuel additives are made out of this mixture. During the last month I concluded that another political C<sub>4</sub>-cut could be the basis of a new value chain: For me "C<sub>4</sub>" stands for clarity in notions, commitment to common objectives, courage to decide, and cooperation for success.

And that is our message to all political decision-makers: As long as clarity, commitment, courage and cooperation are the basic rules of our relationship we do not fear for our success in making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. The power of positive thinking should propel us along our path to success.

We now have a slight change of programme. Mr. Borrell, President of the European Parliament, is due to address an important meeting this morning but has still found time to spend a few minutes with us. President Borrell, I am sorry you can't stay longer but thank you very much for making the effort to be present. You have the floor.

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