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FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES: TRANSLATE LISBON INTO REALITY!

“Prioritise the budget on competitiveness” has been the main message of UNICE Secretary General Philippe de Buck and UNICE General Adviser Jean-Paul Mingasson at today’s UNICE press conference. Policy-makers have to take this into account at the next Economic and Financial Affairs Council on 8 March 2005 and the Spring European Council, if the refocus of the Lisbon strategy on growth and jobs shall become a reality.

In the discussion regarding the **new financial framework for 2007-2013**, UNICE supports the Commission’s intention to triple the resources allocated to competitiveness (i.e. around €133 billion over the period 2007-2013), supporting primarily research and technological innovation, the trans-European networks, innovation policies and the lifelong learning programme.

The Commission proposal is a good basis for negotiations, and an agreement should therefore be reached by June 2005. Under the heading of competitiveness, the top priority should be to preserve at least the proposed increase (more than doubling) for European research and innovation policy. This means more specifically supporting the setting-up of a research agenda more supportive of the long-term needs of industry; the development of new cutting-edge technologies; the stimulation of “poles of excellence”; the improvement of management in the distribution of available public funds in the FP7 and the encouragement of Public-Private Partnerships.

In addition, the EU has to strengthen its forces also in the following areas:

- Trans-European Networks: clear added value at EU level but should foster private investment in Public-Private Partnerships and in particular in complex cross-border projects
- Competitiveness and innovation in the single market: UNICE asks for appropriate financing of the future Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) to be focused on innovative enterprises
- Education and training: with a new lifelong learning programme tailored to better respond to labour-market needs; it should encourage students to choose scientific paths at university and graduates to continue their careers in the scientific field

The proposed enhanced synergy of cohesion policy towards competitiveness is also welcomed. The cohesion policy should focus on actions supporting structural changes to increase regional competitiveness.

UNICE General Adviser Jean-Paul Mingasson: *“We all know negotiations on the financial perspectives 2007-2013 will be tough in the coming months, but any compromise should not be achieved at the expense of the competitiveness heading, and in particular of research and technological innovation. In the likely context of a very tight budget constraint, the question of the Common Agricultural expenditure will have to be addressed. The relative share of the CAP has to decrease significantly for the next financial perspectives to be supportive of the Lisbon Agenda.”*

UNICE Secretary General Philippe de Buck concluded: *“At the verge of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy, policy-makers face an important credibility test vis-à-vis both the EU fiscal and budgetary frameworks. Firstly, we expect policy-makers to end the debate on the revision of the SGP in restoring workability and confidence in this essential coordination mechanism. Secondly, a shift of priorities in the EU budget towards competitiveness is key to translate into reality the new impetus the next European Council must give to the growth and employment strategy.”*

Note to the editor:

UNICE is the voice of more than 20 million small, medium and large companies. Active in European affairs since 1958, UNICE’s members are 38 central industrial and employers federations from 32 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.