

25 January 2006

**MINISTER MARTIN BARTENSTEIN, PRESIDENT OF THE COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL
AND CO-PRESIDENT OF THE EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND
CONSUMERS AFFAIRS COUNCIL
MEETING WITH
UNICE PRESIDENT, ERNEST-ANTOINE SEILLIÈRE**

Services

9 March 2006 – Informal consultation on the Services Directive of European Social Partners by the Austrian Presidency.

The services directive must add value for the European market and notably for service providers and consumers. The directive must create new opportunities in terms of employment, economic growth, increased competition, wider choice and dynamism in the services market which does not yet really exist in Europe. It is estimated that a real internal market for services could create up to 600,000 more jobs.

UNICE, the Voice of Business in Europe, is ready to make all efforts possible but bearing in mind that it is not up to the European business to find solutions.

European Council – The Strategy for Growth and Jobs

23-24 March 2006

The European Commission adopted its Annual Progress Report on the Growth and Jobs Strategy on 25 January including the assessment of the 25 National Reform Programmes. UNICE believes that the Commission's report offers a good basis for policymakers throughout Europe to deliver on the Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

The four actions to be taken in partnership between EU and the national level at this year's Spring Summit are putting the right focus on Europe's most urgent needs for reform. But they must be perceived from the angle of how they can create more growth and jobs.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

On the SME policy field UNICE should point out that European SMEs are in need of a signal from the EU that the interests of entrepreneurs and SMEs are taken seriously. The Spring Summit is a "rendez-vous" not to be missed. UNICE urges the Austrian Presidency to ensure that the Summit adopts "meaningful" conclusions with concrete actions for Europe's entrepreneurs and SMEs: for example added pressure on Member States to sign up to the Home State Taxation scheme introduced by the Commission in early January (this has the potential to reduce compliance costs for SMEs operating cross-border) – reducing administrative burden on SMEs, etc.

Climate Change

The Environment Council is currently the main Council formation managing the climate issues. Bearing in mind the growing implications of this issue from the angle of: 1) EU competitiveness and 2) development of coherent EU strategies for environment and energy; it seems essential that EU climate initiatives are formally included on the agendas for meetings of Energy and Competitiveness Councils during the Austrian Presidency.

Energy

Concerns about higher electricity price in Europe

This increase is linked to a series of factors whose exact role has not yet been completely clarified at this stage. In any event, it is agreed that the following two factors play a role:

- a) the fact that there is still no genuine EU electricity market, but rather a juxtaposition of national markets. UNICE therefore expects the 8 June 2006 Energy Council to give a strong impetus for making good delays and smoothing out imperfections in implementation of the 2003 electricity directives.
- b) implementation of the EU directive on emissions trading. This directive obliges electricity producers to buy emission allowances on the market. There is a debate about how these purchases are incorporated in electricity selling prices. Many commentators believe that the current price-forming mechanisms need to be reviewed. UNICE believes that this issue should be analysed by the Commission during the Austrian Presidency. Any solution that emerges from these analyses should be implemented as rapidly as possible.
