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ROMANIAN AND BULGARIAN ACCESSION: A STEP FORWARD BASED ON MERITS, BUT IS THE EU PREPARED?

UNICE, the Confederation of European Business, is supportive of today's Commission assessments of Romania and Bulgaria and acknowledges the enormous progress that has been made in both countries. They should continue work on enforcement of their legal and economic reforms at the local and national levels.

Romania and Bulgaria already have strong economic links with the European Union: 72% (Romania) and 59% (Bulgaria) of all imports come from the European Union, whereas 71% (Romania) and 57% (Bulgaria) of all exports go to the 25 member states. However, key challenges for the successful accession of Romania and Bulgaria remain:

- Strengthening the rule of law
- Modernising customs and border procedures
- Ensuring the full application of EU product standards

Improving the rule of law and enforcing EU standards will be the most efficient tools to mitigate these issues and make doing business safer in both countries.

The respect of internal market issues – free movement of persons, goods, capitals, and services – is the cornerstone of a well functioning EU market. “Safeguard clauses” should only be used to address failures to respect the *acquis communautaire*. These should only be applied on a case-by-case basis and for short periods. UNICE, together with its member federations, will closely monitor any recourse to “safeguard clauses” after accession to ensure that they are lifted when the countries meet EU criteria.

Commenting on today's reports, UNICE President Ernest-Antoine Seillière said: *“Today's decision is a positive result for the great efforts Bulgaria and Romania have undertaken to meet the EU accession criteria. Enlargement to a European Union of 27 member states also poses a number of challenges for the EU regarding its institutional structure: a Union of almost 500 million inhabitants makes it more urgent to review its institutional decision-making procedure. Adequate solutions have to be found to give Europe the means to meet those challenges successfully. This will be positive for the new countries as well as for the EU itself.”*

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 39 central industrial and employers' federations from 33 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.

For further information, please contact: Maria Fernanda Fau +32(0)2 237.65.62

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