

8 June 2001

**GÖTEBORG: A CHANCE FOR PROGRESS**

UNICE's Council of Presidents, comprising business leaders from 33 member federations in 26 countries, met today in Stockholm. In the presence of Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, the Presidents set out the key issues for European business ahead of the Göteborg EU summit.

Highlighting concerns over Europe's competitiveness in an uncertain international economic framework, UNICE's Council of Presidents **calls on Member States to speed up the implementation of the structural reforms agreed at the Lisbon summit**. These are essential to strengthen long-term competitiveness, improve sustainability of public finances, and boost economic growth potential in Europe. A successful introduction of the euro in six months' time will underpin these efforts. The challenges ahead will define the shape of the EU to come.

1. **A successful enlargement of the European Union** will bring significant overall benefits to the EU and candidate countries alike in terms of economic growth and political stability. UNICE is a strong supporter of enlargement, and is concerned that this view is not shared by large parts of public opinion in the Member States and candidate countries. **"The time has come for political leaders to actively engage in the public debate, to show determination and political leadership, to move the process forward with realism, pragmatism and vision"**, said UNICE's President **Georges Jacobs**. "The Göteborg European Council should be a significant step in that direction".

2. **A sound sustainable development strategy** will be dependent on achieving the essential balance between the economic, social and environmental pillars, in order to make the greatest global progress in the long-term. **The Göteborg summit is crucial because it must ensure that this balance is actually achieved**. European companies have a major role to play in environmental progress, as innovators and investors, and UNICE's Council of Presidents asks governments to create an economic climate conducive to these initiatives, and to be aware of the risks to European competitiveness from certain policy measures, such as the Commission proposals on energy taxation. For sustainable development to become a global objective, future EU policy must be linked to international negotiations aimed at sharing tasks and obligations in a balanced way at world level.

3. **UNICE's Council of Presidents sounds the alarm regarding the prospects for a successful launch of a new WTO round**. President Jacobs stated that **"It is high time for all supporters of the WTO multilateral trade system to mobilise and work actively and with determination towards its improvement and strengthening**. The WTO is a system that has proved its worth and which many countries want to join to enjoy the benefits for economic development and employment". UNICE's Council of Presidents confirmed its priorities for a broad-based round, notably: development of a reference framework for international investment; further opening of service markets; simplification and harmonisation of commercial and customs procedures; and reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. It calls on all the players concerned, governmental and non-governmental, to engage positively in the work to be done.

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