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BUSINESS URGES EU GOVERNMENTS TO STICK WITH ECONOMIC PROMISES

Today, the Presidents of all industry federations in the fifteen EU member states are sending an open letter to the President of the European Council, Spanish head of government José María Aznar, urging and encouraging him to deliver results in the project to make Europe the world's most competitive economic region. This promise, given two years ago by EU leaders, is not being kept, according to UNICE, the umbrella organisation behind this open letter. Business leaders recall the urgency to take bolder steps in liberalising financial services, gas, energy, transport and telecom markets. "We are concerned that 10% of EU laws intended to open up markets have simply not been applied nationally. In the current economic situation, we urgently need more liberalisation and flexibility in order to encourage a spirit of entrepreneurship. It is high time that member states deliver on their promises made two years ago," comments Philippe de Buck, UNICE's Secretary General.

The fact that all Presidents of UNICE's EU members have signed this letter – an unprecedented step in UNICE's history of nearly 50 years of lobbying - demonstrates the urgency that business leaders attach to market liberalisation, innovation and entrepreneurship, infrastructures, financial services, dynamic labour markets and sustainable development – six points highlighted in the open letter to Mr Aznar. The letter is a first step by UNICE and its members in the run-up to the so-called "spring summit", taking place in Barcelona mid-March in order to evaluate the progress made since the ambitious goal set in Lisbon in 2000.

"We are worried that if no concrete commitments are made in Barcelona in a few weeks' time, the whole process will be put on hold. We have already been deeply disappointed to see one of the first, concrete steps being missed: adoption of a Community patent. We really expect more political will to overcome national interests for the benefit of all. Because when business is able to prosper, member states and EU citizens will be better off as a result, as more wealth is created," said Georges Jacobs, President of UNICE.

Note to the editor:

UNICE is the official voice of more than 16 million small, medium and large companies active in Europe, employing over 106 million people. Active in European affairs since 1958, UNICE's members are 34 central industrial and employers federations from 27 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.