

Brussels, 8 July 2004

**ENLARGEMENT – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESS!
UNICE DISCUSSES EUROPE’S CHALLENGES WITH NEW COMMISSIONERS**

In the framework of the UNICE-BOSMIP (Business Organisations as Single Market Integration Players) programme, leaders of UNICE member federations, under the chairmanship of UNICE President, Dr Jürgen Strube, met Commissioner Verheugen and eight Commissioners from the new Member States. UNICE and the Commissioners discussed how the enlarged Europe can be brought back onto the competitiveness track and how the EU should develop in the future.

The UNICE-BOSMIP programme, supported financially by the European Commission, aims at strengthening representative horizontal business federations in the new Member States and the candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe. It is based on a partnership between 17 UNICE member federations involving transfer of know-how and experience.

Leaders of UNICE member federations from 27 countries, Commissioner Verheugen and eight Commissioners from the new Member States P. Balasz, J. Borg, J. Figel, D. Grybauskaitė, S. Kallas, S. Kalniete, M. Kyprianou, and P. Telicka participated in today’s UNICE’s enlargement event. Ahead of the new legislature, they discussed two main themes. First, the European Union in a competitive world, what should be done to bring Europe back onto the competitiveness track and create growth, prosperity and jobs in Europe? Second, the European Union in the years ahead, how should Europe develop in the future? How should it strengthen its position and influence in the world? What financial perspectives for the period 2007-2013?

In his introduction, UNICE President Dr Strube underlined that enlargement has been the most important EU contribution in recent years to long-lasting stability in Europe. He also stated that if enlargement offers new growth opportunities for Europe and its trade partners, the situation in Europe continues to be serious:

- the engine of growth remains outside Europe (2-2.5% compared to 4.2% in the US);
- private consumption in the EU remains weak;
- relocations prompted partly by excessive regulatory and financial burdens in the EU are tending to increase;
- the state of public finances in several Member States continues to be worrying;
- strong divide remains between Europe’s aims and objectives and its citizens.

Participants called on Commissioners to release Europe’s potential and refrain from taking initiatives which would hinder EU competitiveness. Comparing the remaining time until 2010, the target date of the Lisbon strategy for making the EU the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world to a marathon, Dr Strube said: “*How can Europe succeed and reach its goal in time if it has weights on its legs. Let’s all work together on getting rid of those weights and making the EU run faster.*”

Note to the editor:

UNICE represents more than 16 million small, medium and large companies active in Europe. Active in European affairs since 1958, UNICE’s members are 36 central industrial and employers federations from 29 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.

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