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LISBON STRATEGY: “COMMIT AND DELIVER” BUSINESS LEADERS TELL HEADS OF STATE AHEAD OF THE SPRING SUMMIT

Ahead of the upcoming Spring Summit, EuroCommerce, UEAPME, UNICE and EUROCHAMBRES have expressed their dismay at the horrific attacks in Madrid and extend their deepest sympathy to all the victims and families. The European business organisations strongly support the intention of EU Heads of State to reinforce measures to combat all forms of terrorism in Europe.

Implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and the future EU Constitution are the two other key issues on which the European Council must deliver, first of all at the Summit and then back home. Almost halfway along the time path for the Lisbon strategy, Europe is still nowhere close to reaching the objective of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. The EU will not reach the Lisbon objectives unless EU countries make significant progress in implementing national reforms.

Urgent action at both national and EU level is required: EuroCommerce, UEAPME, UNICE and EUROCHAMBRES call on Member States to:

- Reduce existing regulation while aiming at better regulation, with a compulsory business impact assessment for new legislative proposals
- Engage in thorough reforms of social protection systems and decrease structural government deficits in view of meeting the challenge of an ageing population and ensuring fiscal sustainability
- Stimulate R&D and innovation in cooperation with business and knowledge institutions and improve the general, fiscal and financial conditions for innovative investment
- Promote entrepreneurship by lowering the tax level for companies
- Develop strategies and concrete action plans on entrepreneurship for all sectors and introduce the teaching of entrepreneurial skills in schools. Promote lifelong learning systems to satisfy companies' needs and to upgrade employees' competences
- Accelerate reform of national labour market regulations to introduce more flexibility and productivity at work, the ultimate goal being to create more and better jobs by 2010. Special focus has to be placed on the follow-up to the recommendations of the Employment Task Force
- Close the gap in implementing the internal market in order to boost efficiency.

At the EU level, both the European Commission and the (Competitiveness) Council must organise themselves better to make sure that regulations are thoroughly evaluated against the need for competitiveness.

Finally, EuroCommerce, UEAPME, UNICE and EUROCHAMBRES urge the Summit to work towards reaching an agreement on the EU Constitution in order to provide Europeans with an institutional framework which will allow an enlarged Europe to function effectively.

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EuroCommerce

Created in 1993, EuroCommerce represents with more than 100 members from 28 countries the retail, wholesale, international trade and related service sectors the closest link between industry and the 450 millions consumers across the whole of Europe. It is a dynamic and labour intensive sector, which plays a significant role in the European economy. It generates 13% of the EU's GDP. The sector comprises 4.7 million companies of which 95 are small enterprises, so vital to Europe's economic and employment prospects. It is also a major employer providing jobs to 22.5 million people drawn from all sections of society, one of the few increasing employment.

UEAPME

UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing the interests, at European level, of crafts, trades and SMEs in the European Union and countries applying for accession to the European Union. Its 72 member organisations consist of national cross-sectoral federations, European branch federations and other associate members, which support the SME family. Across the whole of Europe, UEAPME represents over 10 million enterprises with nearly 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

UNICE

UNICE is the official voice of more than 16 million small, medium and large companies 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.

EUROCHAMBRES

EUROCHAMBRES is the Brussels-based Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The association represents national associations of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in 41 different countries - and a European network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers with over 17 million member enterprises, and 120 million employees across Europe. EUROCHAMBRES is the sole European body that serves the interests of every sector and every size of European business - due to the multi-sectoral membership of Chambers - and the only one so close to business, as a result of the Chambers' regional focus. EUROCHAMBRES works hand in hand with all European Institutions in promoting a positive, competitive, pro-business environment.