



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

SMEs deeply concerned by Parliament Committee's vote on maternity leave

UEAPME worried by longer leave, higher payment levels and increased dismissal rights, calls on EP plenary to vote against

Brussels, 23 February 2010 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, was left deeply concerned by today's vote on the revised maternity leave directive at the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. According to UEAPME, the Committee approved a text riddled with burdensome amendments, including further increasing the total length of maternity leave to 20 weeks without any evidence of the benefits on the mother's health and introducing significant changes to payment levels and dismissal rights. Such a decision will not only increase costs and burdens for small employers, but also put young women at a strong disadvantage in the labour market, stressed UEAPME, calling for a broader approach on work-life balance combining other forms of leave, affordable child-care facilities and flexible working arrangements. UEAPME therefore urged the European Parliament to revert to a more sensible text in the upcoming plenary vote.

Social Affairs and Employment Policy Director **Liliane Volozinskis** offered the following comments:

"The main aim of the current directive is to protect the health of pregnant women and of those who recently gave birth. We clearly support this goal, but we are afraid that today's vote will do little in this respect and will shift the focus away from the health and safety dimension. First of all, there is no evidence that extending maternity leave from 14 to 20 weeks as voted by the Parliament's Committee will significantly increase the protection of the health and safety of recent mothers. What is clear, on the other hand, is that such a move would create additional costs in many Member States for employers and for public administrations. This is not the best way forward, especially under the current economic crisis."

"Secondly, maternity leave payment systems are very diverse across Europe. Imposing a fully paid maternity leave on all Member States, as suggested today by the Parliament's Committee, is a decision that could have a strong impact on social protection systems and that must be left to the national level. Unfortunately, the one-size-fits-all approach of today's vote goes exactly in the opposite direction."

"Finally, the issue of a better work-life balance for female workers cannot be solved by increasing maternity leave alone. What is needed is a broader approach, taking into account all forms of leave and other essential elements that require more attention, notably the presence of childcare facilities and flexible work arrangements. Europe needs a higher female employment rate for economic and demographic reasons and should set incentives for women to be more present on the labour market while having more children. The Parliament Committee's vote will not help in reaching this target."

"Today's vote is a worrying signal for European SMEs and may actually turn out to be counterproductive for young female workers. That is why the Parliament should revert to a more realistic and workable text when voting in plenary. Failure to do so would send the wrong message to European businesses and put the Parliament out of touch with reality."

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 81 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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