



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Parliament’s changes to working time rules threaten business and jobs

- **Parliament decision on ‘on call’ time should be reversed**
- **Reference period should be set at 12 months – not left to Member States**
- **Individual opt-out must be retained**

Brussels, 11 May 2005 The decision by the European Parliament to make EU working time rules more rigid today (Wednesday) will damage businesses and cost jobs in Europe, according to UEAPME, the European small and medium business organisation.

“Small firms rely on flexible working arrangements to adapt to an ever-changing business environment and remain competitive. Introducing unnecessary restrictions on working time rules will damage small businesses across the EU and impose pressures on their workforces,” said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General.

“UEAPME is calling on the European Council to overturn the Parliament’s amendments and retain the opt-out, as well as reverting to the initial Commission proposal on ‘on call’ time. If we are serious about creating jobs and growth in the EU, we cannot make our labour market more inflexible,” continued Mr Müller.

It is unrealistic to consider all ‘on call’ time as working time, as the European Parliament has proposed. This would place a major burden on small firms, which rely on flexible working arrangements to survive. The Council must revert to the Commission proposal, by which only active ‘on call’ time would be considered working time.

The reference period, over which working time is calculated, should be set at 12 months across the EU. Most small firms operate on a year-to-year basis in the area of administration. Annualising working time is a practical reflection of the reality of running a business. UEAPME is calling on the Council to set a 12-month reference period in the Directive.

UEAPME opposes the decision to end the opt-out. The provision to opt-out of the Working Time Directive enables small businesses and their staff to adapt to the specific needs in different sectors and seasonal demands. The individual opt-out and the collective opt-out should be provided if there is to be a level-playing field for all firms.

“Flexible labour market conditions are crucial if the EU is to remain competitive in an increasingly global economy. The Council must recognise this and ensure the Working Time Directive does not threaten businesses and jobs in the EU,” concluded Mr Müller.

***** End *****

EDITORS’ NOTE: UEAPME is the employer’s organisation representing the interests of crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 78 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across the whole of Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with nearly 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

Further information: Liliane Volozinskis, Director of Social Affairs & Employment Policy, +32 2 230 7599
Richard More O’Ferrall, Press and Communications Officer
Tel: +32 2 230 7599/ GSM: +32 477 44 38 42
Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com Web: www.ueapme.com/pressroom