



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Lack of agreement on Working Time Directive is a huge missed opportunity

- **UEAPME suggests separating “on-call time” and “opt-outs” issues**

Brussels, 7 November 2006. UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation, deeply regretted the lack of consensus on the Working Time Directive at the extraordinary Employment, Social policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting held in Brussels today (Tuesday). According to UEAPME, the rejection of the compromise text tabled by the Finnish Presidency of the EU will trigger uncertainty and generate a flow of legal cases at the European Court of Justice.

“Today’s contrasting views on phasing out ‘opt-outs’ resulted in a blocking minority hampering a text which would have provided reasonable solutions”, said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General. “It is particularly disappointing that the lack of agreement ruled out a widely accepted clarification on the definition of ‘on-call’ working time, on which the Finnish Presidency had drafted a reasonable compromise excluding the ‘inactive’ part”, he continued.

Small businesses also deplored the absence of a 12-months reference period for calculating the average working time, which would have been in line with the real practice of SMEs operating more and more frequently on the basis of an advanced annual working time plan in order to adapt to seasonal productivity fluctuations.

“The current situation concerning working time in Europe is unbearable both economically and politically, with 23 out of 25 Member States being in breach of the current laws. Swift actions and workable rules are needed, especially as far as the definition of ‘on-call’ working time is concerned. If no agreement can be reached on the Directive as a whole, it may be wise to deal with ‘on-call’ working time separately, in order to stop legal uncertainties and burdensome costs for SMEs”, concluded Mr Müller.

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EDITORS’ NOTE: UEAPME is the employer’s organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 81 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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