



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Committee vote on Working Time puts a dent on Parliament's reputation

Brussels, 5 November 2008 – UEAPME, the European craft and employers' organisation, was left strongly disappointed by today's vote at the European Parliament's Employment Committee on the Working Time Directive. MEPs swept away the difficult and reasonable compromise reached at the Council on the dossier, by re-opening discussions and demanding fundamental wording changes on the issues of opt-out and on the definition of "on-call" working time. UEAPME condemned such a short-sighted and irresponsible behaviour, which will plunge Europe back into legal uncertainty and damage both employers and employees if confirmed in December. UEAPME therefore called on the European Parliament's Plenary to reject today's amended directive, for the sake of closing a long-lasting impasse and especially in the light of the deteriorating economic situation in Europe.

"Today's vote puts a serious dent on the European Parliament's reputation as a reliable and trustworthy institutional partner", said Secretary General **Andrea Benassi**. *"By suggesting the gradual elimination of opt-outs and a stricter, EU-wide definition of on-call time, the Parliament is de facto killing the Council compromise and leaving Member States with no room for manoeuvre, not to mention protracting the legal chaos on working time we have all witnessed in the past years. This kind of short-sighted attitude is exactly what Europe should avoid, not pursue at this stage",* he continued.

UEAPME is particularly worried about the issue of "on-call" time, explained Mr Benassi. The Council's political agreement on this aspect confirmed the introduction of the concept of an "inactive" part of on-call time, which is not deemed to be working time. UEAPME supports this decision, which is in line with Europe's economic reality, especially as far as SMEs operating in the services sector such as private security, maintenance and breakdown assistance are concerned. UEAPME therefore condemned the unrealistic stance taken by the Parliament today, by which all time spent on call should be considered as working time.

Moreover, today's decision will have the side effect to endanger decisions on the temporary work directive and to force Member States to revert to the old rules on working time, which have clearly proven their ineffectiveness in the past. Especially after the famous Jaeger case at the European Court of Justice, Member States are forced to opt out en masse from the existing directive, notably in the public sector. This will leave both employers and employees worse off, stressed Mr Benassi, wondering whether MEPs fully considered the consequences of their vote or whether they were driven more by the desire to be re-elected for another term.

"It took eight Presidencies of the European Union and endless Council meetings to find a compromise on the Working Time Directive. The Parliament cannot afford the luxury to tear it into pieces and to transform such a delicate issue into pure electoral propaganda", concluded Mr Benassi.

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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 88 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Liliane Volozinskis, Director for Social Affairs and Employment Policy, Tel. +32 (0)2 230 7599, Email: l.volozinskis@ueapme.com
Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer, Tel. +32 (0)496 520 329, Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com