

11 May 2005

UNICE DEPLORES EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DECISION ON WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE

Reacting to the report on the revision of the working time directive adopted today by the European Parliament, UNICE deplores the changes made. Reducing flexibility in working time is inconsistent with the objectives of enhancing growths and jobs in Europe.

"In its resolution on the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Parliament stressed that sustainable growth and employment are Europe's most pressing goals. Yet, the report contains proposals which put the fulfilment of these goals in jeopardy" stated Philippe de Buck, Secretary General of UNICE. "Flexibility in working time is essential for the competitiveness of companies, in particular for SMEs. But it is also in the interest of workers. When the European Commission and the Council look at the revised directive, they should not underestimate the consequences of further restricting this flexibility" concluded Philippe de Buck.

UNICE now calls on the Commission and the Council to take on board the following concerns for business:

- Reference period to calculate maximum weekly working time: the revised directive should establish a twelve-month reference period as a general rule. This is now a dominant pattern and essential to deal with fluctuating demand. There should also be a possibility to extend it beyond twelve months by collective agreement as this helps to preserve jobs. By contrast, the European Parliament maintains the four-month general rule and restricts significantly the possibility to extend it up to twelve months by way of derogation.
- Inactive parts of on-call time: the EP report establishes that the inactive part of on-call time should be considered as working time. This will raise costs for many sectors, not only in health care. As proposed by the Commission, the revised directive should foresee that the inactive part of on-call time is not regarded as working time.
- Opt-out: the opt-out of the 48 hours working week is essential for companies. Therefore, UNICE strongly opposes the gradual removal of the opt-out as proposed by the EP. The revised directive should explicitly mention that the opt-out is available by two independent means: either by collective agreements or by individual consent as opposed to a combination of both.

Note to the editor:

UNICE is the voice of more than 20 million small, medium and large companies. Active in European affairs since 1958, UNICE's members are 38 central industrial and employers federations from 32 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe.

For further information, please contact:

Maria Fernanda Fau:
Website:

+32(0)2 237.65.62
www.unice.org