

Broad Coalition requests European Commission to be more realistic on Working Time proposals

Press Release - 17 March 2005

Participants:

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC),

European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU),

Members of European Parliament, Alejandro CERCAS, Stephen Hughes.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU), and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), today shared a platform with the European Parliament Rapporteur on Working Time, **Mr Alejandro Cercas MEP** (PES). The message behind this show of solidarity was '**EU working Time proposals - a realistic approach**'.

EPSU General Secretary, **Ms. Carola Fischbach-Pyttel** gave an outline of the Commission's proposals to reconfigure the Working Time Directive. Calling the text "surreal", she slammed the Commission for putting at risk the health and safety protection of European workers, and potentially for the first time in EU history, taking a retrograde step on social policy. **Ms. Fischbach-Pyttel also stated " the proposals are simply not workable. Our objections are practical not ideological"**. The Commission wishes to introduce a new category of "inactive time in the workplace", but has made no suggestion on how this could practically be monitored.

Mr. Cercas MEP, who is responsible for drafting the European Parliament response to the Commission text, stated that he had formulated a draft, which created the

right balance between flexibility and health and safety protection.

The Parliament draft calls for a phasing-out of the “individual opt-out”, recognition of the European Court of Justice ruling on on-call time in the workplace being considered as working time, and provides the flexibility by extending the period of calculating the average working week (maximum 48 hours) to 12 months (through collective bargaining).

Significantly, Mr. Cercas expressed full confidence that the Parliament would accept his proposal.

Ms. Catelene Passchier (ETUC), stated that it was essential that the opt-out provision, which had been intended only as a temporary measure, be abolished. **She also emphasised the crucial role of collective bargaining as the mechanism through which balance could be found.** On on-call duty she stated that it was a scandal that the European Court of Justice could be so casually ignored by the Commission.

Mr. Stephen Hughes MEP (PES) outlined the particular situation in the UK, citing the fact that one-third of those forced to sign the opt-out in the UK had had no choice, and that long working hours have no scientific link to productivity. Indeed Finland, with one of the lowest working hour averages in the EU, has one of the highest productivity indexes of any Member State.

The Cercas report will be further debated on 30 March and is due to be voted upon in the Employment and Social Affairs Committee on 20 April. (Plenary vote is scheduled for 12/13 May)

EPSU will be making the issue of working time the main focus of their participation in the ETUC demonstration in Brussels, this Saturday, 19 March. **(note to photo editors** - there will be a photo opportunity, with 200 trade unionists wearing Salvador Dali clock masks to illustrate the “EU working time proposals are surreal” theme. This will take place at Gare de Midi at 13h30 - further info contact Jan Willem Goudriaan +32 475 25 69 12).

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The European Federation of Public Services Unions is the largest federation affiliated to the ETUC and represents 8 million workers providing services to the public in health and social care, local, regional and central government, and utilities in energy, water and waste.



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