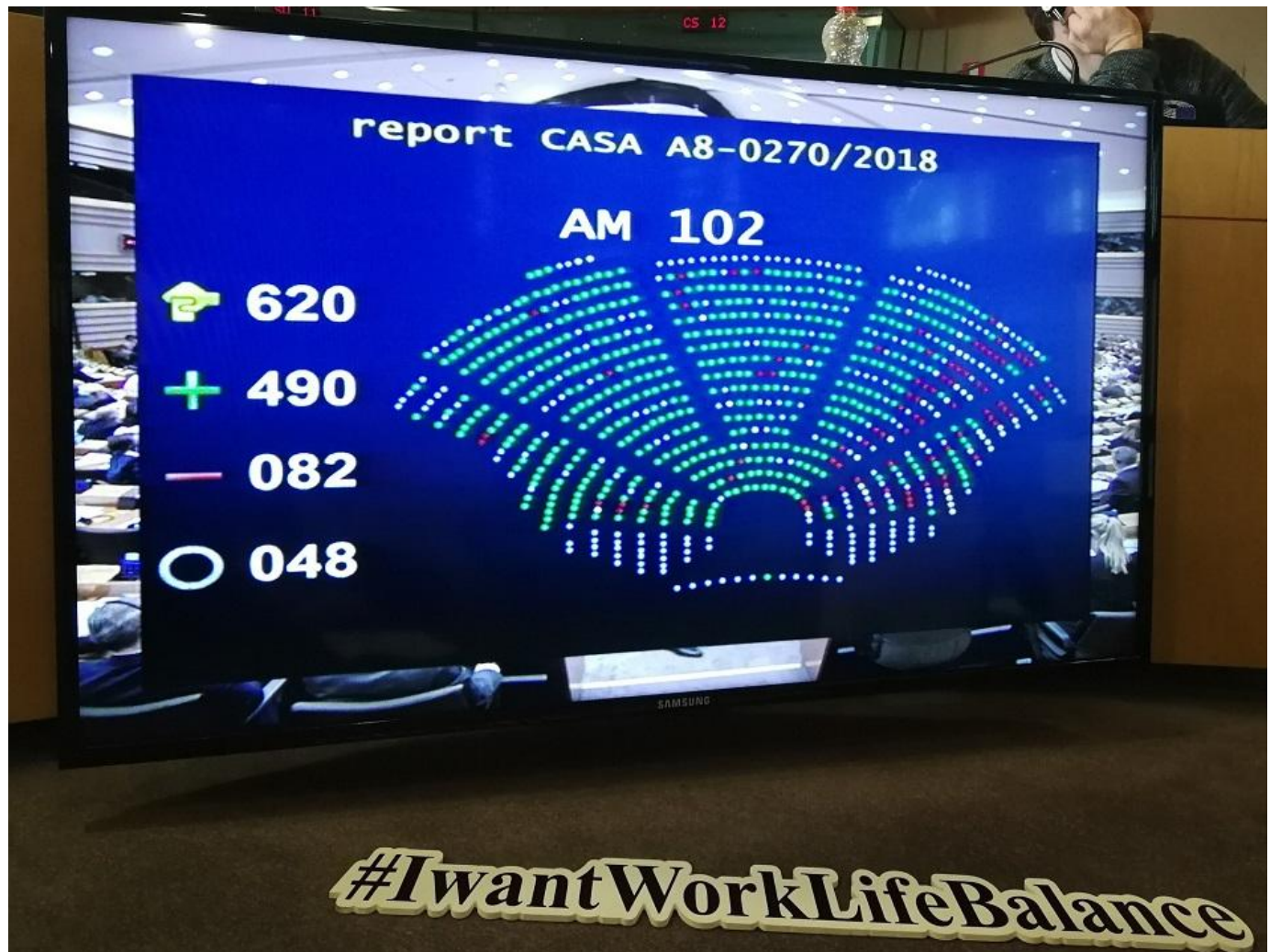


With overwhelming majority the European Parliament approves the Work Life Balance Directive



(4 April 2019) EPSU welcomes the final vote of the European Parliament, introducing European paternity leave, European carers' leave and consolidating parental leave rights for parents and carers in Europe. The directive was adopted with an overwhelming majority (490 in favour, 82 against, 48 abstentions).

With this directive, all fathers (or equivalent second parents) in Europe have 10 days paid paternity leave and all those having a relative in need of care or assistance will have 5 days carers' leave per year. Moreover, the directive introduce

the right to request flexible working arrangements for parents and carers. The text does not introduce a definition of flexible working arrangements but provides with some examples, such as: reduction of working hours, change in the time and place of work, change in the working patterns. This point is crucial because it could allow a high number of young mothers or carers - who are mostly women - to temporarily change their work schedule for the periods where they face care responsibilities. This will help reduce and prevent a share of involuntary part-time and the risk of having to drop out from the labour market altogether to provide care, especially for older women workers - the so-called “sandwich generation”.

This text also consolidate existing rights and raises standards for parental leave. It increases the length of the period of parental leave that cannot be transferred between parents (from 1 to 2 months) and it introduce the obligation of payment for parental leave.

However, the final text as adopted has also some gaps and missed opportunities. The text as initial proposed by the European Commission and as amended by the European Parliament included a level of payment equivalent to what the worker would receive during its sick leave for the three leave schemes (paternity, parental and carers). A strong opposition by a number of Member States lowered this standard and in the final text only paternity leave will be compensated at this level. Only 2 months of parental leave will have be compensated “adequately”, but the level will have to be set at national level. No compensation is mandatory for carers’ leave.

Research widely shows that compensation is key for the uptake of leaves, especially for lower income families and men. Blocking the decision on the level of payment at European level, a number of Member States impeded a further step forward towards a more social, just and equal Europe.

Member States will now have three years to transpose the directive into national law and two more years to include the obligation of payment for a period of the parental leave. With this vote, a first phase is concluded and a new one opens, where trade unions at national level will have a great role to play. EPSU will continue to monitor closely the next phase via its affiliates and calls on Unions to engage with their governments to ensure that the best is achieved during negotiations at national level.

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