



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

Brussels, 10 December 2008
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Letter to all Members of the European Parliament

Re: Revision of the Working Time Directive

“Priority to workers’ rights, not longer working hours”

Dear Sir, Madam,

You will be called upon next week in the plenary session of the Parliament to give your judgement on the proposals for the revision of the Working Time Directive, adopted by the Council in June.

Your vote will decide whether or not the EU is to embark on a legislative exercise that for the first time in its history will **not** lead to social progress and ‘*the improvement of living and working conditions*’ that is one of its aims expressed in the Treaties, but to a **regression** in the social policy field.

That would be a completely wrong message for the Parliament to give, at a time when an increasing number of European citizens are coming to regard the EU as a threat rather than a promoter of their economic and social security.

In this period of economic crisis, and with the European elections on our doorstep, it is vital to give a clear signal to citizens and workers around Europe that the EU is not just a free market putting big business and bankers first, but that it is capable of providing balanced and forward-looking solutions to the many challenges ahead, and can deliver robust social policies to accompany economic and demographic change.

The Working Time Directive is a **key element of Social Europe**.

It is a flexible instrument, setting a floor of protection beyond which no competition between companies and Member States is allowed at the expense of workers’ health and safety. At a time of rising unemployment, it just makes no sense to advocate working hours without limits, putting pressure on less workers working more rather than more workers working less. A 21-st century working time policy should focus on the conditions for longer working lives and reconciliation of work and private life to allow people to raise families and ‘actively’ grow old, rather than advocating longer working days and weeks for those already in jobs which will jeopardize their health and safety as well as that of third parties dependent on them such as patients.

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On **16 December**, trade union representatives from across Europe will demonstrate in Strasbourg, to show our determination to stand up for workers' rights in this period of crisis, and defend the basic principles of the Working Time Directive, under the slogan:

“Priority to workers rights, not longer working hours”.

Our demands are clear and well known:

- an end to the opt-out
- recognition of all on-call time in the workplace as working time
- safeguarding the special role of collective bargaining in the organisation of working time: no annualisation without proper safeguards
- rights for workers to adapt working hours to their needs: reconciliation of work and family life
- protection against long and unhealthy hours for all workers at all job-levels, including higher and managerial staff

In the Annex, you will find a note with the **key amendments** that we want you to support on the above mentioned issues. They represent a reasonable compromise to accommodate the concerns of the majority in the Parliament, allowing for flexibility while safeguarding the rights of workers. We draw your attention especially to amendment 15 on the *conditions* for annualisation, which – in addition to the opt-out and on-call work - is of key importance to trade unions and workers around Europe.

We ask you,

- *to vote next week, not for a perfect Working Time Directive, but in favour of preserving its basic principles, and to prevent the revision of the Working Time Directive ending in the first-ever regression in the history of the EU's social policy;*
- *to ensure an absolute majority for all the key amendments in the Cercas report, and not 'pick and choose' the ones you may like best, because the package of measures that it contains offers a fair deal to enterprises and workers across the European Union.*

We are convinced that a strong European Parliament cannot and must not be ignored.

Workers and citizens around Europe count on you!

We thank you in advance for your support.

See you next week in Strasbourg!

Yours sincerely,



John Monks
General Secretary