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Onderwerp: Protection against long and irregular working hours must continue to be main goal of Working Time Directive

**PROTECTION AGAINST LONG AND
IRREGULAR WORKING HOURS MUST
CONTINUE TO BE MAIN GOAL OF
WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE**

24 March 2010



**European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC]
Confédération européenne des syndicats [CES]**

Long and irregular hours, unilaterally imposed on workers, are unhealthy and outmoded forms of work organization. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is expecting proposals from the European Commission that stimulate modern, sustainable and negotiated solutions, taking into account the needs of businesses and workers in a balanced way.

This was ETUC's message in 2004, when it was first consulted on the revision of the Working Time Directive (WTD). This is again ETUC's message, in a first response to the Commission's communication, adopted today, with which it is starting a new round of consultations on the revision of the WTD.

According to John Monks, ETUC General Secretary "*there is a clear link between long and irregular working hours and increased work-related health problems. Although the world of work has changed, this evidence has not changed since the first legislation on working time, nor since we last discussed the revision of the working time directive. Protection of the health and safety of workers must therefore remain the primary goal of any review of the working time directive. This is of crucial importance for all workers, but in particular where workers in the performance of their jobs can affect the lives of third parties, for instance in healthcare professions or transport.*"

The ETUC criticizes in particular that the European Commission has allowed the erosion of the existing Working Time Directive. In stark contrast to the way the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in other areas has been taken up, the Commission has refused to implement the consistent ECJ rulings about on-call work, and has failed to take Member States to task.

"We have many case studies demonstrating the capacity of social partners at national and sectoral level to develop and agree innovative practices of organizing working time. But we need clear and unambiguous European minimum standards on working time and an end to the opt-out from the Working Time Directive to provide a solid basis for negotiated solutions," says Catelene Passchier, ETUC Confederal Secretary. *"We also have to better define the win-win potential for workers and employers in designing intelligent solutions for the organization of working time. Investing in healthy and sustainable working time patterns may imply short term costs, but not investing in this might come at a much higher price for economies and societies. A number of sectors in the economy will face dramatic staff shortages in the years to come. Improving work - life balance is one important factor to contribute to job satisfaction and enhanced productivity; it is not only good for women and men with care responsibilities, but also allows workers to actively age and stay longer in work."*

The ETUC and its member organisations will thoroughly examine and discuss the Communication of the Commission, but expect a further input from the Commission as regards the current implementation of the WTD in order to properly judge the need for revision. European Social Partners contributed in recent years to the Commission's Report on the State of Implementation of the WTD and this Implementation Report has been sitting in the Commission's filing cabinets since 2008. *"We are demanding from*

Commissioner Andor that this report will be made available to the Social Partners immediately", said Catelene Passchier.

The ETUC exists to speak with a single voice, on behalf of the common interests of workers, at European level. Founded in 1973, it now represents 82 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 12 industry-based federations.

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