

WATCH SOLIDAR's ANNUAL MESSAGE

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

THE EUROPE WE WANT! EP SCRAPS OPT-OUT ON WORKING HOURS

In a voting session which was foreseen to be very close, the European Parliament voted on 17 December in favor of amendment 16 to the Council common position on the working time directive with 421 votes to 273, and 11 abstentions. This marks an end to the opt-out from the 48 working hour limit within a 3 year period.

MEP Stephen Hughes, Member of the UK Labour party delegation and of the EP's Employment Committee, commented "*The British opt-out's time is up. British citizens should be allowed to enjoy the civilized standards of their fellow Europeans in terms of working hours.*" Will it therefore become impossible to work more than 48 hours per week? No. In fact the 48 hour maximum is calculated as an average over a full year, and not week by week. So for example, seasonal workers can work the hours they need to work to collect the harvest and then recuperate this time during the year.

Despite the fact that a majority of Labour MEPs voted against their Prime Minister in this week's vote, it is expected that UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown will not back down on the opt-out issue. The issue will now be addressed by a conciliation committee in early 2009. In the meanwhile, we can go on holiday with the idea that Europe cares about the health and safety of its citizens.

[See the results of voting on Wednesday 17 | Read the European Parliament Amendments to the Council Common Position on Working Time](#)

INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS' DAY - A HUMAN-RIGHTS BASED APPROACH TOWARDS UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

On the occasion of International Migrants' Day and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, four European networks of NGOs, amongst them SOLIDAR, released a joint statement urging MEPs and EU Member States to follow a human rights-based approach to taking forward the proposed Directive providing for sanctions against employers of irregular third country nationals. EU decision makers should show their commitment to human rights for all, including irregular migrant workers.

The signatories, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), the European Women's Lobby (EWL), the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and SOLIDAR, believe a rights-based approach should underpin any measures towards undocumented workers and the irregular labour market. Against this backdrop, the proposed directive contains some positive aspects towards undocumented workers, which if the directive is to be adopted, must be retained. The directive will also have a number of unintended effects that run counter to the EU's values and specific policies in the migration, integration and employment fields.

The Migrant Workers Convention (MWC) is the principal United Nations convention that protects the rights of migrant workers and their families. But only 39 governments in the world have ratified it. No country in the Global North has ratified. [Join the campaign for the universal ratification of the Convention | Read the joint Statement by ENAR, EWL, PICUM and SOLIDAR](#)

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN SOCIAL SERVICES MARKETS - ENCOURAGING THE USE OF SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In mid-March the Third Sector European Network (TSEN), Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and SOLIDAR joined forces and organised a comparative seminar in London focusing on practices of commissioning personal social services from non-governmental organisations across Europe. SOLIDAR members from the United Kingdom (currently implementing a National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning) and six other countries sketched out both the framework conditions for and experiences with the usage of public procurement in different sectors, used mostly in the fields of labour market integration, professional training, and long-term care. [Read more... | TSEN/CSV/SOLIDAR Conference Report](#)

BROAD SUPPORT FROM CIVIL SOCIETY NEEDED FOR EY 2011 ON VOLUNTEERING

In order to make volunteering the European Year in 2011, a coalition has been formed, spearheaded by the European Volunteer Center (CEV) and bringing in other Social Platform members including SOLIDAR, with British member Community Service Volunteers (CSV). In mid-July the EP adopted a Written Declaration on declaring 2011 the European Year of Volunteering. And in mid-November Commissioner Spidla, in a meeting organised by alliance partners and attended by Conny Reuter, pledged his support to the campaign underlining the crucial value of volunteering in social policies. [Read more...](#)

COMPROMISE ON THE LISBON TREATY

At the European Summit which ended last Saturday, 12 December, one of the main three issues discussed

was a way out of the current deadlock on the Lisbon Treaty. A total of 25 Member States have now ratified the Treaty, with the Czech Parliament due to take a decision on 3 February. In the run-up to the European Council, the Irish government signaled its willingness to obtain "legally binding guarantees" from all other governments that the Lisbon Treaty would not affect Ireland's sovereignty in certain areas, as a precondition for calling a second referendum in 2009.

The final compromise, set out in the Presidency Conclusions, includes several elements: the key demand of the Irish government - that every Member State retains its 'own' European Commissioner - has been met. As regards the other "legally binding guarantees", Ireland will get them on three points, namely taxation, neutrality, and family-related and 'ethical' issues. The Ministers were, however, not in agreement on the fourth "opting out clause" that the Irish government had raised, dealing with workers' rights (with the UK having negotiated its own opt-out clause on the social chapter). The most probable scenario is that "legally binding guarantees" on the three points mentioned above will be incorporated into a special Protocol for Ireland and signed together with the Accession Treaty with Croatia in 2010.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

SOLIDAR WELCOMES COUNCIL ADOPTION OF RAPID RESPONSE FOOD FACILITY, REITERATES CONCERN ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION

After the European Parliament delivered its opinion on 4 December, the EU Council of Ministers, on Tuesday 16 December, adopted, without debate, a regulation setting up a rapid response facility to soaring food prices in developing countries from 2008 to 2010. The Community has set aside ?1 billion for this purpose, under financing arrangements and a timetable for payments negotiated between the European Parliament and the Council.

Whilst SOLIDAR welcomes the fact that this funding was finally found five months after the food crisis started affecting people in developing countries, we wish to draw attention to the fact that whilst the food facility will contribute to solve some short-term needs by providing agriculture inputs and strengthening safety nets, this is only a band-aid solution. A new food crisis will be imminent unless Europe and other rich countries address the structural problems that fueled the food crisis including trade rules, the lack of agriculture investment, biofuels policies which encourage the use of land for export crop production instead of local needs, and food commodity speculation allowed under the lax financial markets regulation. It is by ensuring policy coherence for development that the 1 billion people who have been pushed into hunger by the food price crisis will be able to feed themselves.

CIVIL SOCIETY LETTER TO EP RAPPORTEURS ON INTERIM ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

A number of civil society organisations have sent a letter to the European Parliament rapporteurs on the Interim Economic Partnership Agreements (IEPAs) currently being negotiated between the EU and ACP countries. The letter recommends that the ratification be withheld until ACP parliaments have ratified the documents and until there is clarity about the final outcome of EPA negotiations. The letter notes that many ACP governments have stated publicly that the interim agreements were only initialled following insurmountable pressure from the European Commission. However, there remain numerous contentious issues in all texts that require re-negotiation before the IEPAs are signed. As early as 13 December 2007, the ACP Council of Ministers called for their revision. Similarly, African Union trade and finance ministers supported this demand at their Conference in Addis Ababa in April 2008.

While the European Commission has always stated that the interim agreements could not be revised, it has also repeatedly said that contentious issues could be revisited in the ongoing negotiations for regional EPAs. It would be unwise to lock-in commitments which are irrevocable and whose development impacts are unknown, when in many areas under negotiation, there is either controversial evidence or a lack of evidence supporting assumptions on their development impacts. SOLIDAR urges MEPs to see their reports as an opportunity to strengthen the calls for development friendly trade regimes and improved cooperation and relations between the EU and the ACP countries, in full respect of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement principles of ownership, differentiated treatment for different development levels and ACP countries institutional capacities and needs.

EU ENLARGEMENT - WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

The Olof Palme International Center (OPIC) organised, in cooperation with SOLIDAR, a conference on EU Enlargement for 45 partner organisations from the Western Balkans between 15-17 December 2008 in Kolacinc, Montenegro. During the conference representatives from the European Commission, academics, Serbian EU Integration Office and project partners spoke on the various aspects of European Enlargement and the impact for civil society in the region.

The participants worked in sub-groups to develop ideas and suggestions for SOLIDAR and the OPIC that will

be summarised in a briefing note. Based on the EC Communication "Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective", participants split into four workshops to debate their perspectives on economic and social development, democratisation and good governance, human rights and anti-discrimination and civil society engagement on Monday. While on Tuesday the sub-groups discussed the role of civil society in the Western Balkans regarding the enlargement process. One of the most important conclusions was the suggestion for the European Commission to support civil society networks between Old Member States, New Member States and Future Member States, in order to strengthen capacity building, technical assistance and knowledge transfer in the Enlargement process. The complete briefing note will be distributed in January 2009, for more information contact [Maurice](#).

EDUCATION

Hearing and Green Paper consultation on Migration and Education

SOLIDAR contributed to a public hearing jointly organised on 18 December 2008 by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) around the issues "Access, equity and social mixity in education, vocational training and life-long learning: What place for the populations with a migrant background in Europe?". SOLIDAR presented the main elements of its contribution to the consultation on the Green Paper "Migration and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities for EU Education Systems", endorsed by the European Commission at the beginning of July as part of the package of legislative and non-legislative initiatives linked to the Renewed Social Agenda.

SOLIDAR's contribution builds on a position defining education as a fundamental human right which has the potential to empower people to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Ensuring equal opportunities to access formal and informal education for all members of society is therefore crucial. The contribution highlights educational disadvantages many migrant children face. SOLIDAR calls for better linking debates and policies on education and training to promote social inclusion and social cohesion and in this context to give special attention to migrant children. [Read more](#).

MEMBERS NEWS

The SOLIDAR **Members' Area** on the website was launched this week! This space provides us with a fantastic tool which could improve the flow of information between the Secretariat and members and also between members, keeping everyone up to date with the latest activities. In order for this area to be used to its full potential, we will need you to explore it, use it and provide us with information to feed it with. We therefore encourage you to visit this space frequently and share information on your activities and projects in different fields of work.

All staff members working with SOLIDAR should have received a password. If ever you did not, please send a mail to Abigail.gountry@solidar.org

This week, you can register for the ICC and Middle East meetings; read documents of interest in the Social Affairs Committee 'Topics' page; and find out the latest internal news.

ISCOS is pleased to present the publication of its photographic book "[In Pakistan](#)" (version available in Italian & English). ISCOS has been working in Pakistan for the last 10 years in partnership with the Pakistani Workers Federation and different local authorities and civil society organizations. ISCOS would like to illustrate the last 10 years of work in Pakistan and the difficulties, pressures and violence of any kind that the population has been facing, through the publication of a photo book which testifies the gross violations of fundamental rights and in particular violations of workers' rights and the commitment of hundreds development operators and organisations that have supported the work of ISCOS in Pakistan. For more information please contact valeria.patrano@iscos-cisl.org

Read the **Legacoopbund** [article](#) on the agreement signed with the commune of Bolzano on social criteria in public procurement.

Following the French government's announcement to cut funding for associations, SOLIDAR's **French members** are the leading members of a [campaign](#) to make sure that these cuts do not happen.

Read **Solidarité Laïque**'s [newsletter](#)

Read **ASB Germany**'s [press release](#) about starting projects in Honduras

Please note that the SOLIDAR offices will be closed for two weeks, from the 22 December and reopening on the 5 January 2009! Happy holidays from the whole SOLIDAR team

	13	SOLIDAR Middle East Working Group meeting, Brussels
	14	SOLIDAR International Cooperation Committee meeting, Brussels
	27-1	World Social Forum, Belem, Brazil

		Feb	
	5	SOLIDAR Social Affairs Committee, Brussels	
	2-3	<p>Global Progressive Forum event, Brussels</p> <p>SOLIDAR is a European network of 47 NGOs and labour movement organisations. SOLIDAR promotes equality, solidarity and social justice in the fields of social affairs, international cooperation and education. SOLIDAR's Weekly Round Up provides you with the latest information and news from the SOLIDAR Network.</p> <p>If you have any comments or wish to have further information on any of the articles featured in the Weekly Round Up, please do not hesitate to contact <u>SOLIDAR's Communications Officer</u></p>	
		<u>www.solidar.org</u>	