



HEADLINES

EU / Social Affairs: Working Time Directive discussed in Committee

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs was due to discuss the amendments to Alejandro Cercas' (Socialist, Spain) report on the amendment of the Working Time directive on 31 March. However, the tabled amendments had not yet been translated into all official languages preventing full a debate taking place. Instead a more general discussion on the topic was held in its place.

Mr. Cercas started the discussion by stating that he believes a political agreement, which will ensure the security and health of workers, as well as flexibility for business, is possible. He has studied the first 130 amendments (180 have been tabled) and has already devised 6 compromise amendments relating to these. The debate was then opened to Committee members. The main topics that dominated the discussion were: the distinction between on-call time in the workplace and on-call time out of the workplace; the extension of the reference period from 4 to 12 months; and the opt-out.

Derek Roland Clark (IND/DEM, UK) argued in favour of the opt-out for both groups and individuals. He said the UK would support the proposal as long as the opt-out was retained and raised the issue of "autonomous workers", a category that exists in other member-states and exempts workers from the 48 hour week. Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE, UK) also argued in favour of the opt-out. In addition, she claimed that on-call time in the workplace should be classed as "work", whilst on-call time out of the workplace should be classed as "rest". She also said that the 4 month reference period should be maintained but with the possibility of extending it to 12 months.

The Socialist group, PES, has stated that it will support moves to end the opt-out by 2010. British Labour MEPs are expected to vote with their PES colleagues although UK Prime Minister Tony Blair has been adamant that the opt-out should be maintained.

The Amendments will now be discussed in full, on an amendment by amendment basis, on 19 April, with the vote taking place in Committee on 20 April.

Cercas' draft report:

[http://www2.europarl.eu.int/registre/commissions/empl/projet_rapport/2005/353651/EMPL_PR\(2005\)353651_EN.pdf](http://www2.europarl.eu.int/registre/commissions/empl/projet_rapport/2005/353651/EMPL_PR(2005)353651_EN.pdf)

EU / Services Directive: Rapporteur to replace "country of origin" with rules of "mutual recognition"

The rapporteur for the Services directive, Evelyne Gebhardt (Socialist, Germany) has said she would like to replace the "country of origin" principle with harmonisation and mutual recognition. She would also like to shift the focus of the directive to commercial services only and not those of general interest. Ms. Gebhardt will present a number of amendments and proposals at the meeting of the Internal Market and Consumer Affairs Committee to be held on 19 April. It is still not certain when her draft report will be completed.

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Ms. Gebhardt has highlighted a six-point plan for amending the services directive, including the need to protect public services, ensure existing social regulations (posting of workers etc) are not harmed, protect consumers by ensuring a high quality of services and replace the country of origin principle with harmonisation and mutual recognition. MEPs are currently discussing the proposal article by article in a cross-party working group. The group also includes representatives of the Luxembourg and forthcoming UK Presidency. The issue is also due to be discussed in the Competitiveness Council on 6/7 June 2005.

More information on Services in the Internal Market:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/services/services/

EU / Research: EU budget doubled

On 7 April the EU is expected to announce plans to double its research budget to €70bn in an effort to bolster growth and competitiveness and match the USA and Japan's spending on innovation. Under the plan the EU will give details of 10 themes on which research will be based. These are thought to include, health, nano-science, energy, information technology and space. The plans will be accompanied by the creation of an autonomous European Research Council made up of scientists, to promote excellence and help small teams of researchers get smoother access to the proposed €10bn of grants available each year.

The Commission will also outline efforts to deliver results, simplifying applications for grants, improve career prospects for researchers, enhance collaboration with countries outside the EU and boost the role of SMEs. It will also push for more public-private collaboration. The plans also involve the creation of "poles of excellence", which means the development of expertise in a particular subject that will attract researchers and money from the EU and beyond. The Commission estimates that this increase in funding will lead to a 0.96% rise in economic growth by 2030 and nearly 1 million more jobs.

More information: <http://www.cordis.lu/era/fp7.htm>

IN BRIEF

EU / Internet: .eu to be launched in early 2006

The European internet extension .eu will be launched in early 2006. The extension will be available only to businesses and individuals with a European dimension, distinguishing it from .com which has been freely distributed. The EURid website plans to publish a list of offices authorised to register names at the .eu extension in May-June this year. It is expected that there will be at least 1 million registrations in the first year.

More

information:

http://europa.eu.int/information_society/topics/ecom/all_about/todays_framework/public_resources/names_addresses/eu_creation/background/index_en.htm

EU / Innovation: New policy and trends report

DG Enterprise and Industry published the latest edition of the annual policy synthesis report of the TrendChart initiative, "Innovation Policy in Europe 2004" on 6 April. The report provides an overview of innovation challenges and policy trends in the 25 EU member-states, eight Associate and Accession countries and three economic zones. It also highlights the key innovation policy challenges in the EU and provides examples of good policy responses.

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Access *the* report:
http://www.trendchart.org/annualreports/report2004/Innovation_policy_europe_2004.pdf

EU / Manufacturing: Report on SME position

The report “Competence Building in SMEs: Practices and Methods for Learning and Capacity Building” was published on 23 March by the Spanish research consultancy Ikei in collaboration with four EU research institutions. The report has tried to gain an insight on the position of European manufacturing SMEs towards knowledge and learning as a competitive factor. The research also analysed the attitudes, benefits and barriers that manufacturing SMEs identify for engaging themselves in competence development strategies.

See the report: <http://www.ikei.es/pdf/Final%20European%20Report.pdf>

EU / UNICE: Seillière new chief

The European employers organisation UNICE has named Ernest-Antoine Seillière as its new head, succeeding Jürgen Strube, after an unopposed election took place on 22 March. The current head of the Federation of French Industries (Medef) and Chief Executive of Wendel Investment, Seillière is a prominent figure in French politics. His tenure will begin on 1 July and will last 2 years.

For more information: <http://www.unice.org/>

CONSULTATIONS

- **EU regulation on origin marking (“made in”)**

The Commission is examining the possibility of developing an EC regulation on origin marking (“made in...”) with regard to some imported industrial products. This regulation would impose a compulsory mark indicating the name of the country of origin (“made in Country X”) for certain products when imported in the EC. You are invited – as an organisation or as an individual - to give your opinion on an EC regulation on origin marking.

Closes 30 April 2005

Further information: <http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/forms/dispatch?form=401>

- **Aviation and climate change**

The European Commission has launched an internet consultation on reducing the climate change impact of aviations. There are questionnaires for both individual citizens & organisations.

Closes 6 May 2005

Further information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/climat/aviation_en.htm

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important Dates

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7-9 April	Informal Meeting of Labour & Employment Ministers, Luxembourg
11-14 April	European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg
12 April	Economic & Financial Affairs Council
14 April	Justice & Home Affairs Council
18 April	Competitiveness Council
25-26 April	General Affairs & External Relations Council
27-24 April	European Parliament Mini-Plenary Session, Brussels
9-12 May	European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg
23 May	General Affairs & External Relations Council
23-24 May	Education, Youth & Culture Council
25-26 May	European Parliament Mini-Plenary Session, Brussels

Other SME related Events

13-15 April	International Co-operation to Seize innovation Opportunities for SMEs, Barcelona, Spain - Organised by INSME Further information: www.annualmeeting2005.insme.org
28 April	Working breakfast with Commissioner Verheugen Brussels, Belgium - Organised by SME Union Further information: http://www.sme-union.org/
11-13 May	International Training Program on Intellectual Property and Management of Innovation in SMEs - Geneva, Switzerland - Organised by WIPO & INSME - Further information: http://www.wipo.int/sme/en/activities/meetings/forthcoming_events/index.htm
12-13 May	6 th International Conference on Corporate Governance Nuffield Hall, Regents Park, London Further information: http://www.wcfcg.net/iccg/iccg.htm
19-20 May	e-Learning Conference “Towards a Learning Society?” - Brussels, Belgium Organised by DG Enterprise - Pre-registration open until 14 March Further information & to register: http://www.elearningconference.org
26-27 May	European Conference on Innovation and e-Business - Brussels, Belgium Organised by DG Enterprise - Further information: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/innovation/e-business_en.htm#practical_information
29-31 May	12th Annual Conference on the role of Banks, Financial and Economics Institutions in the promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises Amman, Jordan – Organised by the Arab Academy for Banking and Financial Sciences (AABFS) - For further information email: conferences@aabfs.org
31 May – 3 June	Green Week Conference 2005 – “Get to Grips with Climate Change” Brussels, Belgium - Organised by DG Environment For further information & to register to participate: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/greenweek/index_en.htm

