



Brussels, 8 October 2004

<p>ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME AND CEEP SIGN AGREEMENT ON WORK-RELATED STRESS</p>

Today, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP signed a framework agreement on work-related stress which is a concern for both employers and workers. The agreement was then presented to the European Commission. This agreement, concluded after nine months of negotiations, is to be implemented by the members of ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, and CEEP, rather than by European legislation.

Stress is a complex phenomenon: although it is not a disease, it may cause ill-health. It can potentially affect any workplace and any worker. However, in practice, not all work places and not all workers are affected.

The agreement focuses on work-related stress only and aims at increasing the understanding of employers and workers of work-related stress and proposes a method for identifying problems and dealing with them.

The agreement contains a commitment of the members of ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP to implement it in accordance with the practices specific to management and labour in the Member States.

“Stress is a concern for both employers and workers. Approximately 28% of European Union workers report work-related stress each year. The agreement we signed today aims at addressing these problems in order to improve well-being of workers and increase companies’ efficiency” said ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP.

A copy of the full text of the agreement is enclosed

Background

The negotiations on work-related stress between ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP were envisaged in the workprogramme of the EU social dialogue 2003-2005. Subsequently, an official consultation of the social partners was launched by the European Commission on the issue of stress.

According to article 138 of the EU Treaty, the Commission has to consult the European social partners before submitting proposals in the social policy field. On the occasion of such consultations, the social partners can then decide to deal with the subject under consideration through negotiations at EU level. According to article 139 of the EU Treaty, to implement an agreement concluded at European level, the social partners can:

- either ask the Commission to transmit their agreement to the Council, who then turns it into EU legislation,*
- or rely on their members to implement it in accordance with the procedures and practices specific to the social partners in the Member States.*

The four framework agreements concluded so far by the European interprofessional social partners prior to this agreement concerned respectively parental leave, part-time work, fixed term contracts and telework. The first three were implemented by a Council Directive.

After telework, work-related stress will be the second issue leading to an agreement to be implemented by the members of ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP.

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