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**WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE:
EUROPEAN COMMISSION FAILS TO IMPROVE WORKING TIME
FLEXIBILITY**

Reacting to publication of the European Commission proposal for a revision of the working time directive, UNICE recalled that, in Europe, employees work on average approximately 160 hours less a year than in the USA and 230 hours less than in Japan. This gap in working time is not matched by higher productivity.

"European policy-makers should avoid any move towards cutting working time further or decreasing working time flexibility. Flexibility of working time is crucial for companies' competitiveness and also in the interests of workers" stated Secretary General Philippe de Buck.

UNICE is in favour of a revised working time directive which would:

- average the reference period for calculating weekly working time over 12 months as a general rule, with a possibility to extend it beyond 12 months by collective agreement;
- explicitly make provision for opt-outs by means of collective agreements in addition to retaining the possibility of individual opt-outs;
- modify the definition of working time in the following way: "working time means any period during which the worker is working, at the employer's disposal and carrying out his activity or duties, excluding inactive periods during on-call duty and similar situations, in accordance with national laws and/or practice";
- extend the reference period for the weekly rest period from 7 to 14 days.

"Unfortunately, the Commission proposal falls short of meeting our requirements. Moreover, the text is unnecessarily complicated and includes bureaucratic provisions for record-keeping which will hit SMEs in particular". If the European Commission seriously wants to achieve the Lisbon goals, it should have gone further in the revision of the working time directive" concluded Philippe de Buck.

UNICE is now studying the European Commission's proposal in detail and will convey its comments to the Council and the European Parliament.

Note to the editor:

UNICE is the official voice of more than 20 million small, medium and large companies. Active in European affairs since 1958, UNICE's members are 36 central industrial and employers federations from 30 countries, working together to achieve growth and competitiveness in Europe