



*“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”*

## **SMEs deeply worried by Parliament’s vote on maternity leave**

***UEAPME concerned by leave extension to 20 fully paid weeks, calls on Council to revert to a more reasonable proposal***

Brussels, 20 October 2010 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, was left deeply worried by today’s vote on the revised maternity leave directive at the European Parliament. MEPs confirmed the extreme requests made by the rapporteur, setting the minimum leave period to 20 fully paid weeks, despite clear warnings that this would dramatically increase costs for employers and public finances. Today’s vote also risks putting young women at a strong disadvantage in the labour market, stressed UEAPME, urging the European Council to revert to a more sustainable proposal in its upcoming debates.

Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** offered the following comments:

*“Extending the minimum leave period to 20 fully paid weeks all over Europe will create additional costs in many Member States for public budgets and for employers, be it directly or indirectly. Despite our repeated calls, the Parliament turned a deaf ear to the warning of SMEs. This is very worrying especially for small employers, all the more in the present economic climate. Unfortunately, today’s vote shows once again that many MEPs are out of touch with the business reality.”*

*“The main aim of the current directive is to protect the health of pregnant women and of those who recently gave birth. We clearly support this goal, but we are afraid that today’s vote will do little in this respect and will shift the focus away from the health and safety dimension. There is no clear evidence that extending maternity leave from 14 to 20 weeks as voted by the Parliament’s plenary will significantly increase the protection of the health and safety of recent mothers.”*

*“Increasing maternity leave risks damaging not only public finances and SMEs’ budgets but also putting a dent on young women’s chances of finding employment, due to the additional costs and burdens for employers willing to hire women of childbearing age. Moreover, the issue of a better work-life balance for female workers cannot be solved by increasing maternity leave. Childcare facilities and flexible work arrangements are crucial and should also be part of the solution.”*

*“European small employers should not be weighed down with more burdens and costs, and the same is true to a very large extent for national public finances. We hope that the European Council will realise what is at stake, reject the requests made by the Parliament and revert to a more reasonable solution. The ball is now in Member States’ court.”*

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**EDITORS’ NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 85 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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