

## Tisková zpráva

### Press Release

### Communiqué de presse

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## **Negotiations with Parliament do not lead to greater employee protection**

**The final round of talks between EU Member States, represented by the Czech Presidency, and the European Parliament, which took place on Monday 27 April, did not lead to an agreement on greater protection of employees.**

Despite five years of painstaking negotiations on the revision of the Working Time Directive, which often went on until the small hours, the current legislation will stay in force.

“The result of the talks was undoubtedly influenced by the approaching elections to the European Parliament. At this time, the MEPs were not willing to accept a deal that would, however, improve the employees’ situation, and, at the same time, lead to a more flexible labour market. This is what Europe needs at the time of the economic downturn,” said the Czech deputy prime minister and minister of labour and social affairs Petr Nečas, who lead the negotiations with the deputies in the name of Member States.

The proposal for the revision of the directive, unacceptable for the MEPs, would clearly improve the current state of affairs. For example, in those Member States that use the so-called opt-out clause, the current legislation allows working for up to 78 hours per week. The Council has offered to decrease the current maximum weekly working time limit to 60-65 hours, but the Parliament de facto refused to accept this.

The opt-out clause, an exception from the maximum working time limit, which is enshrined in the existing 1993 directive, is used by 15 of 27 EU Member States. For them, it is an important tool for solving difficulties in sectors involving regular standby duty (e.g. healthcare or fire service). Despite that, the Parliament wanted to abolish it. „The Parliament gave priority to ideology over political and economic reality,” Nečas said.

The MEPs’ inflexibility, the minister said, will make the opt-out clause a rule rather than an exception. After the failure of negotiations on the revision of the directive, the number

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of Member States using the opt-out will increase in the near future. They will use it to solve a lack of employees and a difficult situation in sectors with regular standby duty. "The bigger the number of countries using the opt-out, the more difficult it will be to get rid of this exception in the future," Nečas said.

The Czech EU Presidency has since January spared no effort in order to reach a compromise with the EP. In the name of Member States, it offered the MEPs a large number of concessions. It organised a very unusual three-round conciliation process as well as a series of trialogues, but the EP still refused to move from its position. "If the Parliament really wanted to improve protection of employees, it should have accepted the Council's proposals," Nečas said.

The last chance for agreement was a balanced compromise proposal, presented by the European Commission in the course of the last round of conciliation talks late on Monday. The Czech Presidency was, in the name of Member States, willing to negotiate further on the basis of this proposal. However, the Parliament refused negotiations following a vote in its delegation.

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