

Tisková zpráva

Press Release

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Negotiations with the European Parliament on working time will continue

Last night, the EU Member States led by the Czech EU Presidency met for the first time with the Members of the European Parliament at the session of the Conciliation Committee.

The Conciliation Committee is trying to reach a compromise concerning new EU rules on working time. After difficult negotiations, both sides have agreed to meet again, probably on 1 April.

The Czech Presidency adopted a very active approach to the negotiations, providing the MEPs with several new options to deal with controversial issues. The Presidency aims at improving the overall situation of workers in the whole of the EU. "Adopting the directive is our joint responsibility", noted Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Petr Nečas. "Not adopting the draft would bring victory to no one. It would be regarded as a joint failure of both the EU Council and the European Parliament", he added.

During the preparatory talks it became obvious that the European Parliament considers the abolition of the opt-out clause, i.e. an exception from the maximum weekly working hours, as issue number one. Deputy Prime Minister Petr Nečas, who was representing the EU-27 at the preparatory talks, however pointed to the fact that a balanced text of the new directive on working time must treat all issues.

The proposal for a new working time directive, which has been discussed within the EU since 2003, will improve the overall situation of workers compared to the current state. The Czech Presidency strives hard to reach an agreement with the European Parliament. It tabled the proposal as soon as on 24 January at the informal meeting of Social Affairs Ministers in Luhačovice. This was followed by three informal meetings with MEPs.

The opt-out to the maximum working week is currently being used by 15 out of the 27 Member States. It mostly serves to solve difficulties related to professions which involve regular standby duty (e.g. in healthcare or fire service) and allows for flexible work arrangements according to the wish and needs of workers. The Member States' position towards the new directive maintains the opt-out, but also strengthens the protection of workers.

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