
European Works Councils
Revised Directive
16 December 2008

TUC welcomes better rights for workers in Euro-national companies

The TUC has welcomed the decision of the European Parliament to endorse the latest draft of the recast European Works Councils Directive but criticised the British Government for dragging its feet over the measure. European Works Councils give workers a voice on decision-making in companies operating in several European countries.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said:

“This is an important step forward for European workers, and especially important as the European economy enters recession. Now more than ever, workers need a voice at work, and must be consulted about redundancies, restructurings and closures. This decision will make sure that unions have a better chance to protect their members when companies are adapting to the new economic circumstances.”

The recast Directive will provide better rights to training for members of European Works Councils (EWCs) – especially making clear that the employer should provide paid time off; a clearer and expanded definition of rights to information and consultation; and rights for workers to get help from their unions in the establishment of EWCs. These improvements were secured through an agreement between the European Trade Union Confederation and BusinessEurope.

And as a result of interventions by Members of the European Parliament, the recast Directive will also see improvements in the scope of the issues EWCs must be consulted on (so that all decisions made at European level are covered, not just those affecting more than one country); the removal of the threshold of 50 employees before an EWC can be set up; and a commitment to stronger legal sanctions for employers who fail to consult.

The improvements, which will come into force once translated into national legislation, still need the approval of the European Council of Ministers, meeting next week, but the text of the recast Directive that was adopted by the Parliament had already been informally agreed with the Council, and approved by COREPER, the body which brings together the Ambassadors of all the Member States.

But the TUC expressed disappointment that the UK, alone among Member States, expressed reservations at COREPER last week, claiming that until the UK was convinced unions and employers' organisations had endorsed the new deal it could not support the revisions, and also expressing disappointment that the European Parliament had made amendments.

Mr Barber said:

"It is deeply disappointing that, once again, the British Government is out of step with the rest of Europe over such a simple issue – giving British workers the chance to have a say over what is happening to the company they work for. Thankfully, they will not be able to prevent this sensible measure from becoming law."