

Withdrawal of EU maternity directive may cause 'significant negative social consequences'

Written by Henri Malosse on 15 July 2014 in News
News

New parliament must engage in 'constructive dialogue' to ensure the adoption of maternity leave directive, says Henri Malosse.



In a step which poses a threat to social stability in Europe, the commission, at the request of some MEPs and the council, is going to present during the plenary session of the European parliament in Strasbourg, the foundations of its plan to withdraw the revised EU directive regarding maternity leave.

The proposed maternity leave directive, which received the backing of a large majority of the European parliament in its first reading on 20 October 2010, has not since been able to go through the process of adoption, since some member states through the council have systematically tried to block it.

The proposed directive provides a number of highly important measures including 20 weeks fully paid

maternity leave, strengthened measures to protect women from dismissal on return and two weeks fully paid paternity leave, in an attempt to lay down the specifics of years long discussions and efforts from rights groups and civil society for a legal framework that will safeguard gender equality in Europe.

The European economic and social committee, which I chair, strongly believes that such a decision would have unacceptable consequences in terms of protection of women's rights and equal professional opportunities, including the right of both men and women to protect their families.

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The proposal for a withdrawal presented by the commission could result in significant negative social consequences in this area including increased wage differentials between men and women, a negative impact on women's income or a deterioration of the situation for minors to be found in a precarious situation.

Moreover, such a decision directly affects the strategic objectives of the EU, such as the pursuit of an employment rate of 75 per cent for women and men in Europe by 2020, a target which cannot be achieved without more active participation of women in the labour market.

According to data collected from Eurostat, the gender pay gap in Europe is on average around 16.4 per cent, with some countries like Germany reaching 22.4 per cent or Estonia at 30 per cent. The data indicates that this is not an issue that should be dividing Europe, but rather it affects every member state, rich or poor, from the south to the north, and we should all unite and come to realise the consequences of a lack of a proper framework compared to the one proposed would have on our societies.

Therefore, our committee considers fundamental the mobilisation of the European community towards the protection of the rights of pregnant women and young mothers at work. The committee and I personally hope that the parliament will not be tempted by those who wish to deny our society a better future. We hope its members will instead engage in a constructive dialogue to ensure the immediate adoption of the directive on maternity leave.

About the author

Henri Malosse is president of the European economic and social committee (EESC)

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