

## EU drops maternity leave proposals following five year legislative deadlock

Written by Brian Johnson on 1 July 2015 in News  
News

The European commission has been accused of caving in to member states following the decision to withdraw the controversial maternity leave directive.



The announcement on Wednesday by European commission vice-president Frans Timmermans to call time on the revision of the EU's maternity leave directive has been described as "an unacceptable step backwards for women's rights".

Citing a recommendation from the outgoing Latvian EU council presidency that suggested - despite the recent efforts of the European parliament to break the political deadlock between MEPs and their national co-legislators - there was no prospect for an agreement, Timmermans decided to call time on the troubled directive.

EU member states and MEPs have been at loggerheads over the legislation for several years following the European parliament's decision to up the commission's original proposals on minimum levels of

paid maternity leave to 20 weeks with full pay. The current directive, dating back to 1992 guarantees a minimum of 14 weeks.

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Following the appointment of the new commission last year, the EU executive drew up a list of outstanding legislation with the intention of removing the maternity directive as part of its regulatory fitness and performance programme (REFIT) which anticipated the withdrawal of proposals that are deemed "outdated or do not have the support of the legislator".

Last December, the commission announced a six month deadline for progress on negotiations between council and parliament on the directive.

The commission in a short press release said it "considers that prolonging the current deadlock by leaving a proposal on the table that has no chance of being adopted is not doing anything to improve the real day-to-day lives of working mothers".

"In withdrawing the proposal, the commission wishes to make a clear break from the current stalemate and to open up the way for new initiatives that can be agreed and lead to real improvements in the lives of working parents and carers."

The commission did however promise to come back with what it called a "broader initiative" to "promote the objectives of the previous proposal and provide minimum protection".

However, the commission's announcement was strongly criticised by several MEPs with parliament's Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group spokesperson on women's rights and gender equality Marie Arena accusing the commission of succumbing to pressure from EU governments.

"The Junker commission just announced the withdrawal of the revision of the maternity leave directive, which aimed to improve the protection for pregnant women, and new and nursing mothers."

"After five years of delaying, member states have succeeded in rejecting this legislation on the grounds that it is no longer relevant. This is a real setback"

Former MEP and current Party of European Socialists (PES) women vice-president Zita Gurmai added, "Instead of showing solidarity between and for women around Europe and ensuring progress and equal rights across Europe, Europe is choosing to stagnate".

"How can Europe tackle its demographic challenge or ensure that we reach the EU2020 goal of having 75 per cent of women in the labour market, if no measures are taken?"

Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) group deputy Monika Vana also criticised the

commission, calling the decision "very telling".

"The Juncker commission is backtracking on social policies including those with a particular impact on women and this sounds the death knell for one of the few policies that would have improved citizens' social rights.

"Although the commission has announced a new initiative aimed at better reconciling work, family and leisure activities for the coming year, all the evidence so far shows that the new proposals will not go as far as those set out in this directive. The European commission has failed on social and family policies."

## About the author

Brian Johnson is managing editor of the Parliament Magazine.

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