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MEPS Propose Extending Maternity Leave to 20 Weeks Fully Paid

Minimum maternity leave in the EU should be extended from 14 to 20 weeks and be fully paid, believe MEPs in the Women's Rights Committee. An entitlement to paid paternity leave of at least two weeks was also approved by the committee.

MEPs in the Women's Rights Committee have proposed that the minimum maternity leave in the EU be extended from 14 to 20 weeks, 6 weeks of which would be taken after childbirth. The committee's report was adopted by 19 votes in favour, 13 against and 1 abstention. The draft legislation seeks to lay down minimum rules at EU level. Member States may introduce or keep existing rules that are more favourable to workers than those laid down in the directive. This issue will be discussed in the next plenary session in Strasbourg.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9603>

Dairy Products Cannot be Left to Market Forces Alone

Stable prices and fair incomes for dairy farmers are crucial to ensuring the supply of high quality dairy products and preserving a vibrant rural environment in Europe, says the EESC opinion on the future of the EU dairy strategy adopted at the 17 February plenary session. A few months after dairy farmers from across the EU demonstrated in Brussels against price swings on agricultural markets, the EESC has come out strongly in favour of maintaining market intervention measures in order to balance supply and demand. "Food in general and milk in particular are too important for the well-being of citizens to be left to the vagaries of a free, unregulated market", said rapporteur Frank Allen (Various Interests Group, Ireland).

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=CES/10/21>

EESC Takes a Stand on Copyright and Music

On 9 February 2010, the European Economic and Social Committee will hold a public hearing on copyright, with special emphasis on music. The debate will be an ideal platform to exchange views on the issue of the governance and transparency of collecting companies as well as related legal aspects.

The hearing takes place in the framework of an EESC own-initiative opinion on Copyright. "The issue of copyright is clearly one that should be examined by civil society, which can play a key role in this regard", said the rapporteur Panagiotis Gkofas (Various Interests' Group, Greece). The co rapporteur Daniel Retureau (Employees' Group, France) stressed that illegal copying resulted from the absence of an affordable legal supply adapted to new media: "The EESC is convinced about the need to combat counterfeiting but we question the methods used," he noted.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=CES/10/16>

Informal Meeting with EU Ministers on the Economic Situation in the Car Sector

European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, in charge of Industry and Entrepreneurship, met with ministers in charge of the automotive industry. They discussed the economic challenges facing the European car industry, what short-term measures could be made available, as well as the medium term strategy ensuring a sustainable recovery from the crisis.

The main objective of the meeting was for the Commission and Ministers around the table to have an understanding of the current situation of the car sector from a European perspective. The meeting also aimed at agreeing on a common vision that ensures the long-term viability of the car industry in Europe.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/169>

Commission Clears Microsoft's Proposed Acquisition of the Yahoo Search Business

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the proposed acquisition of the internet search and search advertising businesses of Yahoo! Inc. by Microsoft. The Commission concluded that the concentration would not significantly impede effective competition in the European Economic Area (EEA) or any substantial part of it.

Microsoft is active in the design, development and supply of computer software and the supply of related services on a worldwide basis. The Yahoo search business subject to the transaction encompasses the internet search and the online search advertising businesses of Yahoo, including its online search advertising platform Panama.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/167>

EU Social Policy to Ease the Integration of Immigrants

The EU should strengthen the links between its integration policies and the Social Policy Agenda and the 2010 review of the Social Agenda should take greater account of the social effects of immigration. These are the key demands of the opinion on Integration and Social Agenda adopted by the EESC Plenary on 17 February 2010.

The opinion on Integration and the Social Agenda by rapporteur Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños (Employees Group, Spain) emphasises the importance of the EU striving to ensure that the integration of immigrants is better mainstreamed into all social policies.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=CES/10/20>

Commission Creates Two New Directorates-General for Energy and Climate Action

The European Commission has taken a number of decisions to implement the organisational consequences of the allocation of portfolios to Commissioners. Two new Directorates-General have been created: DG Energy (ENER) and DG Climate Action (CLIM). The Energy DG consists of the departments in the former Transport and Energy DG dealing with energy issues and of the Task Force Energy which will be transferred from the External Relations DG. The position of Director-General will be assumed by Philip Lowe, a British national, currently Director-General in DG Competition. The departments responsible for transport policy will remain in the renamed Mobility and Transport DG (MOVE). The Climate Action DG will be created from the relevant activities in DG Environment, the activities in the External Relations DG related to international negotiations on climate change and the activities in the Enterprise and Industry DG related to climate change.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/164>

Questions and Answers on Safety of Sunbeds

What was the objective of this joint action by Member States?

The main objective was to verify that new sunbeds and sunbeds offered for use in services (e.g. tanning studios) are safe, especially with regard to the levels of UV radiation, and the availability of instructions for safe use. It was also an opportunity for surveillance authorities to highlight to suppliers and service providers their obligations to ensure the safety of consumers using their products. This action, which started in September 2008, was co-financed by the Commission under the Consumer Policy Programme (2007–13).

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/37>

Water Pollution by Nitrates from Agricultural Sources

A European Commission report reveals that nitrate levels in waters across the EU are falling. The report shows that the implementation of legislation to prevent nitrates from agricultural sources polluting ground and surface waters is proving effective. However, in some regions, nitrate concentrations exceed EU water quality standards and farmers need to continue to adopt more sustainable practices.

Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said: "Safeguarding water quality is a top priority for European environment policy. Farmers have worked hard to improve fertilisation management, which is now yielding benefits and improving water quality trends. However, in some regions, meeting EU water quality standards remains a serious and continuing challenge."

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/154>

Consultation: EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Consultation of stakeholders to gather ideas to make sure that the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is realistic in its starting point, appropriate in its objectives and responsive to the real needs of inhabitants of the Region.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/danube/consultation_en.htm

Consultation: Update of European Commission Publication on Radiation Protection

Council Directive 97/43/EURATOM on health protection of individuals against the dangers from ionizing radiation in relation to medical exposure stipulates that the EU Member States' competent authorities shall adopt specific criteria of acceptability for equipment in order to indicate when appropriate remedial action is necessary, including, if appropriate, taking the equipment out of service. In order to facilitate the implementation of this requirement in the EU Member States, in 1997 the Commission published Radiation Protection 91: Criteria for acceptability of radiological (including radiotherapy) and nuclear medicine installations (RP 91). This publication specified minimum criteria for acceptability and has been used to this effect in legislation, codes of practice and by individual professionals throughout the member states and elsewhere in the world.

However, development of new radiological systems and technologies, improvements in traditional technologies and changing clinical/social needs have created circumstances where the criteria of acceptability need to be reviewed to ensure the principles of justification and optimization are upheld. To give effect to this, in 2007 the Commission initiated a study* aimed at reviewing and updating RP 91, which in due course has led to the development of the present publication.

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/radiation_protection/consultations/2010_radiation_criteria_en.htm

If you have any queries about the EU Alert bulletin, or would like some more information about any of the topics in this edition, please contact Enterprise Europe West Midlands on 0121 455 0268

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