

Brussels, 26 April 2007

## European employers and trade unions commit to tackle violence and harassment at work

***Today the European social partners (ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME) signed a framework agreement on harassment and violence at work. The agreement aims to prevent and, where necessary, manage problems of bullying, sexual harassment and physical violence at the workplace. Companies in Europe will have to adopt a policy of zero-tolerance towards such behaviour and draw up procedures to deal with cases of harassment and violence where they occur. Data suggests that one in 20 workers (5%) reports being exposed to bullying and/or harassment each year.***

Vladimir Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, who was present at the signing of the agreement in Brussels, said: "Social Europe has made an important step forward today. The existing tools for protecting workers' health and safety have been completed by a social partners' agreement against violence and harassment at the workplace. This is further proof of the success of social dialogue in producing concrete results for workers and employers in Europe."

The European agreement condemns all forms of harassment and violence and refers to the employer's duty to protect workers against these situations. Companies will need to set out procedures to follow when cases of harassment or violence arise. These can include an informal stage involving a person trusted by management and the workforce. Complaints should be investigated and dealt with quickly. The principles of dignity, confidentiality, impartiality and fair treatment need to be respected. The agreement underlines that appropriate measures will be taken against the perpetrator, including disciplinary action up to dismissal, while the victim will receive support with reintegration, if needed.

The social partners have been negotiating on this issue for 10 months, following a consultation by the European Commission in 2005. The final text agreed upon in December 2006 was approved by the decision-making bodies of the European social partner organisations and signed today by the Secretaries-General of the four organisations. It will now be implemented by the national social partners in all EU Member States over a period of three years. This is the third "autonomous" framework agreement of the social partners, following those on telework (2002) and work-related stress (2004). This agreement was part of the social partners' work programme for 2006-2008.

## **Background**

The Community strategy on health and safety at work 2007-2013, adopted by the Commission in February 2007, highlights the promotion of mental health at work a priority.

Recent surveys on working conditions show a trend towards increased psychological health problems at work. There is evidence that, in many cases, these may result from bullying, harassment, violence or the threat of violence. According to the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in Dublin (2005 data, published in 2007), one in 20 workers (5%) reports having been exposed to bullying and/or harassment in the previous 12-month period. A similar proportion states having been personally victim of violence, although more workers are affected by violence from people outside the workplace (4%) than from fellow workers (2%).

Women, white-collar workers and employees of larger companies are more exposed to risks related to harassment and violence. The most affected sectors are health and social work, education, public administration, transport as well as hotels and restaurants.

For more information see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_dialogue/](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/)

Text of framework agreement on harassment and violence at work:

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/news/2007/apr/harassment\\_violence\\_at\\_work\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2007/apr/harassment_violence_at_work_en.pdf)

Social Partners' press release:

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/news/2007/apr/press\\_release\\_violence\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2007/apr/press_release_violence_en.pdf)