Safety, hygiene and health at work: 4th Community programme(SAVE) 1996-2000

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PREVIOUS COMMUNITY LEGISLATION: The Community had not implemented any measures in the field of health and safety at work for a long time. The first five-year action programme (OJ C 165/78) was adopted in 1978, followed by a second in 1984 (OJ C 67/84). Fresh impetus was given to the Community' s action with the entry into force of the Single European Act in 1987 and the introduction of Article 118a, which allowed the Council to take decisions on health and safety protection by qualified majority. The third action programme, adopted in 1988 (OJ C 28/88), which formed the framework for the implementation of Article 118a, led to the adoption of many new laws in the field of health and safety, and in particular Framework Directive 89/391/EEC (OJ L 183/89). The directive adopted after this laid down minimum health and safety requirements. However, Member States could introduce or maintain more stringent measures than provided for in the directives. The minimum requirements laid down in the directives sought to encourage harmonisation and to safeguard the improvements made with a view to avoiding the problem of social dumping. The third action programme ended in 1992 with the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health at Work (OJ L 214/91), as part of which a number of actions to promote and analyse this sector were implemented. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, which was established in Bilbao in 1995(OJ L 216/94), was responsible for gathering and disseminating technical and scientific data in this field. PREVIOUS POSITION OF EP: the EP had always insisted on optimal protection for workers' health and safety, and in several resolutions had stated that Article 118a should not be confined to health and safety in the strictest sense but should embrace all aspects directly and indirectly affecting the physical or mental well-being of workers. In its resolution of 6 May 1994 (OJ C 205/94, p. 478) on the General Framework for action by the Commission in the field of safety, hygiene and health protection at work (COM(93)560), the EP called on the Commission to present as soon as possible a fourth action programme to run until 2000. It supported the Commission on the following points: improving the implementation of, and respect for, the directives in force, improving information, training and development (with particular emphasis on SMEs), and developing cooperation with third countries and international organisations. The EP also proposed a new action programme entitled SAFE (Safety Action for Europe) and invited the Commission, *inter alia*, to look in detail at new problem areas and, if necessary, propose new actions or updated actions: physical or mental stress, shift work and night work, genetic counselling and surveillance, effects of new production techniques and processes on health and safety, harassment and violence in the workplace, and extension of the Framework Directive to the self-employed. SITUATION IN THE MEMBER STATES: almost 8 000 workers lost their lives every year through accidents at work. Almost 10 million of the some 120 million workers were the victim of accidents at work or occupational diseases every year. In the interests of health and safety in the workplace, it was vital to introduce new preventive measures or improve the measures in force. The Community directives improved working conditions for workers as long as they were implemented quickly and correctly and respected in the Member States. Nevertheless, the situation in this sector was extremely critical. The extent to which the directives were implemented varied significantly from one Member States to another. Indeed, by the middle of 1994 only one of the Member States could claim to have transposed all of the directives based on Framework Directive 89/391/EEC, while four Member States had not transposed any of them (COM(94)333). DOCUMENTATION: 1. Health and Safety at Work in the European Community, European Commission, Social Europe , 2/90. 2. Europe for Safety and Health at Work, European Commission, Social Europe , 3/93. 3. General Framework for action by the Commission of the European Communities in the field of safety, hygiene and health protection at work (1994-2000) (COM(93)560) 4. Commission White Paper on European social policy – a way forward for

the Union (COM(94)333). 5. Resolution on a General Framework for action by the Commission in the field of safety, hygiene and health protection at work (1994-2000); rapporteur: Stephen Hughes (OJ C 205 /94, p. 478).