Framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC

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the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment adopted the report by Mrs Anne-Karin GLASE . This Commission proposal relates to the agreement between the social partners UNICE, CEEP and ETUC on parental leave. The agreement gives men and women an individual right to three month's parental leave on the ground of the birth or adoption of a child. This right is not transferable and may be exercised before the child becomes eight. Moreover, exemptions are provided for in order to take account of the requirements of small undertakings and finally, the agreement provides that workers may have time off from work in cases of force majeur and for urgent family reasons when their presence in the family is indispensable. The Committee considers this framework agreement on parental leave to be a fundamental breakthrough in this important aspect of equal opportunities policy. The agreements also sets out minimum requirements and provisions for parental leave and should therefore be considered a first step in the introduction of new flexible ways of organizing work which satisfy the needs of workers and take account of the requirements of employers. Rapporteur GLASE underlined this morning that not all issues are covered or adequately covered by the current text of the framework agreement: - guaranteed sufficient financial support during parental leave; - extension of rights enjoyed at work to the period in which parental leave is taken; - developments of plans to promote the replacement of workers on leave, thus providing new; albeit temporary, employment opportunities and - the right to social security benefits during parental leave. The Committee takes the view that these issues must be regulated by law and considers it an urgent matter for equality of opportunity that a directive on childcare facilities be adopted, in order to enable a better balance to be created between working life and family life. Mrs GLASE was pleased that the discussions about parental leave, which have been going on for 12 years, have at last reached a successful conclusion. But she criticized that the EP is merely an onlooker and, by virtue of a gentleman's agreement, cannot give the Commission an assessment of the agreement until after the event and cannot therefore influence the content of this agreement. Her final conclusion is positive: the agreement is a first step towards the introduction of new, flexible methods for organizing work and should, taking account of all the comments and criticisms, be supported.