

Information and consultation of employees: general framework

1998/0315(COD) - 31/03/1999

The committee has unanimously adopted the report by Mrs Fiorella Ghilardotti (PSE, I) on the Commission proposal for a directive establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Union (cooperation procedure, first reading). This directive is intended to rectify identified shortcomings in existing national and Community legislation. On the most controversial issue, namely the threshold level, the committee has decided to support the Commission's proposal. The application of the directive will therefore be restricted to undertakings with 50 or more employees. Similar provisions should apply in the public sector. The report calls on Member States to establish mechanisms designed to encourage dialogue between management and labour in small businesses outside the scope of the planned directive, so that its general objectives can be achieved in all undertakings. The members of the committee do not believe that there is anything to be gained by granting derogations to companies pursuing political, ideological or religious aims. The exemption proposed by the Commission would even have excluded the media from the scope of the directive. The committee emphasises that the employees' representatives must receive real-time notice of employers' intentions before decisions are taken. The consultation of employees must take place at the planning stage. The text also defines more precisely what is meant by information and consultation. The committee takes the view that employees must be informed of the economic situation of their undertaking and must be consulted on that matter, particularly on investment, production and sales but also on any decision that is liable to result in significant changes to the organisation of the work cycle, such as the introduction of new production processes, relocations, mergers and reductions in productive capacity. Training, equal opportunities and health and safety at work should also fall within the ambit of the rules governing information and consultation. Lastly, the committee believes that employees' representatives should be entitled to legal protection against dismissal or unfavourable treatment in terms of pay and career opportunities throughout their term of office and for a six-month period thereafter.