A new Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002-2006

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The European parliament adopted the resolution by 381 votes in favour to 62 against with 68 abstentions on the new Community Health Strategy in health and safety at work. The report drafted by Mr Stephen HUGHES (PES, UK) was adopted subject to amendments relating to the lack of Commission resources in this area, lack of an overall Commission action plan and a lack of balance between legislative and non-legislative instruments. More specifically, the Parliament calls on the Commission to allocate the resources necessary to reflect the high priority to be accorded to occupational health and safety in the context of the ongoing debates on quality in work and employability, sufficient to re-establish a dynamic and proactive directorate for occupational health and safety. The Parliament welcomes the Commission's initiative and urgently calls for a detailed action plan with financial and timing commitments against each major proposal. As regards gender balance, the Parliament calls on the Commission to integrate a gender dimension throughout the strategy. With regard to the legislative issues, the Parliament requests the Commission to put forward a proposal for a directive laying down minimum standards for the recognition of occupational diseases. Amendments should be proposed to legislation which is defective or inadequate. Parliament believes that the Commission should take the initiative in developing common European standards for the certification of companies possessing a healthy and safe working environment and in preparing a proposal for a working environment management and audit scheme modelled on the legislation providing for an eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS). Moreover, legislative simplification must not become a cover for deregulation of health and safety provisions. In addition, Parliament calls for representatives of the Advisory Committees to be part of an ad hoc body formed to take work forward in this sector. As regards the better application of existing law, the Commission is called upon to adopt the broadest possible approach using all instruments such as tougher sanctions, minimum requirements for the quality of preventative services and work inspection, etc. It stresses the importance of systematically evaluating the implementation of legislation at European level and creating a method of examining and discussing the national reports which must constitute a basis for future policy-making. Concerning new instruments, Parliament calls on the EU and Member States to raise awareness of all the players concerned about the need to reintegrate and retain disabled people in the labour market. It believes more must be done to reinforce and harmonise labour inspection services: Member States should be required to instruct all competent authorities to carry out minimum numbers of missions, apply uniform standards and contribute to better Community-level data; for this purpose, a Community framework setting out the minimum criteria which a public service needs to satisfy should be established. Parliament states that the preventive aspect of the work of labour inspection should be spelled out more clearly; emphasises that the labour inspection service should have adequate tools available to enforce legislation, e.g. the right to impose administrative fines. It supports the use of new instruments, including benchmarkingunderpinned by quantified targets. Parliament on the other hand, deeply regrets, given how much higher health and safety incidence rates are in SMEs, that the Commission has still not launched a multi-annual SME programme based on the two years of preparatory actions undertaken by the Bilbao Agency on the initiative of the European Parliament. The Commission is called upon to draw up a Green Paper on promoting the use of economic incentives in the area of the working environment. It also believes that the health and safety at work issues should be given a clear priority within the European Social Fund (ESF), particularly in view of the challenges faced in this area by the candidate countries. More detailed proposals are needed regarding urgent technical, financial and other assistance to the candidate countries in the transposition and, critically, the implementation of the acquis in the occupational health and safety field. With regard to institutional issues, Parliament notes the proposals for the integration of the candidate countries into the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee and other Community bodies; supports the proposal to merge the two Advisory Committees and hopes this will also facilitate the candidate countries' integration into the new structure; recommends that the new Committee's

role in social partner consultations under Article 138 TEC should be clarified. It is also surprised to find so little mention of the Dublin Foundation and its invaluable five yearly surveys on working conditions, which provide important safety and health data and it supports the leading role given to the Bilbao Agency as the key player in non-legislative safety and health activities at Community level; regrets that the Commission has not yet produced its report on the Bilbao Agency following its external evaluation. Lastly, Parliament would like to see better cooperation between the Commission and the ILO, particularly in the context of development and trade policies, in order to extend the reach of Community approaches and experiences regarding occupational health and safety for the benefit of third countries.