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To
European Commission
Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities DG
Commissioner Spidla
&
Equality between Men/Woman. Action against discrimination. Civil
Society
The Director

February 25 2008

**Subject: Reconciliation measures targeted at fathers – the view of
the www.european-fatherhood.com – platform.**

Dear Ms. Pyke and Mr. Spidla

Thank you for replying on our letter to Mister Spidla and thank you for including views from our group in the Commission's evaluation of legislation of reconciliation professional, private and family life.

Here you have our answers to the "Questionnaire on Council Directive 92/85/EEC and on Council Directive 96/34/EC":

1.

- We find that the payment on maternity leave should be raised to the level of full salary. Sources for this payment might be a mix of company and public social funding.
This scale of payment is necessary in order to secure young families' welfare and in order to help men and women share the responsibility on an equal basis.
- Maternal leave should be raised to at least 26 weeks. This is important in order to secure breast-feeding in at least 6 months as breast milk seems to be vital for the physical health of the child. We think however

that maternity leave and the duration should be seen in a broader perspective as a family matter where the child's needs and the shared parental responsibility are viewed together. This means that the child will benefit from a parental leave of 12 months including maternal and paternal and shared leave. See below.

2.

- We think that it is necessary that parents get payment during parental leave.
- It is important that fathers have their own and non-transferable right to parental leave. This is for the benefit of men, children and women.
- It should be illegal to fire anyone on parental leave. This protection will encourage mothers as well as fathers to take care of their child.
- We think that 3 months parental leave is a too short a period.
- We support the possibility of using parental leave on a flexible and part-time basis. This will encourage men to be more participating and give better possibilities for women to join and maintain their positions in the labour market.
- Both men and women should have full wage compensation during parental leave.

3.

- It is time now for men to get the right of paternity leave! It is important that fathers have their individual and non-transferable right to paternity leave. From our research and international studies and from our practice in diverse disciplines and countries we very much support the intent to implement mandatory parental leave share for fathers as European standard.

Several research findings in the Nordic countries point to a strong relationship between the father's legal rights of parental leave and the amount of paternal leave fathers actually take.

- Both father's and mother's parental leave after birth should be increased. A child will benefit from a 12 months parental leave during the first year of its life including maternal and paternal and shared leave. Therefore parental leave should be seen as a family matter where the child's needs and the shared parental responsibility are viewed together. In this perspective the best solution will be that the parents can stay together at home 3 months after the birth of the child. Then the women should have three months leave, and then the man should have 3 months, and at last the family should have 3 months on a flexible sharing basis.
- Fathers should be additionally *encouraged* and *supported* to take parental leave or, more generally speaking, to be active, caring fathers.

Furthermore many research findings show that programmes aiming at encouraging good, caring fatherhood such as information and communication on "good fatherhood" for dads-to-be do have positive effects. In research and evaluation of according programmes it has proven that fathers-to-be who receive training and/or information/communication on fatherhood will, in effect, be more involved with their children. Moreover, as Swedish and German research has shown, new fathers who have received training on "active fatherhood" will take a longer share of parental leave.

- We think that it is necessary that parents get payment during parental leave. In order to give the child the healthiest psychological development it is important that the parents have the opportunities to spend as much time with it as possible during the first year of life. To make this possible it is crucial that parents do not suffer from economical problems as a consequence of their taking care of their child. Therefore a full compensation corresponding to their normal income is preferable.
- Another important field where father-friendly action is needed is the business world. Research and experience indicate that fathers who intend to take parental leave face obstacles such as prejudice or even hostility from their fellow colleagues and, especially, from seniors/executives. Many fathers say from their experience that a more father-sensitive and father-friendly workplace culture is needed. On the other hand, there are some employers throughout Europe that perform good practice in terms of "father-friendly" policies. We have identified and characterized some of this good practice in our project.
- Instruments on macro level – this being, for instance, a parental leave system – should be complemented by instruments on micro level – where conditions meet persons directly, e.g. at the workplace. For the political agenda this means, for instance, key players in the business world need to be informed and trained about the facts and advantages of "father-friendliness" in businesses. The case for "father-friendly business policies" has to be communicated.
- Concluding, we would like to stress that there is strong evidence that politics for achieving gender equality (and child well being) will be more successful when it integrates instruments aimed at men and fathers.

Yours Sincerely

- on behalf of "European Fatherhood"



Svend Aage Madsen, Head of Project