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Press release | 23.02.2010

Parental leave

EU Parliament raises minimum maternity and paternity leave standards

Today a majority of MEPs in the European Parliament committee for women's rights and gender equality (FEMM) voted in favour (1) of a legislative report that sets a minimum threshold of fully paid maternity leave of 20 weeks, with additional paternity leave (also at full pay) of at least 2 weeks. The vote followed a call outside the committee room - by Greens/EFA MEPs, parents and children - for these improvements to be made to the Commission's legislative proposal. (2)

Green MEP and FEMM committee member **Raül Romeva** commented:

"I welcome that Parliament's women's rights and gender equality committee has voted in favour of a minimum of 20 weeks maternity leave at full pay throughout the European Union. Adequate maternity leave should be a right for all new mothers, not just those who can afford it. Additionally guaranteeing two weeks of fully paid paternity leave presents an excellent opportunity for fathers in Europe to play a more active role in family life. I call on our Parliament colleagues, Council and the Commission to support our position so that the EU can make a real step forward in empowering parents to better reconcile their work and family life."

UK Green MEP and FEMM committee member **Caroline Lucas** commented:

"I am delighted that MEPs have added legislative measures to guarantee time off for breastfeeding, which provides immediate and lifelong health benefits. I also welcome the fact that the committee supported legal protection against workplace discrimination for new mothers. Too many women – and mothers in particular – are still held back in their professional careers by unequal treatment and lower pay for doing the same work as their male counterparts."

Dutch Green MEP and Greens/EFA FEMM committee coordinator **Marije Cornelissen** commented:

"Committee's support for 20 weeks maternity leave at full pay represents a perfectly feasible improvement on the current EU average of 18 weeks, and a positive step towards the 24 weeks that is recommended by the WHO and others on health grounds. In a context where risky speculation has destabilised the economy, parental leave is one sure investment for the future. It would be false economy to refuse adequate investment in parental leave. Countries that provide better parental leave also see new parents take less sick leave and holidays. This is just the start to the long-term benefits for society by supporting parents and children when they need it most."

Notes to editors:

(1) Estrela report on pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth. 19 votes for, 6 votes

against and 8 abstentions. The report will now go to a European Parliament plenary vote, expected to be scheduled on 24 or 25 March.

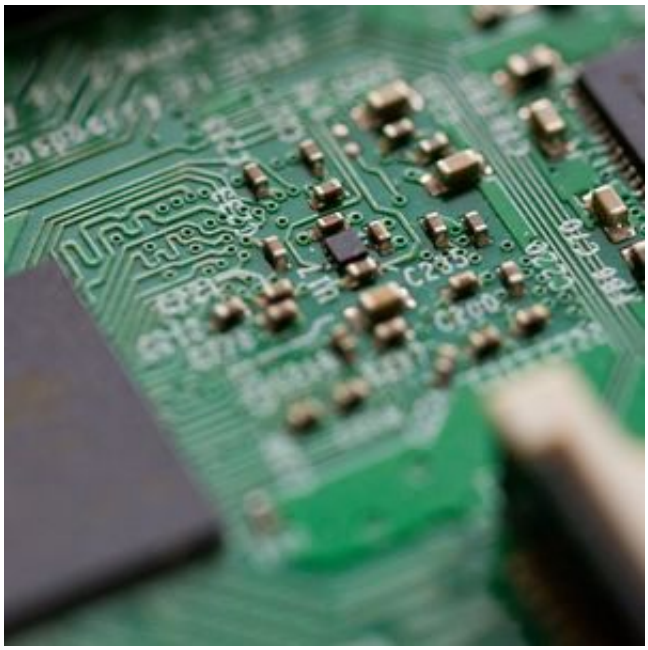
(2) Photos at:http://www.greens-efa.org/cms/default/dok/326/326974.greens_action_on_paternity_leave@en.htm

High-res photos are available on request.

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