

## Editorial

This issue is entirely devoted to the Framework Agreement on Fixed-term Work signed on 18 March 1999 by the main trade unions and employers' organisations at the EU level, namely ETUC, CEEP and UNICE. The agreement centres on the need to remove discrimination against fixed-term workers and to create a framework which prevents abuse of such contracts. As requested by the signatory parties, the European Commission has initiated the procedure for making these requirements binding for all Member States. The Commission's proposal for a Directive concerning the framework agreement was discussed at the Labour and Social Affairs' Council meeting of 25 May 1999 where all delegations favourably regarded the deal reached by the social parties. The Directive has not yet been formally adopted because national Parliaments have a six-week period starting from the day of the Commission's proposal (1 May 1999) during which they can examine proposed Community legislation. This is the first instance in which the 'Protocol on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union' (attached to the Treaty of Amsterdam) is being applied. It is very likely that a final decision will be made in the second half of the year, under the Finnish presidency.

I have asked a number of colleagues, mostly from the Editorial board, to comment on this agreement which is the third one concluded in the context of the 'Maastricht Social Chapter'. As a result, the readers have a choice of European and non-European authors. Within the EU, one may find that the three 'Continental' voices (Roger Blanpain, Manfred Weiss and Michele Tiraboschi) conclude that the impact of the framework agreement on the domestic situation will be marginal. Not surprisingly, however, Pascale Lorber's forecast is quite different. She foresees a 'serious impact' on the UK system, although she claims that the leeway for national implementation is considerable.

Opinions from a non-European angle are offered by colleagues representing three major geographical areas. Véronique Marleau claims that this European response to the growth of fixed-term relationships

obviously cannot be imported into North America. Anthony Forsyth is quite enthusiastic and even proposes to applaud, from Australia, the European social parties. The reader will notice that this latter opinion is not at all shared by Weiss who considers the agreement to be nothing more than the lowest common denominator to be found in the Community. Tadashi Hanami and Yasuo Suwa confirm that the need was also recently felt in Japan to amend legislation in this area.

This international commentary reflects the very nature of this Journal: a forum for promoting exchanges of views on real events taking place in the global field of labour law and industrial relations.

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