

**Question for oral answer O-000027/2022
to the Commission**

Rule 136

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Subject: European initiative to promote civic engagement to protect and better support European volunteers

Directive 2003/88/EC concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time lays down minimum rules on the safety and health of workers, in particular as regards the maximum number of working hours allowed and the minimum rest periods to be complied with.

Many European countries organise their civil security in a dual mode, with both professional and voluntary firefighters. The latter represent about 3.5 million people at EU level and are based on citizens' engagement.

With the Matzak ruling of 21 February 2018, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) equates, in the current example, a Belgian volunteer firefighter with an ordinary worker. Given the obligations created by Directive 2003/88/EC with regard to the mandatory maximum number of working hours and minimum rest periods, if this ruling were to become a precedent and if the directive had to be applied to all citizens voluntarily engaged in civil security arrangements, it would clearly be impossible to combine this voluntary engagement with a normal professional activity. Given that almost 7 out of 10 volunteer firefighters are in another job in addition to their engagement, this would lead to a concrete closure of first aid services in many countries.

This ruling creates legal uncertainty and casts doubts on a service that is absolutely vital for millions of European citizens. It also undermines Member States' security and European strategic autonomy at a time when they are needed more than ever. At the same time, it is important to encourage civic and voluntary engagement. It benefits both those who commit themselves, and society as a whole, in particular through its social link and in light of the climate change we are facing. Our societies are enriched by these voluntary commitments that create an initial safety net of solidarity and public security.

In the Council conclusions of 24 February 2022 on civil protection work in view of climate change, Member States invited the Commission to promote civil society engagement in the prevention of and operational response to climate change. To this end, they urge the Commission to support citizens' contribution to their own safety and resilience and to promote volunteer-based disaster response initiatives.

1. How does the Commission intend to safeguard and promote this voluntary commitment in Europe without, however, calling Directive 2003/88/EC into question?
2. Does the Commission intend to propose a European initiative on civic engagement?

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