Barroso must stop playing with workers’ health and safety!

Workers in the hair and beauty sector are angry at being dragged into the political games being played out between the European Commission, the British tabloids, the UK and other conservative governments.
In a bid to ingratiate himself with anti-EU elements, European Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, recently said that there would be no more unnecessary EU regulations such as banning the wearing of high heels by hairdressers. This false story belittling hair and beauty staff originated in the British tabloid press.

In fact, there never have been any EU regulations or proposals regarding high heels. The story was based on safety proposals made by employers and unions which were primarily concerned with reducing exposure to dangerous chemicals amongst staff working in the sector, but also included recommendations for the use of slip resistant footwear. Many hair and beauty workers develop skin diseases such as eczema every year.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES ARE URGENTLY REQUIRED

- Safer products should be used where available
- Chemical irritants need to be replaced in hair and beauty products such as hair dye
- Premises need to be better ventilated
- Staff need to be provided with appropriate protective materials such as gloves

The wearing of slip resistant footwear IS important in working areas that are often wet and dangerous underfoot. This is something which is already common practice among staff.

Hairdressers and beauticians are also susceptible to musculoskeletal disorders that can end their careers. This also needs to be addressed by, for example, better designed workplaces and equipment.

So we ask Mr Barroso to stop echoing disparaging remarks aimed at undermining measures to improve health and safety and instead use his influence to support European-level collective agreements between unions and employers that could be translated into binding health and safety laws.

Official apologies to discredited workers and social partners as well as a change of course from the European Commission could and would persuade European citizens and workers that the EU is worthy of their support!