

Location of the seats of the European Union's institutions

2012/2308(INI) - 23/10/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Constitutional Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Ashley FOX (ECR, UK) and Gerald HAFNER (Greens/EFA, DE) on the location of the seats of the European Unions Institutions.

It believed that the European Parliament, given that it is the only body directly representing the European citizens, should be granted the prerogative of determining its own working arrangements, including the right to decide where and when it holds its meetings. The current situation is that, in accordance with Article 341 TFEU, Member States have determined the seat of the institutions: Protocol 6 annexed to the Treaties establishes that Parliament shall have its seat in Strasbourg, where 12 periods of monthly plenary sessions including the budget session shall be held, that the periods of additional plenary sessions shall be held in Brussels, that its committees shall meet in Brussels, and that its General Secretariat and its departments shall remain in Luxembourg.

The committee agreed with the principle that the European Parliament would be more effective, cost-efficient and respectful of the environment if it were located in a single place. Members note that the continuation of the monthly migration between Brussels and Strasbourg has amongst most EU citizens become a symbolic, negative issue detrimental to the European Unions reputation, especially at a time when the financial crisis has led to serious and painful expenditure cuts in the Member States.

The report noted that the additional annual costs resulting from the geographic dispersion of Parliament have been estimated to range between EUR 156 million and EUR 204 million, equivalent to approximately 10 % of Parliaments annual budget, while the environmental impact is also significant, with the CO2 emissions associated with the transfers to and from the three working locations estimated to be between 11 000 and 19 000 tonnes.

Treaty revision procedure: Members considered it perfectly legitimate to launch a debate on its right to determine its own working arrangements, including the right to decide where and when it is to meet. Accordingly, they committed themselves to initiating an ordinary treaty revision procedure under Article 48 TEU with a view to proposing the changes to Article 341 TFEU and Protocol 6 necessary to allow Parliament to decide on the location of its seat and its internal organisation.

They also called on the Parliament not to make any recommendations regarding the seats of the other EU institutions.

The committee asked the Court of Auditors, or a similar independent agency, to provide a comprehensive analysis of the potential savings for the EU budget if Parliament had Brussels as its only seat. This analysis should include budgetary aspects and ancillary costs such as savings made through reduced loss of working time and greater efficiency. Furthermore, the committee asked the Bureau to commission Eurobarometer, or a similar professional polling service, to conduct, by 1 January 2014, a survey of the European citizens views on the prospect of maintaining Parliaments three places of work, with specific reference to the financial, environmental and efficiency costs of this arrangement.

Lastly, Members acknowledged that any future decision by Parliament on its working arrangements must allow sufficient time for debate and reflection, as well as for an orderly transition.