

REPLIES TO AND ACTIONS TAKEN

**ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION
OF 27 APRIL 2017 ON DISCHARGE IN RESPECT OF
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL
BUDGET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE
FINANCIAL YEAR 2015**

§6: *"Notes that, against this background, the work undertaken by Parliament in the context of the discharge procedure offers an opportunity to consider more thoroughly the accounts of Parliament's administration; calls for a strengthening of in-house expertise on accounts and auditing that rapporteurs can make use of in the preparation of their discharge reports;"*

The Secretary-General will invite the relevant services of the Parliament's administration to reflect on how to further strengthen their cooperation to support rapporteurs in their work on the discharge of the various EU institutions, agencies and bodies. More concretely, this reflection could involve the Secretariat of the Committee on Budgetary Control, the Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs (DG IPOL) and the Unit for Budgetary Policies (DG EPRS).

§21: *"Asks the Internal Auditor in presenting the annual report, to focus more closely on those aspects where shortcomings and/or irregularities have been encountered; asks also the Internal Auditor to make his reports on follow-up, developments and solutions relating to problems identified in the course of his mandate available to the Committee on Budgetary Control; asks the Secretary-General to introduce procedures for the assessment of performance and results;"*

The Financial Regulation and its Rules of Application require the Internal Auditor to submit to the institution an annual internal audit report indicating the number and type of internal audits carried out, the recommendations made and the action taken on those recommendations. The Internal Auditor draws up his annual report in full compliance with these requirements. Where relevant, the description of individual assignments in the annual report includes significant opportunities or deficiencies identified by the auditors and the action plan agreed with management to address these. The Internal Auditor's presentation of his annual report to the Committee on Budgetary Control is, necessarily, a summary of the contents of the annual report. However, at that presentation, the Internal Auditor is at the entire disposal of Committee Members to provide further information and explanations in reply to any questions they may have.

Under the approach of the Internal Audit Service (IAS) to the follow-up of agreed actions from its reports, each follow-up assignment is transversal, simultaneously covering all actions from all previous audit reports for which the agreed due-date for implementation has expired. For the timing of each transversal assignment, the IAS has adopted as an operational objective the request made at paragraph 3 of Parliament's resolution of 10 May 2011 relating to the 2009 discharge, for the Secretary-General to report twice yearly on the status of all outstanding actions to the Committee on Budgetary Control. The Internal Auditor therefore issues two reports on the transversal follow-up each year. As set out in Article 99(6) of the Financial Regulation, reports and findings of the internal auditor shall be accessible to the public only after validation by the internal auditor of the action taken for their implementation.

Ex-post evaluation of operations provides interesting feed-back and helps building useful lessons learnt which can serve as a basis for process improvement. All DGs are developing management tools to follow progress in their different functions and according to their own excellence standards. This effort is supported in order to disseminate and exchange best practices in measurement and implementation. Building on these achievements, one lead indicator per DG has been co-defined between the Director-General and the Secretary General. This lead indicator allows to monitor progress and support key decisions on efficiency and allocation of resources.

§28: *"Notes the Secretary-General's reply regarding the accessibility of the ePetition application for Members and the general public as well as the Legal Service report; asks the Secretary-General to report on the actions to follow-up the recommendations of the Legal Service;"*

In 2014, Parliament launched the Petitions Portal <https://petiport.secure.europarl.europa.eu/petitions/en/home>, which is destined to the general public, allowing them to lodge new petitions in a user-friendly and safe way, and to inform them of existing petitions. The portal also offers a possibility to support other people's petitions. The Petitions Portal is available in all EU languages. Public access to petition documents is governed by Regulation (EC) 1049/2001.

All Members have access to the ePetition database since 1 June 2016 with their ordinary user name and password. The recommendations of the Legal Service were taken into account before enlarging the access.

Since ePetition is an internal database that contains all relevant information and documentation concerning petitions, including petitioners' personal data and various supporting documents they have sent to the European Parliament, it is not meant and designed for consultation by the general public.

The administration is conducting a business analysis aimed at integrating existing systems (PETI Portal, ePetitions) with the currently developed PETI Greffe. The objective is to have a more consistent IT environment for managing petitions.

§30: *"Calls upon the Secretary-General to submit a plan of action on how to apply sustainability criteria in Parliament's public procurement procedures and, in this respect, to include an evaluation of the use made of green public procurement as an instrument;"*

In 2014/15, a systematic green public procurement approach was introduced at the European Parliament, including a revision of the Vade Mecum on Public Procurement, an Implementation Guide on Green Public Procurement (GPP) and the set-up of a GPP Helpdesk.

The Working Group on Green Public Procurement (WGGPP), which was set up in February 2014, met on a regular basis in order to assess and improve the systematic green public procurement approach in the Parliament.

Implementation of the comprehensive approach started in the beginning of 2015 with a test phase running until the end of 2016. In the 2014 version of the Guide, the target was to have at least 35% of the procurement procedures launched in 2015 classified as "GREEN", "VERY GREEN" or "GREEN BY NATURE", respectively 50% in 2016, and 60% in 2017. The 2015 version of the Guide extended the deadlines for reaching the above percentage values by one year, namely 35% for 2016, 50% for 2017 and 60% for 2018.

At the end of the test phase the GPP Working Group modified the Implementation Guide on Green Public Procurement on the basis of the test phase's results and considered that Parliament could achieve to have at least 50% of the procurement procedures launched in 2017 classified as "GREEN", "VERY GREEN" or "GREEN BY NATURE", respectively 60% in 2018 and 70% in 2019. These targets remain non-binding, but all services are strongly encouraged to reach them.

They apply to cleaning, food and catering, furniture, IT and imaging equipment, lighting, paper, vehicles and transport, sanitary and water equipment, waste management, textiles and office supplies. A reporting system will be made available in due course to allow for evaluation.

§32: *"Recalls the reply by the Administration to Question 75 in the questionnaire concerning the discharge for Parliament for 2013, namely that it had decided to discontinue the 'practice of long-term missions ..., ... leading to considerable savings', but views as a major contradiction the fact that 13 members of staff are currently on long-term missions; considers that a long-term mission for a member of staff, involving an expatriation allowance and daily allowances, to a place where that person was already living and working is a reprehensible use of taxpayers' money and contrary to the Staff Regulations; insists on a clarification of the circumstances of every long-term mission, and in particular on the disclosure of the reasons and costs for that long-term mission;"*

Question 75 mentioned above referred explicitly to the cost of the Washington Liaison Office for 2013, with the reply stating that "... it was decided in 2013 to discontinue the practice of long-term missions and rather transfer the posts for the time of the placement to Washington, a practice leading to considerable savings."

On 1 October 2017, five staff members are on long-term missions (i.e. missions lasting longer than four consecutive weeks). Three of them are taking part in fellowships¹ and two are temporarily working in the EP Information Offices (Tallin and Milano). The total expenditure of these 5 long-term missions is estimated at around EUR 50 000.

Mission orders are not established if the destination is at the place of employment of the staff member. As a consequence, long-term missions to the place of employment are not possible either.

§33: *"Recalls that all officials and other servants of the Union, even those who work within cabinets, are to carry out their duties solely with the interests of the Union in mind, according to the rules laid down in the Staff Regulations; points out that Union officials are paid by taxpayers' money, which is not intended to finance press or other staff engaged in promoting any national political interest of a President; calls on the Bureau to lay down clear provisions in Parliament's regulations;"*

The Staff Regulations, under Title II, and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union already include clear provisions outlining the rights and obligations of officials and other agents.

These concern, inter alia, rules concerning the engagement in an outside activity and the duties of discretion and of loyalty to the institution that are incumbent upon all members of staff. The Staff Code of Conduct, adopted by the Bureau on 7 July 2008, contains further detailed provisions on these issues: https://epintranet.in.ep.europa.eu/files/live/sites/epintranet/files/human-resources/rules-rights/right-duties-staff-conduct/staff-code-conduct/staff-code-conduct_en.pdf)

¹ https://epintranet.in.ep.europa.eu/files/live/sites/epintranet/files/learning/programmes/fellowship-programme/fellowships-programmes_en.pdf

§34: *"Notes the decision of the President of 21 October 2015, by which he sought to appoint people to managerial posts within Parliament without observing procedures, and in particular without calls for applications; notes that that decision 'did not correspond to the rules' (Administration's reply in connection with the second questionnaire from CONT; insists that decision by the President be formally revoked;"*

Following the Legal Service opinion of 11 July 2017 concluding that the President was not competent to adopt the above mentioned decision, it became null and void. In this context, it should be reminded that the EP administration never applied it.

§35: *"Notes that, on 15 December 2015, the President gave himself authority to allocate an uncapped special allowance to his cabinet staffers, over and above the existing cabinet allowance, despite the fact that the Staff Regulations make no provision for such a special allowance; raises again the question of the lawfulness of that authority and the validity of the special allowances; asks for consideration to be given to whether the decision concerned should be revoked;"*

The possibility to allocate an uncapped special allowance to Cabinets' members was revoked on the proposal of the Secretary-General by President's decision of 3 April 2017.

§37: *"Welcomes the fact that this considerably reduces cash payments and introduces mandatory electronic transfers thereby reducing the risks of theft, as well as the reputational risk for Parliament, while still providing for considerable flexibility; supports the Bureau's intention to evaluate the revised system after one year of implementation; regrets, however, that Parliamentary Assistants can be nominated to receive payments to their personal accounts and to certify the group's expenses; is concerned this places an unnecessary legal and financial responsibility on APAs and exposes them to potential risks; urges the Bureau to reconsider this as a priority;"*

In order to provide Members with the necessary flexibility, the designation of a parliamentary assistant as head of group is one of the possibilities set out in the "Rules governing the reception of groups of visitors", as adopted by the Bureau in October 2016.

To be able to cover Members' needs, further options offered to them include the choice between:

- a paying agent under contract. Based on the contract concluded with the Member, the paying agent takes the financial responsibility and the contribution is paid to his/her bank account;
- an authorised employee of a travel agency, who is present during the visit. The financial contribution is transferred to the bank account of the travel agency;
- an individual, either a participant or MEP's staff (also local assistants or trainees) who may choose to receive the contribution on his/her personal bank account or on a bank account held by the group (school, association, NGO, etc. with the exception of political parties, groups or foundations).

When a Member designates one of his staff as head of group who receives the financial contribution on his/her personal bank account, the administration provides a certificate, available in all official languages, as to the source and purpose of the funds, to be used in cases of controls by national authorities.

In 2016, around 54% of the head of groups were Members' staff, with more than 80% for a number of countries. The new rules are in force since January 2017 and will be analysed after a full year of application in accordance with the Bureau decision of October 2016.

§40: *"Calls on the Bureau to publish on Parliament's website the relevant documents submitted to it by the Secretary-General in a machine-readable format, unless the nature of the information contained therein makes this impossible, as is the case, for example, for the protection of personal data;"*

§41: *"Stresses the need to make the work of Parliament's internal decision-making bodies, in particular the Bureau, more transparent and accessible; calls for Bureau agendas to be published on the Intranet in good time and for the minutes of meetings to be published much more promptly; observes that it is not necessary to wait until they are translated into all languages;"*

Meetings of Parliament's governing bodies (the Bureau, the Conference of Presidents and the Quaestors) are restricted to their members and the staff essential for the running of the meetings. Accordingly, notes from the Secretary-General to the Bureau are not public documents, but only intended for Bureau members, enabling them to make informed decisions on matters within their competence. These documents usually contain information on financial, legal, security, organizational, and personal matters. As a result, such notes cannot be distributed automatically to all Members of Parliament.

The necessary consultation and information process with Members routinely takes place via the Vice-Presidents and the Quaestors who are elected by the plenary and thus represent all Members of Parliament, and also via the political groups, who are represented by members of their staff in the Bureau meetings.

Agendas of Bureau meetings are published on the intranet before each meeting and are made available in the public register of documents on Parliament's internet site. All Bureau discussions and decisions, including the ones *in camera*, are minuted and, once approved by the Bureau, these minutes are also accessible on the same sites. The minutes include references to the documents submitted, to enable requests for access via the register or on the basis of Rule 31(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

Any Member concerned by a Bureau decision, either in a personal or in an office-holding capacity, is informed by letter from the President, the Secretary-General or the Bureau secretariat, as appropriate.

§43: *"Asks the Secretary-General to forward this resolution to the Bureau, highlighting all requests for action or decisions by the Bureau; calls on the Secretary-General to establish a plan of action and a timetable enabling the Bureau to follow up and/or respond to the recommendations contained in Parliament's discharge resolutions and to include the results in the annual monitoring document; asks the Secretary-General to report in good time to the Committee on Budgets and CONT on all projects with a significant budgetary impact that have been submitted to the Bureau;"*

As all Vice-Presidents and Quaestors vote the discharge resolution in Plenary, Members of the Bureau are fully aware of all recommendations. Furthermore, the information concerning the replies and actions taken on the resolution on discharge adopted by Parliament in respect of the implementation of the general budget is transmitted to the Bureau for each annual procedure.

The Bureau is also informed of the answers by the Secretary-General to the questions raised in the resolutions on Parliament's estimates every year.

The Committee on Budgets is regularly informed on building projects as required by the Financial Regulation. Other projects with significant budgetary impact are approved in the framework of the annual budget procedure or communicated as ad-hoc budget transfer request.

§44: *"Believes that Members ought to be able to use Parliament's website to provide their constituents with the greatest possible transparency on their activities and, therefore, calls upon the Secretary-General to develop a system that Members can use to publish details of their meetings with interest representatives; and urges the Secretary-General to make this possible without further delay, as already requested in Parliament's 2014 discharge resolution;"*

The issue was raised in the Bureau. It is already possible for Members to publish their calendar on their own websites. The administration prepared a technical solution to publish information on Members' meetings in their profile on Parliament's website which could be deployed once a corresponding decision will have been taken by the Bureau.

§45: *" Calls on the Bureau to define and publish the rules concerning the use of the general expenditure allowance (GEA);"*

§46: *" Notes the low level of awareness, among Members, of the possibility of returning general expenditure allowance surpluses; reminds Members that the GEA does not constitute an additional personal salary; asks the Secretary-General to publicise this possibility as a priority; urges Members to return surpluses at the end of their mandate;"*

§47: *"Similarly, calls on the Secretary-General to provide Members who would like to publish on their own websites details of payments to them of any other Parliament allowances , with appropriate data records that can be easily reprocessed;"*

The regulatory framework concerning the general expenditure allowance is published and accessible to Members on Parliament's Intranet site.

At its meeting on 15 May, the Bureau discussed a revised non-exhaustive list proposed by the Secretary-General on expenses defrayable under the general expenditure allowance. At its subsequent meeting of 12 June, it decided to create an ad-hoc Working Group on this matter, which had its constitutive meeting on 4 July.

The Bureau decided that the revised list should be submitted for adoption to the Bureau by the end of the year and be accompanied by additional recommendations for the next legislative term.

§48: "Calls, further, on the Secretary-General to assist interested political groups in the same way;"

Appropriations from item 400 are transferred to the account of the political groups at the beginning of each year. The groups manage these funds according to the principles of indirect management meaning that they nominate their own authorising officers and set up their own internal control and accounting systems. It is only the groups themselves who hold all accounting records and as a consequence the possibility to publish these as they see fit.

The same budget item is also used for the political and information activities of the non-attached Members, the appropriations being managed by the administration. Reports on the use of these funds are provided regularly as well as upon request to these Members, who are free to publish these.

§49: "Notes that Parliament's website makes available a range of documents regarding the decision on the recognition of the European political parties and European political foundations alongside details specifying the final funding amount; asks Parliament to request the Commission to present a proposal for a revision of the current Union legal act on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations¹, including stricter requirements for the setting up of European political parties and foundations, in order to prevent abuses;

The Secretary-General presented its report to the Bureau in July 2016, which analysed the issues not resolved by Regulations No 1141/2014 and 1142/2014 and proposed specific measures to address these shortcomings. Proposals included also the above-mentioned stricter requirements for the setting up and funding of parties and foundations. In particular, the report proposed different options as possible pre-condition for an applicant political party to receive EU funding.

The report was transmitted to the Commission and the Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

Following the report of the Secretary General to the Bureau and the letter addressed by 3 main political parties in June 2016 to the President of the Commission, AFCO decided in January to introduce an Oral Question for March II focus on the main questions EP wishes that Commission will review in the current Regulation. A resolution was voted in Plenary on 15 June and a hearing was organised in AFCO on 12 July to explain the main issues at stake.

The Commission published its review proposal on 13 September. Main issues of concern for the EP included in the Commission proposal:

- reduction of the 15% co-financing obligation (Article 17.4)
- increase of the minimum representation of 1 MEP in the EP (Article 17.1)

- prevention of the misuse of multi-party membership for the funding of European parties with regard to “individual membership”(Article 17.3)

§51: "Reiterates its call for Parliament's administration to produce a report on the use of Parliament's premises by interest representatives and other external organisations"

A detailed report on the use of Parliament's premises by interest representatives and other external organisations for the year 2015 was provided by the Secretary-General in the answer to paragraph 55 of the resolution on the 2017 budget estimates.

The following table shows the list of organisations that have been authorised to use the premises of Parliament in 2015, for both Strasbourg and Brussels. Due to the yellow alert restrictions, the number of requests granted was smaller than in previous years.

Use of EP premises by external bodies in 2015	
Brussels	
Parti Populaire Européen	22-23 January
Comité des Régions	11-13 February
Comité des Régions	16-17 April
Comité des Régions	3-4 June
Comité des Régions	8-9 July
Comité Économique et Social	4, 7 September
Comité Économique et Social	5-8 October
Covenant of Mayors	15 October
Comité des Régions	2-4 December
Prix du Livre Europeen	8 December
Strasbourg	
Association Unions	19 February
European Administrative School (EAS)	10 March
Conseil des notariats de l'Union Européenne (CNUE)	11 May
Association Accès Culture	29 May
European Administrative School (EAS)	9 June
Conférence de l'aviation civile (CEAC)	30 June - 1 July
Scouts et Guides de France	17 July
Chambre des experts agréés Communauté Européenne (CEACE)	24 August
European Administrative School (EAS)	27 October

§56: "Calls on the Directorate-General for Communications (DG COMM) to introduce a more efficient and user-friendly website that incorporates a more efficient website search engine, one that will raise the profile of Parliament with the general public and respond more directly to the needs and interests of citizens; notes that mediocre results only have been obtained, despite the expenditure of considerable resources;"

The roll-out of a new website - in responsive web design allowing consistent visual consultation on any device and with a simplified navigation of the site - started in May 2017. The Portal and News section were the first to be put into production on 24 May 2017, and all other sections will be re-designed in the course of 2017 or beginning of 2018.

Regarding the search engine of the Europarl website, a replacement of the current platform is foreseen in 2018 when the current search engine will reach the end of its lifetime. The selection process of a new product is ongoing and should be finalised by the end of 2017. The implementation of the new search engine is foreseen for the first half of 2018. The capacity, quality and compatibility of the multilingual web-streaming on the site is also constantly improved.

Please also see the reply provided to paragraph 115.

§57: "Expresses concern about the effectiveness of Parliament's communication strategy; calls in this respect for a comprehensive review of the current strategy and, in particular, for a more active approach towards those who are not automatically interested in Parliament's activities or who may even be sceptical about its functioning; invites the Secretary-General to develop a new strategy to reach out further in order to engage with these citizens too, including by facilitating access to information, to adequately address unjustified prejudices against Parliament, while avoiding unnecessary and costly advertising campaigns;"

The administration has been assessing past communication activities and is revising its communication strategy. Communication channels and target audiences were reviewed and audiences that are not automatically interested in Parliament's activities are being targeted amongst others. Target audiences include youth, students, opinion multipliers, key stakeholders and of course media. The revised communication strategy strengthens the efficient allocation of resources.

The Secretary-General suggested to the Bureau to strengthen in-house capacity for campaigns through redeployment instead of relying on external agencies. In the autumn 2017, he will submit an ambitious election communication strategy to the Bureau, duly taking into account the requests of the discharge resolution.

Lessons learnt from recent successful electoral campaigns will be integrated in the European Election Campaign 2019, especially in terms of youth engagement and information distribution. A "go-local" approach will be further enhanced in order to meet the diversity of requests coming from different national audiences.

Furthermore, the Secretary General informed the Bureau of the creation - through redeployment - of a dedicated unit for tackling the issue of fake news and improving the Parliament's rebuttal capacity.

§58. *“Underlines the need to modernise the mission of the information offices of Parliament by optimising the use of new communication technologies and patterns and taking advantage of their privileged geographical positions, close to citizens, to further intensify “going local” activities, such as debates organised with Members and civil society, with a view to listening to people and engaging with them; emphasises that online debate and media attention triggered by such events should contribute to increase outreach to citizens still further; notes that building and staff costs for the information offices in the Member States are disproportionately high in relation to the amount of money spent on the key functions of those offices; calls on the Secretary General to present, by the end of 2017, to CONT a detailed activity and financial report on the information offices in the cities of Brussels and Strasbourg respectively, with a special focus on the value that they add;”*

Parliament's Information Offices play a key role in reaching out to citizens at local level, adapting messages to their needs and interests and taking local and national media agendas into account. Over the past ten years, profound changes have taken place in the role played by the Parliament, in European societies, in the media landscape, as well as in citizens' media and communication habits. Parliament's Information Offices should adapt to those changes in order to stay at the forefront of modern communication. They need to refocus their work and be equipped to face new communication challenges. To this end, a revision of their mission statement will be discussed during the Bureau Away-Day in October.

A report on the information offices in Brussels and Strasbourg is currently being drafted and will be ready before the end of this year.

§64: *“Is not convinced of the selection method, by which Members decide about the nominations and the final election of the Prize winner, and invites the Bureau to report on alternative models for obtaining the desired results, for example, by supporting a comparable initiative taken by film-makers' organisations themselves;”*

The survey on the awareness of the LUX Film Prize and its impact, requested in the framework of the 2013 discharge, showed that the Prize is well-known among Members and film professionals and has a positive image with both. At the same time, it showed that there is a need for improvement in terms of visibility among the general public.

In this respect, negotiations on a partnership with the European Commission and the European Film Academy, the major umbrella organisation of the European film business, have been underway since September 2015. The partnership would result in a unique pan-European audience award. The voting procedure would involve Members and the European audience. Communication to a larger audience, jointly implemented by Parliament, the European Film Academy and the Commission would be financially supported by the latter. On 24 March 2017, the CULT Committee approved the state-of-play of the negotiations.

As a further measure, the possibility to make the LUX Film Prize filmography available to the 139 EU delegations across the world, as a tool of cultural diplomacy, is being analysed.

§69: *"Notes that with the establishment of the Parlamentarium and the opening of the House of European History, the Parliament and its surroundings are becoming a citizens' and tourist attraction that will bring about a better knowledge of the role of Parliament and illustrate for citizens Parliament's commitment to consensual values such as human rights and solidarity; requests that the Bureau consider entering into a dialogue with the local authorities to see how the latter can contribute to the financing and management of the House of European History;"*

Following the signature of a Service Level Agreement at the end of 2016, the European Commission will contribute up to a maximum of EUR 3 million per year towards the HEH's running costs, an important share of the total costs.

The administration maintains a constant dialogue with local authorities on co-operation, e.g. in the domain of amenities for visitors. In this context, local authorities contributed, in the run-up to the HEH's opening, by executing an elaborate make-over of its surroundings and access, including paving the pathway between the HEH and rue Wiertz/rue Belliard and by the embellishment of the whole area. Local authorities showed continuous commitment to the cooperation with Parliament and are also responsible for the maintenance of the Leopold Park, in which the HEH is situated.

§70: *"Calls on the Bureau to consider adapting the management of the House of European History to a more inter-institutional approach, exploring further cooperation with other institutions of the Union, especially the Commission and the Council;"*

Since the establishment of the Board of Trustees in 2009, the European Commission has been represented, ex officio, by its Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. Following the signature of a Service Level Agreement between Parliament and Commission at the end of 2016, the Commission proposes candidates for one seat in the Academic Committee as an independent academic. The administration is keen to continue and intensify cooperation with other EU institutions and established a dialogue with them to this end.

§74: *" Welcomes the fact that the gender balance of the directors-general improved from 18,2% / 81,8 % in 2014 to 33,3 % / 66,7 % in 2015, but notes that the gender balance of directors fell from 34 % / 66 %, in 2014, to 31,1 % / 68,9 %, in 2015; recalls that the absolute majority of the Parliament staff is composed of women but that women are in a limited part of the managerial posts; notes that the gender balance in heads of unit continued to improve from 30 % / 70 %, at the end of 2014, to 31,2 % / 68,8 %, at the end of 2015; emphasises that imbalances for managerial posts therefore persist and that **an equal opportunities programme for these posts remains of the utmost importance**; is of the firm opinion that **Parliament should have at least 40 % of women in managerial posts by 2019**;"*

In January 2017, the Bureau adopted the Report on Gender Equality in the European Parliament Secretariat - State of play and the way forward 2017-2019. The report of Vice-President Papadimoulis finds progress in several areas since the adoption of the previous major report on equal opportunities in 2006.

Nevertheless, the targets set therein already for 2009 regarding female Heads of Unit (40%) and regarding female directors (35%) have not yet been reached. The Bureau therefore endorsed these targets while raising the target for female Directors-General to 30%. Additionally it introduced minimum targets by DG for female Heads of Unit and female Directors (30% each). All targets are foreseen to be achieved by 2019, which requires effective measures in different areas in a short time frame.

As set out in the report, gender equality at management level can only be ensured if both genders are equally represented in the pool of eligible staff members, therefore female career development has to be supported. Creating a working environment where a wide range of work-life balance measures is available and their use by both genders widely accepted, is equally important.

To implement the recommendations of the report, the High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity adopted in May 2017 a clear timeline for specific measures on management, professional training, awareness raising on gender equality, work-life balance and monitoring of gender balance indicators.

It should also be noted that professional training targeted at women eligible for management posts was already introduced in 2007. Four sessions of the training programme “Potential Women Heads of Unit” were organised between 2007 and 2011 with 114 participants in grades AD9 to AD14, not being managers at that time. Around 50 of them were since appointed as Head of Unit or Director.

The specific training programme has since been updated and now follows a new format and a bottom-up approach, with 88 colleagues participating. A roundtable “*Women with management potential*” was also organised in March 2016 with the participation of Vice-President Mr Papadimoulis, Ms Mlinar, Rapporteur on Gender Mainstreaming, and male and female top managers of the administration, to promote the new programme and obtain feedback on training needs by the target audience.

§75: "Expresses its surprise that Parliament's advisory committee on the appointment of senior officials consists solely of higher management and invites the Secretary-General to include a representative of a staff association;"

The composition of the Advisory Committee for the Appointment of senior officials, which assists the Bureau with the appointment procedure, is defined in a decision adopted by the Bureau and last amended in 2008. The Committee consists of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the Director-General of Personnel and, in the case of appointments to directors' posts, the director-general responsible. The committee also includes an observer for equal opportunities.

Given that the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General are both male, by decision of 20 January 2017, the Secretary-General has appointed a female Director-General as standing member of the Committee with voting rights in order to guarantee a proper representation of each gender. She also acts as the observer for equal opportunities.

§80: *"Notes the Secretary-General's replies regarding the conditions for external contracting by Parliament; emphasises that the administration must carefully and systematically ensure strict compliance by service providers with employment, safety and welfare legislation etc. applicable to all external staff working on Parliament premises, such as canteen, cleaning and maintenance staff etc.; calls on Parliament to introduce regular alert and monitoring mechanisms for the prevention and detection of any isolated or systematic cases of negligence, abuse or infringement, enabling it to take immediate action;"*

Parliament's administration stipulates in all its procurement procedures that tenderers comply with the relevant environmental, social and labour law obligations established by Union law, national legislation, collective agreements or the international environmental, social and labour conventions listed in Annex X to the Procurement Directive. Non-respect of such provisions can lead to the termination of the contract, as also stated in the contract templates.

The importance of actually monitoring the respect of these rules is continuously emphasized at staff training sessions on procurement. Taking into consideration the rather heterogeneous nature of services provided to Parliament, all services are advised to deploy their own individual monitoring methods adjusted to the contract in question.

§81: *"Notes that the procedure for bringing Parliament's security guard service in-house is complete and that the procedure for doing the same for the drivers' service is on-going; calls on the Secretary-General to report to CONT on what has been learnt from these procedures and any savings that have been made as a result;"*

The action plan concerning the internalisation of the security services in Strasbourg and Brussels, approved by the Bureau in 2012, was strictly complied with in all respects (recruitment, budget, etc.), and completed on 1 July 2015.

The internalisation achieved:

- a full security team composed of professional, multilingual, qualified staff managed by specialists with proven experience in national police forces of the Member States or in the security services of the other Institutions, contributing to attain the highest level of expertise and security inside Parliament's buildings;
- a level of motivation, commitment and loyalty of the security and safety agents to the Institution and its Members much higher than the staff of an external service provider;
- protection and maintenance of the know-how for an efficient and tailor-made security service meeting Parliament's specific needs.

Savings amount to EUR 4.2 million, EUR 2.3 million and EUR 3.4 million for the years 2013 to 2015 respectively, totalling EUR 9.9 million, in comparison with the action plan and while taking into account the significant increase of the perimeter to be secured (new buildings: Parliamentarium, MARTENS and House of European History) and an improved quality of service. Savings continue to be generated in future years too.

The Bureau decision to internalise the drivers' service had been mainly motivated by:

- a more sensitive security situation;
- a series of negative experiences with the service providers resulting in unstable and precarious social situations and an increased turnover of staff;
- a situation in which security screening of the persons employed by the external companies and standards required and expected by Parliament had not always been respected.

Moreover, the internalisation of the drivers' service allowed for:

- reliable verification of criminal records and background checks before recruiting and thus increased security for Members;
- guaranteed respect of social and labour obligations without the reputational risks previously existing;
- enhanced monitoring of drivers' performance;
- stable social situation for the employees with increased loyalty towards Parliament;
- improved geographical and gender balance of drivers;
- continued training adapted to the specific needs of the service;
- increase of services and of their quality provided to the Members (such as Brussels-Strasbourg during sessions);
- possibility to quickly adapt the fleet in line with technological developments, including safety equipment, and to environmental standards.

As the drivers' service no longer operates with or depends on an intermediary, it can respond effectively and efficiently to unforeseeable emergency situations or sudden increases in demand. It is now a truly European service offering a stable working environment with favourable social conditions for 110 new colleagues who are fully integrated. Many of these new colleagues come from the external service providers where these conditions were not necessarily always met.

These two projects also demonstrated that the administration is able to conduct significant internalisation procedures with success and within a short time frame.

§85: *"Points out that, in cases of harassment or whistleblowing, APAs are in a particularly vulnerable position, as their contracts are based on mutual trust between the Member and his or her assistant; notes that, if this trust is lacking, this in itself is a reason for terminating the contract; notes, furthermore, that if the Member has to resign as a result of reputational damage arising from a criminal offence or other violation of law, this normally means that the contracts of all his or her assistants will also be terminated; calls, therefore, for the immediate strengthening of the representation of APAs in the advisory committee on harassment, ensuring that there is a gender balance, as already requested in the context of the 2013 and 2014 discharges; calls on the Bureau to assign appropriate funds to cover the travel and subsistence expenses of APA claimants, who often don't have the necessary means to come to Brussels to attend in person and state their case to the harassment committee; calls also for the possibility of financial compensatory measures for APAs to be considered in the next revision of the Staff Regulations in order to ensure equal treatment of APAs and recognition of their particular vulnerability in cases of harassment or whistleblowing;"*

During its meeting of 16 January 2017, the Bureau took note of the report on the activities of the advisory committee dealing with harassment complaints between APAs and Members for the period 2014-2016. The Bureau unanimously endorsed the proposal of a roadmap for the establishment of preventive and early support measures to deal with conflict and harassment between APAs and Members.

The possibility to cover travel expenses of claimants is under analysis. Among other issues, the potential conflict of interest when a Member should authorise the travel expenses for his APA to attend the harassment committee is to be avoided.

§87: *"Deplores the fact that the Bureau has not responded to the requests made by Parliament in its 2013 and 2014 discharge Resolutions to apply to APAs the same daily allowances than the other staff; asks the Secretary General to provide, before any changes are implemented, an estimation of the additional cost which would arise through this adjustment; meanwhile underlines that the current mission reimbursements ceilings for APAs have not been adjusted since 2009 and that the discrepancy between APAs and other staff has further increased up to at least 40% following the introduction of new ceilings approved by the Council on 9 September 2016 and so far applied, from 10 September 2016 only to officials; calls, therefore, on the Bureau to take the necessary measures to remedy this inequality;"*

In its meeting of 2 October 2017, following a proposal by the Secretary-General, the Bureau has adopted the review, by the same proportion of the increase applied for missions by officials, of the flat-rate amounts for the reimbursement of expenses incurred by accredited parliamentary assistants in respect of duty travel between Parliament's three places of work. The new flat rate amounts to EUR 137, EUR 160 and EUR 183 with effect from 1 January 2018.

§88: *"Deeply regrets the fact that the employment period of an APA in the case of death or resignation of his or her Member ceases at the end of the relevant calendar month; emphasises that this could mean that an APA would not have a single day of notice if the Member's term of office happens to end on the final day of a given month; calls for this unacceptable situation to be resolved in the next revision of the Staff Regulations, by linking notice periods to a defined period of time, such as four weeks, rather than to calendar months; further calls on the Bureau to swiftly introduce temporary measures that could provide a provisional solution to this problem before such legal revision takes place;"*

As indicated in the Report on the Evaluation of the New Statute for Parliamentary Assistants submitted in March 2017, a possible solution could be that the APA contract is terminated at the end of the month following the one in which the Member's term of office ends. This would give more time to the APA to find another employment, and would assist also those APAs whose Member's term of office ends close to the end of the month (as there is no notice period in this case). As pointed out, any such a change would require an amendment to Art.139(1)(c) of the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the EU (CEOS) and the right of initiative to propose such an amendment lies with the Commission.

It is worth pointing out that former APAs without new gainful employment receive a compensation for loss of contract equal to a third of the basic salary that would have been received for the remainder of the contract, with a maximum equalling three months of salary.

The total population concerned in 2015 with a decision to terminate the employment contract due to end of mandate was 31 persons, of which 15 concerned were re-recruited by the EP, either immediately or soon thereafter. In 2016, 20 of the 32 APAs concerned were re-recruited by the EP, either immediately or soon thereafter.

As a further support measure by the administration to assist the APAs concerned, introduced in 2015, a personalised guidance and assistance is offered to them on the administrative formalities linked to the termination. The necessary certificates for claiming unemployment benefits are also prepared within the shortest time possible.

§89: *"Is concerned about the alleged practice of Members obliging APAs to undertake missions, particularly to Strasbourg, without mission orders, without mission costs or simply without travel costs; is of opinion that such a practice leaves room for abuse: where APAs travel without a mission order they not only have to pay for the costs by their own means, they are also not covered by workplace insurance ; calls on the Bureau make sure that the Staff Regulations are properly implemented and to penalise Members who breach the rules;"*

The administration does not have any evidence at hand, information from APAs or other data indicating that professional travels are undertaken by APAs without a validated mission order.

On the other hand, it is allowed to have a proper mission order validated and without certain costs or any cost borne by Parliament, though this concerns only a minor part, notably around 7-10%, of all APA missions². APAs are under insurance cover once a mission order exists irrespective of the arrangement on mission costs.

² 77 (2015) and 134 (2016) missions without any cost;

§90: *"Notes that trainees are entitled to a discount of EUR 0,50 on main dishes in all the self-service restaurants in Brussels and Luxembourg EUR 0,80 in Strasbourg; considers, however, that, taking into account their average pay levels and the high prices charged over the last two years, these discounts are not sufficient to have even a minimal impact on their finances; calls on the Secretary-General to grant price reductions in line with their earnings;"*

While it is true that the modernisation of Parliament's catering policy aims at adopting realistic prices and price review methods, so that those reflect the real cost of catering products and services in order to avoid subsidies, the prices for the main dish on which the trainees' discount is applied had stayed unchanged precisely due to social reasons. Discounts for trainees are therefore re-invoiced to Parliament's budget, thus being the only exception to the end of direct subsidies for food prices.

§91: *"Calls on the Bureau to ensure that social and pension rights are guaranteed for APAs that have worked with no interruption for the last two legislative parliamentary terms; in this regard, invites the administration to put forward a proposal that takes into account the decision to have early elections in 2014 and the time spent in the recruitment procedure, when calculating the 10 year service period required by the Staff Regulations;"*

In order to be entitled to a retirement pension paid by the EU institutions, a staff member must have completed at least 10 years of active service within the institutions or have reached the normal retirement age whilst still employed by the institutions. Those 10 years of active service may be accomplished as an official, a temporary staff member or a contract staff member, including as an accredited parliamentary assistant, while serving in one or more institution(s).

These provisions are fixed in the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the EU (CEOS) and Parliament's administration is not entitled to issue any interpretation changing the length of the 10 years period. The right of initiative to propose an amendment lies with the Commission.

The EP services keep a record of all those cases where any technical problem caused a delay in re-recruitment in July 2014 and consider that for the purpose of calculation of pension rights, the employment was not interrupted.

§92: *"Calls on the Conference of Presidents to reconsider the possibility for APAs, at certain conditions to be set, to accompany Members in official Parliament Delegations and Missions, as already requested by several Members;"*

The Conference of Presidents and the Bureau have taken a political decision not allowing APAs to accompany Members on official Parliament Delegations and Missions.

303 (2015) and 392 (2016) missions without travel cost;

36 (2015) and 63 (2016) missions without daily allowance (to the three places of work);

674 (2015) and 911 (2016) missions without daily allowance (outside the three places of work) ;

The total number of APA missions in 2015 was 15 117 and in 2016: 15 864.

Further 2 427 (2015) and 2 578 (2016) missions outside the three places of work were without accommodation cost; but this is due to the fact that APAs regularly perform missions to their home country and stay without any expenditure for them.

This principle has been recalled more recently in the Bureau decision of 15 May 2017 and the Conference of Presidents decision of 11 May 2017.

While it is up to the two political bodies to decide on this matter, some financial, functional and administrative impacts have to be carefully considered, such as:

- significant budget increase for APAs missions,
- increase of organisational and logistical complexity (venues, transport, accommodation etc.) and thus of workload when delegations grow substantially in size,
- change in the character of EP delegations/missions and their perception by external partners.

However, the provisions for missions and delegations do not apply for other travel activities of Members, such as the so-called Stakeholder Dialogues, where rapporteurs participate in meetings organised by the EP information offices to exchange views with various national stakeholders. For such meetings Members might need administrative support and expertise which could be provided by their APAs (to be reimbursed from the relevant allowances available for Members). This would also take into consideration the budgetary constraints for missions of IPOL and EXPO) administrators, often requested to accompany Members to such meetings.

§93: "Calls on the Secretary-General and the Bureau to look into and resolve problems arising mainly from the last change of term in relation to APAs (as delays in signing contracts, interruption of contracts, early European elections, etc.) which can have serious consequences on future acquisition labour rights of APAs; ask APAs' representatives to be involved in the search for solutions;"

The new evaluation report on the application of the Statute for Accredited Parliamentary Assistants, requested in the 2014 discharge resolution, was submitted to the CONT Committee in March 2017. It provides an overview of facts, problematic issues and proposed solutions regarding APAs' recruitment, departure and career-related administrative procedures during the two years following the change of parliamentary term in 2014.

As requested, the administration involved official representatives of the APAs on two meetings held on 8 December 2016 and on 9 January 2017. The results of this exchange are set out in the last part of the report.

For further information, a total of 773 APAs were re-recruited in 2014. The main cause for delays in recruitment was late submission of documents required.

§95: "Notes that in 2015 the number of terminations of service of staff was 154, of which 126 were retirements, 13 invalidities, nine resignations and six deaths; invites the Secretary-General to strictly enforce the fourth paragraph of Article 16 of the Staff Regulations on potential conflicts of interest after termination of service in Parliament, in particular in cases of resignation, as it is striking that no cases of potential conflicts of interest have ever been published;"

It should be highlighted that Article 16(4) of the Staff Regulations), which refers to the implementation of the third paragraph of that Article, only concerns former senior officials, i.e. Directors and Directors-General. None of the officials who resigned was a senior official.

In particular, two of them worked as conference interpreters, one as translator one as file manager while the remaining five officials resigned after a long-term unpaid leave.

Until the drafting of this document, two former senior officials have declared outside activities, notably of a scientific and/or academic nature involving research and lecturing. None of these cases falls within the scope of Article 16(3) of the Staff Regulations.

The report on the implementation of Article 16 of the SR for 2015 has been published online at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/divers/Article16_en.pdf.

§96: *"Notes with concern that no special arrangements have been made for staff in the event that a Member State decides to leave the Union; whilst recognising that this issue is relevant to all European institutions, invites the Secretary-General to engage in dialogue with the Commission in order to ensure that British staff do not become victims of Brexit, and that their statutory, contractual and acquired rights are fully safeguarded;"*

There is a clear interest in keeping staff with British citizenship who have become European civil servants. Parliament's administration is closely following the developments related to Brexit, and its potential consequences for British staff. Inter-institutional talks are ongoing and the concerned staff will be informed on a regular basis.

§97: *"Calls for a more efficient organisation of training courses in order to adapt them to the specific needs of APAs; calls, in particular, for the administration to take into account the calendar of parliamentary and MEP's activities and define tailored timetables and specific topics;"*

Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs) have access to the full EP catalogue of general, IT and language training, including e-learning and external training courses. For the period 2014 to 2016, over 3000 participants in EP training courses were APAs³. Four sessions of a special APA induction training were also organised in autumn 2014, with around 180 APAs participating.

To help APAs to benefit fully from the learning opportunities currently offered, by taking into account their professional needs and the organisation of their work, a number of arrangements have been put in place over the years; these include:

- access to external training (including language training without some of the restrictions applying to other staff) since 2011;
- APA Summer School - a two days seminar first offered in summer 2016 and repeated this August with more than 120 APAs attending different learning modules on law-making, parliamentary procedures and communication ;
- additional sessions on Monday/Friday were introduced in language training to facilitate the participation, APAs can also access a range of language training courses via e-learning (accessible anytime and anywhere);
- since January 2017, access to an additional 36 learning opportunities, together with the Members, via the learn.Member catalogue and offered on-demand. The content and duration are tailored to suit the demands of individual Members and their staff.

³ Statistic does not count individual APAs, but rather the number of participants who were APAs. Thus, if an APA participated in two courses over this period, they would be counted twice.

For further improvement, a new ‘Induction’ training course covering contractual rights and obligations, services at the disposal of APAs etc. is currently under preparation and will be offered to new incoming APAs on a regular basis.

Participation by APAs on trainings is continuously growing. In 2015, APA enrolments reached approximately 2500, with around 1110 confirmed attendances.

APA participation on training courses		
Training type	Attendance	Remark
General	405	Most popular: - ‘How to work with legislative amendments’ - ‘Delegated and Implementing Acts’ - ‘Introduction to Economic Governance in the EU’ - ‘EU Environmental Law for non-Lawyers’
Languages	595	-360 EN, FR, DE - 235 other
IT	22	- Office application - skills
External	56	- general training, languages and conferences

§98: *"Points to the fact that 43 % of Parliament’s staff considers that teleworking would have a positive effect on their job satisfaction; emphasises that Parliament is the only institution that has not introduced teleworking and a flexitime system, while both have been present for many years in most of the other institutions, including the Commission, with proven results in terms of increased productivity and better quality of life for members of staff; notes that Parliament introduced occasional teleworking in October 2016; asks the Secretary-General to report to all interested services, including Members and their assistants, on the implementation of this service; calls also for the 'flexitime' system to be incorporated as soon as possible into Parliament’s working practices;"*

A scheme for occasional teleworking has been in place since November 2016, while structural teleworking is one of the administration’s strategic projects with implementation foreseen by 2019 the latest.

The occasional teleworking scheme will be thoroughly evaluated after its first year of operation, including a survey among management and staff about its functioning, the effectiveness in terms of achieving results, and advantages and drawbacks perceived.

Members and their assistants will be informed on these issues taking into consideration that steps towards structural teleworking will be significant, such as:

- IT tools permitting full connectivity at all times during the working day for staff on teleworking arrangements,
- Management culture that can absorb a results-based management style, and a positive staff response to results-based management,

- Working conditions that allow as many staff members as possible to use teleworking arrangements, and enable them to provide their best quality contributions,
- A set of rules for extended teleworking that tighten the results-based approach to work and provide for sufficient common time in the office.

The project will be run in close cooperation with the resource directors and line managers as well as with staff representation in order to ensure that further progress with teleworking arrangements becomes generally accepted. The introduction of a flexitime system could be considered once the structural teleworking has been implemented.

§99: " Calls on Parliament to change its rules governing internships offered by MEPs and political groups in order to improve the situation of interns and trainees in Parliament, including decent remuneration, the fixing of a limited duration of traineeships and a learning agreement.;"

The Bureau had a first exchange of views on the issue and is aware of the request formulated by the Plenary. The Bureau will discuss the general principles governing traineeships with Members in due course.

Concerning the traineeship agreements concluded by the political groups, these manage their allocations from budget item 400 according to the principles of indirect management meaning under their own responsibility. The relevant Bureau rules allow political groups (and the non-attached Members) to conclude traineeship agreements, with the precise conditions for such traineeships to be set out by the groups themselves. Changes to this arrangement would require a modification of the Rules on the Use of Appropriations from Budget Item 400 by the Bureau.

§104: "Calls on the agency to actively seek to offer lower prices whatever the airline in question; requests that the agency introduces a feedback process (user satisfaction surveys) with a view to identifying areas in which further progress might be made;"

The travel agency contracted by Parliament is instructed to follow the guidelines given by the services responsible for the reimbursement of travel expenses (Members' Travel and Subsistence Expenses Unit, Missions Unit). Given that Members' agendas are very often modified on short notice, they are entitled to choose flexible fares allowing ticket modifications and cancellations without fees. The travel agency therefore offers Members a flexible business class rate, the lowest business class rate, the lowest flexible economy class rate, and the cheapest fare available and states the maximum reimbursable amount. Members are free to choose the option best suited to their professional commitments and needs.

Furthermore, Parliament' Travel Organisation Service carries out random ex-post controls on reservations, mainly air tickets, made by the travel agency to confirm the compliance with the rules in force. It is also in regular contact with the airlines most frequently used in order to negotiate special fares and conditions.

The Travel Organisation Service is working intensively with the travel agency to ensure the proper implementation of the travel policies of the Parliament and to improve the travel agency's perception by Parliament's traveller clients. Efforts have been made to optimise and harmonize internal procedures to enhance a more client-oriented approach.

A complaint register directly monitored by Travel Organisation Service has also been set up. In the first five months of 2017, 15 complaints were registered, of which five concerning the service quality of the travel agency, six concerning air carriers and four concerning hotels. The total number of complaints in 2015 and 2016, were 81 and 38 respectively, representing on average less than 0.05% of the transactions.

108: *"Calls once again on the Bureau to make an assessment as soon as possible of the current situation of the Pension Fund;"*

§111: *"Considers that, whereas national pension funds normally have to meet strict standards and are not allowed to have any actuarial deficit at all, the voluntary pension fund is now facing an actuarial deficit of 64 % of the actuarial commitment, calls on the Secretary-General to present the Bureau with a comprehensive plan of action to avoid the early exhaustion of the fund;"*

The last assessment of the situation of the Pension Fund has been carried out on 31/12/2016, on the one hand by the actuary of the Parliament concerning the future commitments of the Fund, and on the other hand by the auditor of the open-end investment fund (Sicav).

At present, the liquidity of the Fund seems sufficient until 2023-2024.

Additional measures might be necessary but are constrained by strict legal limitations.

§112: *"Regrets the fact that, in selecting the financial institutions that Parliament deals with for its payments and accounts, no attention is paid to the policies of these institutions in respect of corporate social responsibility and calls on the Secretary-General to make sure that, in future, Parliament primarily deals with financial institutions that have investment policies that focus on sustainability and other aspects of corporate social responsibility;"*

Corporate social responsibility and sustainable commitment are essential strategic values of the banks chosen to provide banking services to Parliament. The environmental and social actions undertaken by the two contracted banks can be consulted on their respective sites:

<https://www.bcee.lu/D%C3%A9couvrir-la-BCEE/D%C3%A9couvrir-la-BCEE/Corporate-Social-Responsibility-CSR>

<https://www.ing.com/ING-in-Society/Sustainability/Reporting-on-Sustainability.htm>

§113: *"Emphasises that in 2015 Parliament had on average EUR 106.25 million on bank accounts raising no interest income whatsoever; invites the Secretary-General to examine whether it is necessary to have such a high amount of liquidity and in particular, invites him to improve treasury management in this respect and, if possible, to find ways of increasing the returns on such deposits;"*

Until 2016 Parliament submitted a monthly funds replenishment request to the Commission, which is responsible for the overall treasury management of the EU, and which transferred at the end of each month the funds requested. The bank account balance at the end of each month would thus correspond to the foreseen budgetary payments for the upcoming month.

The 2015 budget amounted to EUR 1.794 million, corresponding to a monthly payment average of EUR 150 million. Cash and cash equivalent in the balance sheet as at 31 December 2015 were EUR 106 million, thus less than the amount of the average monthly payments.

For any possible returns on bank deposits, it must be born in mind that the overnight market rate had negative rates first in August 2014 and has been continuously negative since April 2015. Taking into account these realities of the financial market, Parliament was faced with the need to further reduce treasury balances and changed the monthly funds replenishment system to a fortnightly cycle.

Cash and cash equivalent in the balance sheet as at 31 December 2016 were reduced to EUR 46 million corresponding approximately to payments of the two first weeks of January 2017. Parliament's current accounts are remunerated at the EONIA reference rate with a bank specific margin. The agreed formula with the existing current market conditions, notably a negative EONIA reference rate, would generate a negative interest remuneration on the current accounts. Parliament's administration has succeeded negotiating that the negative interest will not be applied.

§114: *"Is satisfied with the implementation of DG ITEC's strategic orientations 2014-2019; considers that many changes in the electronic working environment for Members and staff are being implemented, but that the implications of these changes, including new opportunities, are relatively little known and are being developed mainly inside DG ITEC; calls for closer co-operation between DG ITEC and DG COMM to improve internal and external communication concerning the many innovations that have been or will soon be implemented;"*

The Secretary-General created inter-DG steering groups to further enhance cooperation across all DGs. DG COMM and DG ITEC liaise on a regular basis for example in the inter-DG Steering Group on ICT and the quarterly Internet Steering Committee. DG COMM promotes DG ITEC's work externally whenever of interest to the media or the public. The two DGs will continue to cooperate particularly on the institutional campaign for the 2019 European Elections.

A variety of communication tools are already used: monthly newsletter, weekly briefing to ITEC staff, email communications to users from the service desks, intranet page, articles on Newshound, a dedicated section of the EP Intranet for Members, dedicated social media accounts and specific campaigns on new tools. Additionally, the INNOVATE! platform proposes an interactive way of communicating about innovation, with the possibility to contribute with ideas and engage with the projects that the Innovation Department is carrying forward.

The Innovative Working Guide, a compilation of all ITEC services, achievements and programs was distributed to Members and staff in November 2016 with the support of Vice-President Valean.

Two important events in autumn 2016 have also been relayed through social media:

- DIGITEC (29 November 2016), the first interinstitutional IT Forum, co-organised with the Commission attracted more than 800 participants from the Institutions;

- InterHack, the first interinstitutional Hackathon (15 October 2016), co-organised with the Commission and the Council generated 5 innovative projects, two of them currently being analysed for a possible deployment.

An innovation week was organised from 20 to 24 March 2017. This event was the occasion to sensitise Members, staff and visitors alike on the new technologies that will compose the EP ICT environment of the future.

President Tajani and the Vice-President responsible for informatics and telecommunications, Ms. Gebhardt, attended the event. The success of this initiative allowed to study the feasibility of a permanent “try me shop” inside Parliament's premises, that would enable Members, staff and visitors to have a more interactive experience with technological innovations.

§115: "Understands the efforts of DG ITEC to improve the number of hits for Parliament's webpages in the context of Google's search engine; is, however, also of the opinion that the search engine on Parliament's webpage itself should lead to meaningful results, so that users can actually use the portal of the site to quickly get to the relevant webpages; is concerned that, at the moment, this search engine does not function properly, and invites the Secretary-General to find a quick solution for this long-standing problem;"

The Secretary-General decided to set up a dedicated Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) Task Force which brings together technical and editorial representatives from all DGs concerned. This task force delivered an SEO white paper which is regularly updated to reflect the latest developments in the field to all DGs and EP partners. It also conducts website audits, provides training to staff on SEO best practices and monitors progress in the domain. At the end of 2016, the SEO conformity rate of more than 80 Parliament websites reached 88% on average (websites rank from 79% to 100%) and nine specifically audited websites ranked between 82% and 100% with three 100% SEO compliant websites.

In the context of the SEO initiative, several improvements were implemented at the end of 2016 to improve the current search engine. Works are ongoing also on the handling of synonym terms used to describe Parliament's activities.

The current search engine on Parliament's web pages will be replaced by a more advanced one by 2018. Several innovative options, including cloud-based solutions, are being analysed.

§116: "Notes, with concern, that, despite the fact that, within the remit of DG ITEC, expenses incurred on an annual basis for the acquisition of new hardware amount to more than EUR 35 million, there is no clear policy for environmental and social sustainable procurement and invites the Secretary-General to develop an action plan in this regard to make sure that in the future all calls for tender include environmental and social selection criteria of hardware;"

As pointed out in the reply to paragraph 30, sustainability criteria play an important role in Parliament's procurement procedures. The objective to promote environmental considerations in procurement procedures in order to improve the Institution's environmental performance, is mentioned in the annual EMAS ("Eco-Management and Audit Scheme") Action Plan.

Parliament's Working Group on Green Public Procurement (WGGPP) was set up in 2014 to establish a common approach to integrate environmental considerations into procurement procedures and to measure the performance of Parliament. The green public procurement approach as developed by the WGGPP started with a two-year test phase on 1 January 2015. During this phase, green public procurement (GPP) targets applied progressively. The targets defined were ambitious, but reasonable and applicable to the Institution as a whole, not to individual DGs or services.

Since 2010, DG ITEC applies the EMAS policy in its procurement procedures and contracts and also contributes to the WGGPP's activities. Internal instructions strongly encourage greening all procurement procedures, participating in training on GPP and making use of the advice provided by the GPP Helpdesk. It should however be noted that IT hardware contracts are mostly interinstitutional contracts lead by the Commission, which has the final decision defining selection criteria.

DG ITEC includes the following requirements in its call for tenders for IT equipment:

- energy-efficient models (i.e. European Energy star, European Ecolabel, etc.);
- products with restricted amount of hazardous constituents;
- design for recycling, throughout the lifecycle of each product;
- reduced and recyclable packaging.

For compliance with social criteria, please refer to the reply provided to paragraph 80.

§117: *"Calls on DG ITEC to make all Parliament's web pages accessible to portable devices, since, even though a large proportion of visitors to the pages use an iPad or mobile phone to access the sites of Parliament and the specialised committees, the current interfaces cannot be considered to be compatible with portable devices; proposes the implementation of measures to improve, tangibly and within a reasonable time-frame, the accessibility of the web pages to portable devices;"*

The deployment of a responsive web design allowing improved access to Parliament's website from portable devices is ongoing and some parts of the site were already migrated. The end of migration is foreseen for 2018 to achieve compatibility with mobile devices.

§118: *"Finds it essential for the mandate of the Members that printers remain in their offices; points out that cheap generic cartridges may possibly lead to dangerous levels of emissions of particles and to health damages; calls, therefore, for measures to be taken by DG ITEC and Directorate-General for Infrastructure and Logistics (DG INLO) to promote the procurement of eco-friendly printers and to ensure the sole use of original cartridges, whilst creating options for Members and their staff to have printers located strategically near but not inside their offices;"*

Concerning the procurement of eco-friendly printers, policies applied are described in the reply to paragraph 116. Cartridges for printers to be purchased will solely be originals.

In addition to the multifunctional laser printer located in the Members offices, the deployment of an efficient printing solution and a unified printing strategy (including options for Members as regards the printers and a print anywhere solution for all users) is foreseen.

This includes network printers which will be located conveniently near meeting rooms and Members and Assistants offices. Measures to streamline the relevant services in DG ITEC have already started. The first phase of the project covering governance and needs analysis will be finalised by end 2017.

§120: *"Reiterates the call in its 2014 discharge resolution for the creation of an emergency rapid alert system which allows DG ITEC, in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Security and Safety (DG SAFE), to send swift communications by SMS or e-mail to Members and staff that agree to their contact details being included on a communication list for use in specific emergency situations;"*

As described in the reply to paragraph 51 of the resolution on the 2014 discharge, two major decisions have already been implemented.

Firstly, the creation of an internal communication cell composed of the Directors-General of DG SAFE, PERS, and FINS (and eventually other DGs concerned by the event), which intends to harmonise the communications sent via e-mail to Parliament users in case of security-related emergency situation.

Secondly, the implementation of an automated SMS alert system for urgent security-related communications to reach the Cabinet of the President, the Cabinet of the Secretary General, the Secretaries-General of the political groups as well as the Secretariat of the Non-attached Members, and the senior and middle management in the administration, who all have a Parliament mobile phone. In case of an emergency, these persons are in turn responsible for transferring the necessary information to Members and staff.

§121: *"Commends DG ITEC for rolling out Wi-Fi throughout Parliament's buildings; notes, however, the Wi-Fi in the hemicycle in Strasbourg is unreliable , especially when, during voting sessions and key debates, many Members use the system simultaneously; calls on the Secretary-General to take the necessary remedial measures in this respect;"*

An in-depth analysis of the Wi-Fi in the hemicycle in Strasbourg was carried out by technical services during the June 2017 plenary session. The analysis has shown that only in extreme peak moments the network capacity was operating at its limits. To ensure a seamless service even for these rare occasions, network capacity has already been increased and the quality of the signal strengthened for the July session. Further reinforcement of the Wi-Fi access points inside the Hemicycle will take place later this year.

§122: *"Welcomes the fact that certain public meetings of inter-parliamentary delegations are already being broadcast by web-streaming; asks the Secretary-General to continue developing and expanding this service, together with the content of the delegations' web pages;"*

Public meetings of inter-parliamentary delegations started being broadcast by web-streaming in September 2016. Until the end of that year, 12 meetings were broadcast. During the first semester of 2017, already 37 meetings were broadcast. Efforts to further increase the streaming will be continued, even though a certain lack of meeting rooms with the necessary equipment in Strasbourg premises exists so that more delegation meetings are broadcast from Brussels than from Strasbourg.

The content of the inter-parliamentary delegations' websites is being entirely revamped with significant structural changes. The new websites with simplified navigation, improved structure and enriched content are expected to go live before the end of the year.

§123: "Notes that the 2010 – medium term building strategy is currently being revised; calls for that strategy to be extended to cover a longer-term perspective, and for it to include a case study of the likely consequences of Brexit;"

The proposal for a “Medium-Term Building Strategy 2015-2019” was elaborated under the guidance of the Bureau Working Party on “Buildings, Transport and a Green Parliament” and presented to the Bureau in September 2015. Taking account of the recent developments on the premises in Luxembourg and Strasbourg, any new building strategy will be centred on the Brussels site and the main axis will be the future of the Paul-Henri SPAAK building for which divergent opinions are still present at the level of the Bureau.

The updated proposal is meant to describe Parliament's needs in the medium and long term (2019 - 2025 and beyond), taking also into account the current security context and the future development of the Union.

More particularly, it will be only after the Brexit process has come to conclusions that more reliable planning could be done.

At this stage crucial factors defining every future Buildings Strategy such as the impact on the numbers of Members of the European Parliament, the number of posts for officials in the establishment plan or the potential consequences of Brexit on multilingualism have not yet been decided.

§124: "Welcomes the fact that from 2019 onwards, the amount of office space for Members and their assistants in Strasbourg will increase; calls on the Secretary-General to ensure that, as long as no single-seat solution has been found for the working place of Parliament, the minimum amount of square meters per assistant in accordance with the current rules on labour conditions, will be guaranteed, since Parliament's position on this issue is vulnerable, as it deliberately disrespects those rules on the minimum amount of office space;"

Parliament's administration constantly assesses options for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of office space while respecting the common guidelines which specify the principles and modalities for the use of office space and other facilities.

In its meeting of 11 September 2017 the Secretary-General proposed to the Bureau the allocation of extra office space for Members in Strasbourg based on the one-plus-one principle, the optimisation of the use of space for the administration and the optimisation of the space for other institutions. The decision endorsed by the Bureau should allow by 2019 for each Member to dispose of at least one office for personal use, plus one office for staff.

For the time being, the Members' offices are equipped with standard furniture which allows to occupy the office with two working stations and one additional folding table to be used if necessary by a third person. Respecting this office configuration, the minimum requirements are ensured⁴ until 2019.

§128: *"Is concerned about the problematic social dialogue between DG INTE and the representatives of interpreters, which started in January 2014 and which, to date, has produced no agreement; calls on the Secretary-General to initiate a mediation between the parties involved to improve the mutual understanding of the positions and to find solutions that are agreeable to all;"*

In the context of recourse-efficient full multilingualism, interpretation services to Members should be of high quality at a sustainable cost. In recent years, the meeting patterns changed considerably mainly due to the increased legislative powers of the European Parliament since the Treaty of Lisbon.

The working conditions of the interpreters, adopted in 2005, were no longer aligned to this pattern which resulted in a loss of efficiency as pointed out in the discharge resolution of 28 April 2016 on the budget of 2014.

An intensive social dialogue between DG INTE, the EP staff interpreter delegation and the Secretary-General began already in December 2013. As a result, a revised set of working conditions for interpreters were agreed upon by the EP staff interpreter delegation, DG INTE and the Secretary-General. However, a majority of staff interpreters rejected the final proposal of the revised working conditions for interpreters in April 2015.

Following this rejection, the Secretary-General took the initiative to meet with the Director General and Directors of DG INTE as well as with all Heads of Unit in order to achieve consensus on the necessary reforms. On four occasions he also met with DG INTE staff (not only interpreters) in 2015 with the objective to obtain a wide range of views and re-launch the process.

After that, a new consultation process between DG INTE and the representatives of the interpreters was launched in mid-2016 with the objective to finalise a revision of the working conditions by the end of 2016. 14 meetings were held until the end of 2016, but no agreement could be reached between the two parties.

After a "cooling off" period of four months and on request of the interpreter representatives, bilateral discussions between a representative of the interpreters and a member of the cabinet of the Secretary General - who had previously worked as EP staff interpreter - started in May 2017 with the objective to finalise a revised set of working conditions by the middle of 2017.

⁴ The Advisory Committee on Prevention at Work proposes that the following standards be applied:

- Minimum free floor-to-ceiling height: 250 cm;
- Minimum real space per person: 10m³;
- Minimum unfurnished surface: 2m² per person.

As a basis for these discussions, the Secretary-General had submitted a revised version of the working conditions with the following minimal changes in order to improve efficiency of the service and to adapt working conditions to the new staff regulation in force since 2014:

- Replacing the inflexible slot and session system by hours. The maximum number of interpretation hours per week remains unchanged at 28. Please note that the weekly average before the update of working conditions was 13:25 hours. The maximum of 7 hours interpretation per day (interrupted by a break of 90 minutes) is increased to 7.5 hours per day with the possibility to go up to 8h for a maximum of 6 times per month. (By means of comparison, the maximum number of interpretation hours per day in the working conditions of the Commission is 10h.)
- No booth reinforcement with 4th interpreter for meetings up to 4 hours; and for political group meetings in Strasbourg lasting up to 6 hours (previously 7 hours with 4 interpreters) with the interpreters being free the remainder of the same day.

During the conferral process between the representative of the interpreters' delegation and the member of the cabinet of the Secretary-General numerous meetings were held and every effort was made on both sides. In the final version of the working conditions, which came into force on 1 August 2017, the Secretary-General took on board the interpreters' suggestions whenever possible from an operational and efficiency point of view.

In parallel to updating interpreters working conditions steps have been taken to increase efficiency by adopting management commitments in DG INTE which are based on four principles: increased individual and unit productivity, guaranteed social protection measures, highest quality standards and more fairness in workload distribution between individual interpreters.

§130: "Requests information from the Secretary-General regarding the measures that have been taken since the adoption of the resolution on the discharge on the budget 2014 to achieve more resource efficiency and effectiveness in the organisation of meetings by streamlining conference management in Parliament;"

Conference management encompasses the booking of conference rooms, the coordination of interpretation and various technical and logistical support activities provided for meetings, conferences, exhibitions and other events. Those services are provided by different Directorates-General and have to be booked through different workflows. Responsibility for technical and logistical support in the meetings itself is distributed among several Directorates-General. The Secretary-General has therefore set up a high-level working group to analyse business processes and propose a streamlined conference management concept for Parliament, to be implemented within the framework of a project called 'One-Stop Conference Organisation'. As a first step in the implementation of the project, the Conference Ushers' unit was moved from DG INLO to DG INTE.

As regards the booking of conference rooms, please also see the reply to paragraph 141.

§132: "Calls on the Secretary-General to ensure that cooperation [in the field of security] with the other Institutions of the Union is actively pursued, along with cooperation with the Belgian, French and Luxembourgish authorities;"

The Secretaries-General of the Parliament, the Council and the Commission have agreed that the three institutions should resume a joint position and formalise arrangements with the Belgian, French and Luxembourgish authorities on a number of security-related issues.

On this basis, they develop a close cooperation with the three Members States authorities in particular in case of emergency situations when general risk assessment, threat evaluation and potential change of alert level or communications need a common agreement.

In the case of Belgium, the cooperation already resulted in the definition of a European perimeter secured by the Belgian force, the appointment of a Belgian representative charged to deal with all EU institutions and the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding for the security verification of all external staff working in Parliament's premises.

Similar arrangements are currently under discussion with the French and Luxembourgish authorities.

It has to be recalled that in order to further increase the number of individuals undergoing a security check, Parliament has started to expand the system of security verifications for staff employed by external contractors to the other places of work as well.

In that light, high-level contacts have been initiated with the authorities in Luxembourg. This issue was also raised by President Tajani during his official visit with the Prime Minister of Luxembourg. Although no MoU has been signed yet, the intention is to draft an agreement that is similar to the MoU in place in Belgium as fast as possible. To this end, new legislation is being prepared by the Luxembourgish authorities in order to allow for such a system to be put in place.

As for Strasbourg, French law does not allow for a similar agreement. Parliament's services reiterate, on each possible occasion, the need for such a system, and the benefits for the security of the Institution. Ongoing contacts with the French authorities are aimed at finding a legal solution to be able to set up a similar system of security verifications in France.

It must be noted that since March 2017, the MoU between the Belgian authorities and the EU Institutions is on hold. This is caused by national legal problems on the Belgian side. Belgian authorities have indicated that new legislation should be passed in the last trimester of 2017 which would allow security verifications to be continued. Parliament takes part in an inter-institutional effort to speed up this process, so that the terms agreed upon in the MoU are upheld. In July of this year, the Commissioner responsible, Mr. Oettinger, formally requested the urgent resumption of the security verifications in his role as contact point for the EU Institutions with the Belgian authorities on this file.

§133: "Calls on DG ITEC and DG SAFE to reinforce cyber-defence capabilities in light of the increased threat of cyber-attacks in recent months"

Several important steps have been accomplished to reinforce Parliament's cyber defence capability.

The appointment of the Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) is effective since November 2016. From 1 January 2017, the ICT Security Unit with a Security Management and a Security Operations team has also been set up. These entities are now operational and will have to be reinforced with appropriate staff.

The CISO entity acts as the central contact point for all matters related to IT security in ICT systems. It will deliver quick response to incidents and develop policies regarding information security, ensuring their correct implementation and application at a technical and operational level, whilst implementing security risk assessments and supporting the security development lifecycle for ICT projects.

An ICT security action plan has been drafted and is now to be adopted by the ICT Security Steering Board. It comprises 5 pillars for a cybersecurity strategy, namely defining a cybersecurity governance, defining cybersecurity policies, operating an ICT security assessment, enhancing cyber-defence capabilities and developing a cyber-security culture in Parliament. The action plan is multiannual with the clear objective to permanently improve the maturity level of each pillar of the cybersecurity strategy according to needs and the priority of the Institution.

Among the practical measures, the security of external access to the EP network has been reinforced (2-factor identification, Mobile Device Management, use of a separate WIFI network for visitors), representing an important step of the ICT Security Strategy implementation.

Additionally, the encryption of emails using the inter-institutional TLS - S/MIME solution has been implemented through a pilot project involving both Members and Staff. Voice communications are now encrypted between EP internal telephones. Moreover, additional security measures have been taken to further reinforce the external network connections between European Parliament Information Offices and Parliament headquarters as well as between Parliament buildings in the three places of work.

§139: "Calls on the Bureau to study an incentive scheme for promoting more sustainable and efficient transport for home-work commuting;"

The decision of the Bureau on a roadmap towards full electric mobility for Parliament's car fleet in May 2017 mandated the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps to reduce Parliament's carbon footprint stemming from transport.

These include accompanying measures such as the use of bikes for commuting between work and home, the preparation of Parliament's future parking policy in Brussels to respond to a strengthened regulatory framework of the Brussels authorities as well as the necessary investments into infrastructure. The future parking policy is under preparation and will be presented to the Bureau in due course.

The existing subsidies on annual passes for public transport are also being evaluated in order to further encourage the use of sustainable transport modes and to develop a comprehensive and coherent mobility policy for commuting between work and home.

Following the endorsement of the improved bicycles service for Members and staff by the Quaestors in June 2017, the Bureau approved the new set of rules in July. Service bikes will now become available for use between the workplace and the home/accommodation during a working week at all three places of work.

A Working Group on Sustainable Mobility will also be created by the Secretary-General in order to report back in 2018 with a set of proposals and targets for further reduction of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from transport of persons.

*§140: "Welcomes Parliament's initiative with regard to the implementation of a comprehensive policy to reduce food waste; **calls on Parliament to ensure that food waste is actively prevented by all the catering providers in all the premises of Parliament; calls on Parliament to intensify the practice of donation of unsold food for charity purposes;**"*

Parliament has been implementing a comprehensive policy to drastically reduce food waste since 2013. Food waste (unsold food and leftovers) was around 18% in 2014, 16% in 2015 and stood at 15% in 2016. Benchmarking, best practices and awareness-raising measures are in place, aiming at a 10-15% target. The so-called "my portion" helps to reduce food waste by giving the choice between regular and small servings, at a different price. It will be progressively extended to all dishes in the canteens at the three places of work. Other measures serving the same purpose are reducing the food offer at the end of opening hours and gradually replacing presentation tables by screens.

The current service providers in Brussels and Strasbourg have committed themselves to oversee the management of all products and meals so that food waste is reduced to a minimum.

The main service provider and The Organic Food corner are already donating unsold food to charitable organisations. This operation required the acquisition of special thermoforming and sealing machines and the training of staff operating them. At present, approximately 100 kg of unsold food are donated each week.

Food donation in France is still problematic, due to certain abusive practices mainly by supermarkets. Following the Borzan report on reducing food waste approved in May 2017, the catering provider approached the local French authorities requesting an exemption so that momentary shortcomings in French legislation would not hinder food donation.

*§141: "Assumes that the **introduction of an efficient meeting room reservation system and a facility management register can bring into play considerable potential as regards Parliament's costs and environmental efforts, and calls on the Secretary-General to take that approach forward, accordingly;**"*

As described in the reply to paragraph 105 of the 2014 discharge resolution, all official political and legislative meetings are managed directly by its organisers, notably political groups become the owners and manage meeting rooms during the weeks set aside for their activities (blue weeks), while the committees own and manage the meeting rooms during the committee weeks (pink weeks). This structure matches Parliament's colour-coded calendar as approved by the Conference of Presidents. Thanks to the excellent cooperation between committees and political groups, the arrangement has proven to be both efficient and sound in terms of resource management.

Meeting rooms intended for smaller meetings are largely managed via the Outlook application. Regarding conference rooms, an integrated system (Meeting Request System or MRS) is progressively being developed and put in place, notably within the framework of the project called 'Electronic Room Reservation System/MRS phase 3'.

This will allow the managers of facilities and services to have a better overview of the usage and availability in real time, to digitalise conference organisation processes, as well as to include new types of meetings and services currently not available online.

The one-stop conference organisation project initiated by the Secretary-General will also streamline meeting room reservations. Please also refer to the reply paragraph 130.

§143. *“Recalls that the Court recommended in its annual report that Parliament “review the existing control framework for the implementation of budget appropriations allocated to political groups and in addition, that Parliament provide better guidance through reinforced monitoring on the application by the groups of the rules for authorisation and settlement of expenditure, and for procurement procedures” as regards the financing of European political parties (OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 28)”*

Article 1.4 of the Rules on the Use of Appropriations from Budget Item 400 stipulates that the *“political groups shall be responsible to the institution for the use of appropriations, within the limits of the powers conferred upon them by the Bureau for application of these rules. They shall ensure that the appropriations are used in accordance with these rules and they shall take appropriate action to prevent any expenditure which is not in accordance with these rules. The political group, represented by its chair, shall have authorising officer powers”*. A review of the existing control framework requires the amendment of the above-mentioned Bureau rules.

Parliament's administration is active in guiding political groups to improve their internal financial management. In order to implement the recommendations of the Court, training sessions on the general principles of budgetary management as well as on procurement have been organized by DG Finance in cooperation with the groups. In addition, a guidance note on tendering procedures was drafted and put at their disposal. Parliament's administration remains fully committed to support groups' efforts to improve financial management, and provides regular assistance on specific financial issues identified by them.

§148. *“Is aware of the new regulations, namely Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 and Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1142/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014, which will start to affect the funding of European political parties and foundations for the financial year 2018, and of the important role of the newly established Authority for European political parties and European political foundations, as well as of the on-going discussions in the Bureau of the proposals of the Secretary-General to address a number of issues not resolved by those Regulations; calls on Parliament's internal auditor to make a new audit report on the financing of the European political parties and foundations as soon as possible after the entry into force of the new Regulation;”*

The Internal Auditor's three-year rolling plan already foresees such an assignment. The rolling plan had envisaged a new audit in the area in 2015 on the assumption that proposals for substantial changes in the regulatory framework would be enacted in 2013. However, given that the new Regulation (No. 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council) on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations was adopted only on 22 October 2014, that this only came into effect on 1 January 2017, and that the first full financial cycle will only terminate in 2018, a new audit in this area is not planned to take place until 2019. Nevertheless, Internal Audit will re-assess any need for an earlier assignment as part of its macro risk analysis for the work programme of 2018, which it will undertake during the last quarter of 2017.

§149. *“Considers it to be essential in this respect to look into any deficiencies in the current system of internal and external controls in respect of the avoidance of major irregularities; notes the declarations of the external accountant, EY, that its audits are aimed at obtaining a reasonable assurance that the annual accounts are free of material misstatements and that the entity has complied with in scope of rules and regulations, and that they include examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting the opinion; notes, however, that the examinations do not include investigations of possible fraudulent statements and documents, and therefore provide only for a somewhat limited insight in the financial activities examined; “*

The control of the implementation of the grants awarded to the European political parties and foundations is based on the annual final report of the beneficiaries, to be sent to Parliament by 15 May following the end of the financial year. The relevant Bureau rules⁵ specify in Article 6 paragraph 3 the elements to be contained in this report.

Part of the final report is the “report of an external audit of the beneficiaries' accounts carried out by an independent body or expert authorised under national law to audit accounts and appointed by Parliament for all parties and foundations.” The rules further specify the elements to be certified by the external auditor. These arrangements are based on standard conditions applicable to grants awarded by the Commission or by the Parliament, and have been extended in order to cover the specificities of parties and foundations. The mission entrusted to auditors are in line with current practice used all over the institutions and the private sector.

⁵ Decision of the Bureau of the European Parliament of 29 March 2004 laying down the procedures for implementing Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding (the “Bureau decision”)

The control system follows Article 9(3) of the relevant Regulation⁶ that states that the control of funding for the European political parties and foundations shall be exercised in accordance with the Financial Regulation and its implementing provisions: “Control shall also be exercised on the basis of annual certification by an external and independent audit.”

For each grant procedure, subsequently to the audit conducted by the external auditor, a verification of the final reports is undertaken by the competent services. This verification is based, on the one hand, on the audit report on the annual accounts and on the other hand on any possible additional indication issued by the external auditor. The auditor determines whether the audit report entails an unqualified or a qualified opinion, an observation, or an emphasis of matter.

Parliament’s services evaluate all problematic findings communicated by the external auditors, evaluate the final reports of the beneficiaries, including an analytical review of the general ledgers of all beneficiaries which are requested in addition to the final reports. This is complemented by detailed checks of samples of transactions based on a risk analysis, taking into account the performance of the beneficiaries over the past years.

The samples are selected based on the value of single transactions, the number of transactions involving the same service provider or consultant, knowledge about specific prior issues, incoherencies in the general ledger, divergences between the final budget and the provisional budget, information received from the beneficiaries, from third parties or from public sources etc. In cases of serious issues detected during the desk review, an ad-hoc on the spot audit visit might follow.

Since 2015, financial irregularities have been discovered at four parties out of a total of 15 beneficiaries, and at another four foundations out of a total 15. In several cases, these findings prompted investigation of OLAF or of national regulatory and oversight bodies. Those irregularities led Parliament’s services to recover the funds from the beneficiaries, four of which had then concerns to face their financial obligations and initiated insolvency measures.

§151. “Calls on the Bureau, in so far as the principle of confidentiality allows it, to facilitate access to the underlying documents contained in the final reports of European political parties and foundations and, in particular the accounts and the audits undertaken;”

The audited reports of all beneficiaries (containing final budget, balance sheet and profit and loss account), an annual report on technical assistance, the annual work programme of grants for the current year, lists of parties and foundations with name, address, website, maximum and final grant for all years and beneficiaries since 2004 as well as brief annual reports on the practical implementation of the Regulation are published on the internet site of the European Parliament:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/contracts-and-grants/en/20150201PVL00101/Political-parties-and-foundations> .

⁶ Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding

For any other document and information, access has to be requested individually according to the relevant Regulation⁷. Decisions on access take into account the applicable legal requirements while balancing the legitimate interest of the grant beneficiary of confidentially of its personal and commercial data and the legitimate interest of third persons or of the public on transparency regarding public expenditure (see in particular Article 4 of Regulation 1049/2001).

Even if Article 6(1) of the Statute for Members of the European Parliament⁸ entitles, in principle, Members to inspect any files held by Parliament, this right also needs to be balanced with the right of the data subject as mentioned-above, i.e. the beneficiaries and their members, on the protection of their personal data. Therefore, a decision on access needs to be taken on a case by case basis.

⁷ Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents

⁸ Decision of the European Parliament of 28 September 2005 adopting the Statute for Members of the European Parliament