

REPLIES TO AND ACTIONS TAKEN

**ON THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION
OF 14 MAY 2020 ON DISCHARGE IN RESPECT OF
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENERAL
BUDGET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE
FINANCIAL YEAR 2018**

§16: "Notes that two audits, one on visitors' groups and the other on the parliamentary assistance allowance, are part of the 2019 activity and will be reported in early 2020; asks the internal auditor to inform Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control on both outcomes as soon as they are available;"

In accordance with Paragraph 4 (t) of his Charter, the Internal Auditor ensures "...the effective and timely communication of all audit reports, when adopted, to the Audit Panel, the Secretary-General, and to the Director-General with responsibility for the audited service."

The reporting consultation phases of the audits of Visitors' Groups and of the Parliamentary Assistance Allowance are in progress. In accordance with normal practice, the Internal Auditor presents its Annual Report during the hearing organised by the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) in the framework of the discharge procedure. The presentation by the Internal Auditor of the Internal Auditor's Annual Report for 2019 will take place in the framework of the 2019 discharge procedure.

§17: "Deeply regrets that the internal auditor's report is not public; insists that this report be made public each year, and that it be sent to Members at the same time that it is sent to the Parliament's President and Secretary-General; deplores that, for the 2018 report, the decision was taken in January 2020 that Members may only view this report upon request, applying the secure reading room procedure; strongly believes that by limiting access to this document, which concerns the use of public funds, it gives the regrettable impression that there is something to hide;"

In accordance with Article 118(9) of the Financial Regulation, the reports and findings of the internal auditor, as well as the report of the Union institution concerned, shall be accessible to the public after validation by the internal auditor of the action taken for their implementation.

§19: "Deplores the fact that no action has been taken in response to some of the recommendations in Parliament's resolution on discharge for 2017, and that the discharge follow-up document does not provide any justification for this; stresses the importance of having more frequent discussions with the Secretary-General on issues concerning Parliament's budget and its implementation in the Committee on Budgetary Control;"

Parliament's resolution on the discharge for 2017 as adopted by the Plenary on 26 March 2019 asked the Bureau to take action on a number of issues. As it is indicated in the reply to Question 1 of the questionnaire in preparation for the EP discharge for 2018, based on proposals submitted by the Secretary-General, the Bureau already considered the majority of items described in the reply. These include, inter alia, the following:

- J the new rules concerning Members' trainees adopted by the Bureau on 10 December 2018 which entered into force on 2 July 2019;
- J the new list of expenses for the General Expenditure Allowance adopted by the Bureau on 2 July 2018 that contains the most common examples of eligible expenditure of each category referred to in Article 28 IMMS;
- J the decision of the Bureau of 10 December 2018 modifying the rules applicable to the additional voluntary pension scheme (by increasing the retirement age from 63 to 65 years and introducing a levy of 5 % to pension payments for future pensioners) with a view to improving the sustainability of the voluntary pension scheme;

- J) as outlined in the answer to §47, on 13 January 2020, the Bureau approved new and more ambitious targets for gender balance in senior and middle management posts in the EP Secretariat to be achieved by 2024: 50% female Heads of unit, 50% female Directors and 40% female Directors-General. Currently (30 June 2020) 38% of Heads of Unit are women. With the appointment of nine new female Directors by the Bureau on 15 June 2020, Parliament is approaching gender parity at the level of Directors on 1 January 2021, thereby taking a major step towards achieving the targets adopted.

Every year the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) organises a hearing in the presence of the Secretary-General and the Vice-President responsible for budgetary affairs for an exchange of views in the context of the replies provided to the written questions in preparation of the discharge procedure. A second hearing is organised in order to allow the Secretary-General to report on the actions taken to follow-up on the Parliament's resolution on discharge. For the Secretary-General both meetings represent an important opportunity to inform the Committee on Budgetary Control about the implementation of Parliament's budget and ongoing activities.

§21: *"Reiterates its call on the Bureau to follow-up all discharge decisions, as follows from Rule 25 of and Annex V to the Rules of Procedure and Articles 6 and 166 of the Financial Regulation; 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 to 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 Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control on all projects with a significant budgetary impact that have been submitted to the Bureau; reiterates the need for the Bureau to substantially improve, in a proactive manner, the transparency of its decision-making procedure;"*

The Bureau's responsibilities are listed in the Rules of Procedure, especially in Rule 25 thereof, and in other rules and decisions adopted by the Bureau or the Conference of Presidents. The President directs the activities of the Bureau, in accordance with Rule 22(1) of the Rules of Procedure.

Due to the nature of its responsibilities, the meetings of the Bureau are open to those Members and staff entitled to attend its meetings in a specific capacity. Consequently, the documents and other information are primarily intended for these persons. Apart from the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, the meetings of the Bureau are attended by staff members of the EP administration, staff from Cabinets of the President and the Secretary-General, Vice-Presidents' and Quaestors' management assistants, staff representatives of all political groups, staff of the secretariat of the Bureau and the Quaestors.

The website of the Bureau on Parliament's intranet provides a wide overview on Bureau's activities. Members and staff can find information on the composition of the Bureau and individual responsibilities of the Vice-Presidents and Quaestors; the calendar of meetings, agendas and minutes; the working groups of the Bureau; the Notices of the Bureau; the Compendium of rules, which contains all the rules adopted by the Bureau and the Conference of Presidents.

The website is updated regularly. The draft agendas of Bureau meetings can be found in the course of the week preceding a meeting and the minutes, except for the *in camera* parts of the Bureau meetings, as soon as they are adopted by the Bureau. As per standard practice, the draft agendas and minutes of the Bureau, except for the *in camera* parts, are subsequently also proactively published in Parliament's Public Register of Documents, and thus available from outside Parliament.

Moreover, Bureau decisions of general implementation, especially regarding the introduction of or amendments to Bureau rules and decisions, are communicated to all Members via Bureau Notices. Four such Notices were issued in 2018 in relation with:

-) the 2019 Open Doors Days of the European Parliament and Europe Day festivities in Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg;
-) new Rules on the functioning of the Advisory Committee dealing with harassment complaints concerning Members of the European Parliament and on the financial consequences of a proven case of harassment of an APA;
-) new Rules governing the Posting of Notices;
-) adjustment of parliamentary allowances and Voluntary Pension Fund for Members.

§27: "Regrets that, despite the fact that Parliament's Committee on Budgets rejected the budget requested in order to create an observatory on artificial intelligence, this initiative still seems to be ongoing in the form of a working group; is strongly concerned by the apparent circumvention of a democratic decision taken by Members, which sets a very unfortunate precedent; recommends that the activity of this working group be immediately interrupted until the budgetary authority has decided to provide it with a budget;"

In June 2019, Parliament's administration set up an informal working group at administrative level without committing budgetary resources. One purpose of this working group is to exchange information to avoid that the knowledge on Artificial Intelligence is fragmented across various units and directorates of the administration. This informal working group identifies in-house technical skills in different policy areas and exchanges information about the different activities of committee secretariats, policy departments and EPRS in the area of Artificial Intelligence. It has not been involved in any policy-making activity.

§31: "Notes with concern that there were at least 24 breaches of the Code of Conduct between 2012 and 2018 which were not sanctioned; stresses that if breaches are not adequately sanctioned, Members are less likely to comply with the Code of Conduct; calls on the President to carefully assess any alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct and, if applicable, impose an adequate sanction on the respective Members;"

The procedure applied in the event of possible breaches of the Code of Conduct is enshrined in Article 8 of the Code of Conduct. Accordingly, where there is reason to think that a Member may have breached the Code of Conduct, the President may refer the matter to the Advisory Committee on the Conduct of Members which, after having examined the circumstances of the alleged breach, on the basis of its findings shall make a recommendation to the President on a possible decision. If, taking into account that recommendation, the President concludes that the Member concerned has breached the Code of Conduct, he or she, after hearing the Member, shall adopt a reasoned decision laying down a penalty which should be notified to the Member concerned.

Pursuant to Rule 177, the Bureau is responsible to examine any appeals lodged by Members against sanctions imposed to them by the President, and not breaches of the Code of Conduct.

§32: "Takes note of the Rules Governing Transport Arrangements for Members in the European Parliament's Places of Work ('the Rules'); considers the provisions setting out conditions for the use of official cars on a permanent basis by the President, Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General and each political group chair in the Rules to be too vague; calls on the Bureau to revise the Rules with a view to introducing stricter conditions on the use of such cars;"

DG INLO executes transport of Members in European Parliament's places of work in accordance with the Rules in force as set out in the Bureau decision of 30 November 2011.

In this regard, article 2 of the Rules Governing Transport Arrangements for Members in the European Parliament's Places of Work provides for the following:

Article 2 – Assignment of cars

- 1. Official cars shall be assigned on a permanent basis to the President, to the Secretary-General, to the Deputy Secretary-General and to each political group chair, who may use them in connection with the activities of their political group. Where he or she so requests, one additional car may be assigned to the President to cover specific needs.*
- 2. At the request of the Office of the President, official cars may also be assigned on specific occasions to the Vice-Presidents when they are representing the President on official missions.*
- 3. Former Presidents who are still Members of the European Parliament shall have the right to use an official car for two and a half years following completion of their term of office.*
- 4. By decision of the Secretary-General, official vehicles may be assigned on an exceptional basis to Members with reduced mobility or for security reasons or in other cases where it is in the interests of Parliament.*

§33: "Is of the opinion that the protection of whistleblowers is an integral element of democracy and it is crucial in preventing and deterring unlawful activities and wrongdoings; recalls that, among others, accredited parliamentary assistants (APAs) are in a vulnerable position due to their contract of employment; notes with concern the Secretary-General's acknowledgement that "whistleblowing rules are applicable to accredited parliamentary assistants but that the Parliament cannot provide employment protection"; as they are dependent on their individual Member; calls on the Secretary-General to take that factor into account when APAs act as whistleblowers, and to look to extend the contract protection options granted by Parliament for APAs who are victims of harassment to APAs who act as whistleblowers;"

Parliament treats requests for assistance and protection from staff very seriously. The competent Appointing authority replies as a matter of urgency and takes appropriate and, where needed, immediate measures.

Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APAs), as all other staff members, have a right to benefit from a legal and practical assistance of the Institution, whenever an attack by reason of his or her position or duties, or inappropriate behaviour in the working environment, is at hand.

This right is guaranteed by the Staff Regulations and Parliament's Rules of Procedure, which prohibit harassment by colleagues and Members, and offer assistance and whistleblower protection, including in relation to APAs.

Parliament has set out a comprehensive framework to turn these provisions into practice. This includes the Bureau rules of 2 July 2018 on the Advisory Committee dealing with harassment complaints concerning members of the European Parliament, and the Internal Rules on whistleblowing of 4 December 2015. In its administrative practice, Parliament places particular importance on witness protection and uses the leeway offered by the Court's case-law in this respect, to the extent compatible with the rights of the defence of the person accused.

The specificity in relation to APAs is that they are employed to work under the direction of a specific Member. Thus, it is not possible for them to be transferred to another post in the EP by decision of the administration only. Parliament may not unilaterally change this requirement, as it is enshrined in legislation.

Yet, the Bureau has adopted a provision whereby where it is established that an APA has been a victim of harassment by a Member, the APA's salary has to be paid by the MEP from the parliamentary assistance allowance until the end of the APA's contract and the Member shall not be entitled to the provision of any further services by that assistant. Moreover, other tailor-made forms of assistance may be available for APAs, depending on the case, in accordance with the Staff Regulations' provisions on assistance.

§34: *"Underlines the fact that current rules on the termination of contracts for APAs do not provide for the possibility of a termination by mutual consent", which would be a way to recognise the special relation between Members and assistants, where both parties can acknowledge that mutual trust no longer exists, and benefit from a common solution without undermining the social rights of APAs; asks the Secretary-General to find a solution for the fact that APA's salaries can only be paid to Belgian bank accounts, which runs counter to the idea of a single monetary and payments union;"*

Pursuant to article 139(d) of the CEOS (Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union), APA contracts may be terminated before their initial expiry date either due to breach of the mutual trust at the request of the APA or the Member. In both cases, the end of the contract is subject to a notice period from 1 to 3 months depending on the length of the contract. In case of a request by the Member, the procedures established by the Administration and the notice period are a guarantee for the protection of the rights of the APA. It is worth noting that in many Member States, including Belgium, the termination of an employment contract by mutual consent is assimilated to a resignation: the worker agrees with the termination, therefore the State is not required to provide additional protection.

) **On the issue of the bank account on which the salary is paid:**

According to article 40 of the Implementing measures for Title VII of the CEOS (Bureau Decision of 14 April 2014): *"Amounts payable to assistants shall be paid in euros in the country in which they perform their duties"*. This means generally Belgium.

Any revision of the Implementing measures referred to above lies with the Bureau.

§35: *"Reiterates its concern about the alleged practice by Members of obliging APAs to undertake missions, particularly to Strasbourg, without mission orders, without mission costs or even 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 out of their own pockets, they are also not covered by workplace insurance; reiterates its calls on the Secretary-General to investigate this alleged practice and to report on this **by the end of the year**;"*

Every mission undertaken by an APA outside his or her working place must be covered by a mission order. Sending an APA on a mission not covered by a validated mission order is contrary to the Staff Regulations.

By Quaestors' Notice 37/2020 dated 26 June 2020, Members were reminded of the procedure for the validation of mission orders for APAs. Mission requests must be submitted together with the invitation and the programme of events to be attended. In case of missions without costs paid by the Member, he or she must provide DG PERS with a justification with regard to the source(s) that will cover each category of costs (transport and/or subsistence, and/or accommodation).

§36: *"Reiterates its call on the Conference of Presidents and the Bureau to reconsider the possibility for APAs, under certain conditions to be determined, to accompany Members on official Parliament delegations and missions, as already requested by several Members; calls on the Secretary-General to investigate the budgetary consequences, and the organisation and logistics of those missions;"*

The Bureau decision of 2 October 2000 (last revised on 10 April 2014) on "Committee missions outside the three places of work" as well as the "Implementing provisions governing the work of delegations and missions outside the EU" (Conference of Presidents decision of 29 October 2015) explicitly prohibit the participation of APAs to official EP delegations and committee missions. The Bureau and the Conference of Presidents on 28 May and 31 May 2018 respectively reiterated this stance when adopting the semi-annual programmes for committee travel outside three places of work (within and outside the EU).

Allowing APAs to attend official EP delegations including committee missions would not only have substantial financial consequences (see below) but also affect organisational aspects. In fact, the participation of assistants could significantly increase the size of EP delegations and make the planning of the programme and meetings more complex (meeting venues, transport and accommodation facilities, etc).

Parliament's responsible services estimated the financial impact of APAs' participation in official mission delegations based on the following elements:

-)] travel cost (flight in business class for missions outside Europe as defined by IATA);
-)] accommodation cost applying the hotel cost ceiling defined by the rules;
-)] daily allowance applying the official rate defined by the rules;
-)] the 2019 average mission cost reimbursed for one mission delegation was equal to EUR 2 935 (EUR 1 389 inside the EU and EUR 3 250 outside the EU);
-)] 36 mission delegations in 2019 (7 within the EU; 29 outside the EU);

- J) a maximum of three APAs can go on a mission delegation, but only when the chair, the rapporteur and the shadow attend the delegation meetings.

Based on the 2019 average mission costs, the 2019 number of mission delegations and three APAs per mission as stated above, the total estimated costs for APAs' mission delegations amount to EUR 311 954,52 (EUR 29 169,56 inside the EU and EUR 282 784,96 outside the EU).

§37: *"Calls on Parliament to fully adapt its own internal rules in the Staff Regulations to the recently adopted Directive (EU) 2019/1937¹ on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, including by setting up secure channels for reporting; further requests that Parliament guarantees the same level of protection to whistle-blowers as it does to victims of harassment; requests that the Secretary-General institute mandatory training for line managers to raise awareness among parliamentary staff on their whistle-blower protections and their duty under the Staff Regulations to report illegal activities or maladministration;"*

The protection of the whistle-blowers in Parliament is laid down in Article 22c of the Staff Regulations. A framework of internal procedures related to the protection of officials and other agents acting as whistle-blowers is laid down in the Internal rules implementing Article 22c of the Staff Regulation of 4 December 2015.

The competence to adopt a framework on internal procedures related to the protection of APAs who report breaches of Union law upon the MEPs lies with the Bureau.

With respect to awareness raising of the protection of whistle-blowers, DG PERS envisages organising a series of workshops on the topic under the auspices of its Middle Management Action Programme (MMAP), accompanied by a new factsheet in the handbook for Heads of Unit. This approach will have a high impact in terms of awareness raising.

§41: *"Is worried about the number of members of staff on long-term sick leave and the steep rise in the number of cases of burnout, and is concerned that some of those cases may relate to exhaustion and disturbed work-life balance; is particularly concerned about understaffing and, at the same time, considers that it is hard to justify the expansion in senior management positions, which is leading to an imbalanced, top-heavy management structure; calls on the administration to adopt a proactive approach towards the staff concerned, to carefully evaluate the staff workload and to ensure a balanced distribution of tasks; asks for a report on measures taken in response to long-term sick leave and burnout by 30 June 2020;"*

In 2014, there were 50 Directorates for a total of approximately 7 734 EP secretariat staff members which amounts to 155 staff per Directorate. In 2020, there are 56 Directorates for a total of approximately 8 880 EP secretariat staff members corresponding to 159 staff per Directorate.

The balanced distribution of tasks is an inherent responsibility of line managers and the Resource Directors of the respective Directorates-General.

¹ Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law (OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17).

No exact data exist on the incidence of burnout in the EP because medical leave certificates do not allow to distinguish between different medical pathologies. However, according to the experience of Parliament's medical services there has neither been an increase in the number of suspected cases nor does the numbers differ from those in the other EU institutions.

In 2018, DG PERS launched the "Mind Matters" campaign to raise awareness and combat stigma related to mental health. Several seminars were organised in the course of 2018 and 2019 (e.g.: "Taking care of broken minds - mindfulness", "Food and Mind", "Psychosocial aspects at work", "How to boost mental strength at work").

An important part of the campaign was the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. As of the beginning of 2019, around 100 staff members were trained in MHFA in Brussels and Luxembourg.

Parliament is currently evaluating the possibility of conducting a psychosocial risk assessment to detect psychosocial risks in work environment and to develop targeted action plans to either eliminate them, or mitigate their negative impact, and thus reduce adverse effects on staff health and organizational performance. The tender specifications are being finalised and preparations are advanced.

In order to better support staff on sick leave, DG PERS has put in place a new approach to absence management called Early Intervention and Return to Work. In line with the new approach, the Medical Leave Service takes a proactive role and reaches out to staff members on sick leave. Medical officers intervene in early stages of the sick leave and support staff members in returning to work.

§43: *"Considers that it is essential, to this end, for staff representatives to be heard when the Bureau discusses general matters affecting staff policy: asks the Secretary-General to take the appropriate measures to implement this crucial necessity;"*

Before the competent authority adopts internal rules governing staff policy the Staff Committee is formally consulted.

Pursuant to Rule 24 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, the Bureau consists of the President and the 14 Vice-Presidents of Parliament. The Quaestors are members of the Bureau in an advisory capacity. The meetings of the Bureau are closed to the public. Participants invited to the Bureau meetings do not have a right to be heard or to discuss issues with the Bureau. All participants other than the members of the Bureau are present on the meeting only in order to assist the Bureau, if such assistance is considered necessary or useful.

§45: *"Recalls the findings and recommendations of the European Ombudsman in joint cases 488/2018/KR and 514/2018/K, as well as Parliament's resolution of 18 April 2018, notably that officials from staff representative bodies sit on Parliament's senior management selection panels, and invites the Secretary-General to further improve the procedures of appointment of high ranking official towards more transparency and equality; calls, furthermore, for consistency to be ensured when it comes to external publications of senior management posts and diligence in the publication of these posts as and when they fall vacant; calls on Parliament's administration to report annually on the appointment of high ranking officials;"*

For the last publications of senior management posts in Parliament, the President decided to guarantee the widest possible choice of candidates under the Staff Regulations. Thus, the posts have been consistently published internally, inter-institutionally and externally. Furthermore, the President requested that the Advisory Committee for the Appointment of Senior Officials presented to the Bureau recommendations for at least two candidates per post representing if possible both genders.

It is important to notice that the selection procedure provided for in Article 29 (2) for recruiting senior managers is not a competition procedure as mentioned by the Staff Regulation itself (article 29-2 : “*a procedure other than the competition procedure*”). This means that this procedure is not governed by Annex III to the Staff Regulations. According to the constant case-law (C-289/81, *Mavridis/Parlement*, p. 15-16) and within the framework of that special procedure, the selection board shall not consist of members appointed by the Staff Committee.

The Secretary-General adopted a more gender-balanced composition of the Advisory Committee for the Appointment of Senior Officials in 2018 by appointing a second permanent female Member. All appointments made by the Bureau are rapidly communicated to all EP staff.

With the appointment of nine new female Directors by the Bureau on 15 June 2020, Parliament is approaching parity at the level of Directors with 48% female and 52% male Directors on 1 January 2021, thereby taking a major step towards achieving the targets adopted. Furthermore, the gender balance of the Secretariat’s senior management is covered in the annual HR Report, which is published in relation to developments during the previous year.

§46: *"Profoundly regrets the lack of career prospects for contract staff; invites the Secretary-General to assess the risks relating to employing growing numbers of contract staff, including the danger of creating a two-tier staffing structure within Parliament; insists that core permanent positions and tasks should be performed by permanent staff;"*

The last reform of the Staff Regulations and the budgetary cuts adopted within the MFF for the period 2014-2020 led to 6% reduction of the EP permanent staff by the end of 2019. In addition, the 2017 budgetary procedure brought an additional reduction of the administration’s staff as a result of an increase of staff of political groups by 76 posts. In total, the administration’s staff was reduced by 7 % between 2014 and 2019, regardless of a constant increase in competences and related workload in Parliament since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty.

In this context, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, the administration has put in place a contract staff strategy allowing more efficient use of contract staff instead of permanent staff, for example for tasks to be discontinued in the foreseeable future due to increased digitalisation or for very specialised profiles needed for a limited period of time.

However, most of the increase in contract staff over recent years was mainly due to the strategic projects to internalise Parliament's security services and drivers (673 contract staff at the end of 2018), inter alia, to improve security and the working conditions of this particular group of staff. The increase in structural needs in the DGs was less significant.

As of 2020, an improved procedure to manage the DGs' contract staff recruitment requests is applied in order to limit the increase in the number of contract agents. The Secretary-General strictly monitors the budget granted to the DGs.

Furthermore, a "pool" has been set up where contract agents no longer needed by one DG are made available to all other DGs. In this way they can finish their existing contract in another DG where the recruitment of an extra contract agent can be avoided.

§47: "Is convinced that the attractiveness of Parliament as a workplace is a key component of its success; draws attention to the difficulties encountered in recruiting some nationalities; calls on the Secretary-General to insist on the need for real geographical balance in terms of proportional representations of all Member States at all levels, including top management levels; recognises the very positive steps taken in order to achieve gender balance; calls for urgent action to achieve better gender balance at all levels, including directors-general level;"

The European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) needs to make sure that their laureates represent a reasonable balance of representation of all EU nationalities. In order to improve the selection procedures and among others to tackle the issue of geographical balance at competition stage, a Special Working Group currently reviews the way EPSO is conducting competitions for the Institutions. A positive outcome of this reform is very much awaited.

For Parliament, the Secretary-General closely monitors the geographical balance of staff in the administration. On the basis of the ratio of the number of staff to the number of Members from that same Member State, there is no difference between older and newer Member States in terms of over or underrepresentation. In fact, the five highest ratios concern staff from Belgium, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia and Malta, while the five lowest those from Poland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Cyprus. The geographical balance expressed in ratio of managers to Members originating from the same Member State is analysed in the reply to §48 below.

On 13 January 2020 the Bureau approved, on proposal of the Secretary-General, new and more ambitious targets for gender balance in senior and middle management posts in the EP Secretariat to be achieved by 2024: 50% female Heads of unit, 50% female Directors and 40% female Directors-General. To date (16 September 2020) 38% of Heads of Unit are women. With the appointment of nine new female Directors by the Bureau on 15 June 2020, Parliament is approaching gender parity at the level of Directors on 1 January 2021, thereby taking a major step towards achieving the targets adopted. The High-Level Group for gender equality and diversity adopted a draft gender action plan in its meeting on 25 June. On 6 July 2020, the Bureau endorsed all commitments laid down in the draft and adopted the gender action plan.

§48: "Regrets the continuing under-representation of countries which joined the Union after 2004, especially in more senior posts, the problem being that, whilst citizens from the new Member States are indeed taken on, more from the old Member States are being promoted, which results in an ever-widening gulf between the old and the new Member States; calls for this situation to be rectified;"

The promotion system used in the EP administration guarantees full transparency and equality for all staff no matter from which Member State they come. In line with the Staff Regulations the system is solely based on merit.

What seems at first sight to be an underrepresentation of nationals of Member States that joined in 2004 and after is the direct consequence of the 2004 reform of the Staff Regulations. The reform resulted in the recruitment of officials from these states, as well as from any other Member State, mainly at entry grade AD 5. For the appointment as a Head of Unit the minimum grade of AD 8.2 is required. A standard career from AD 5 to AD 8.2 in Parliament takes approximately ten years. The experience and competences gained in middle management posts are prerequisites for senior management posts. It takes time to gain such experience and competences. Directors are appointed in grade AD14. This explains the relative underrepresentation of some newer Member States.

The Secretary-General closely monitors this aspect. At the moment, the EP has middle managers from all EU Member States on which future appointments of senior managers can build. The pool of Heads of Unit from the newer Member States is constantly growing. The ratio of managers to MEPs from that same Member State evolves constantly in favour of managers from the newer Member States. In fact, currently Slovenia and Lithuania count among the seven Member States with the highest ratio of managers to MEPs. On the other hand the Netherlands count among those with the lowest ratio.

§49: "Points out that in internal competitions between 2014 and 2019, 30 people were appointed to the highest AD9 pay grade, of whom 16 were from two large old Member States, so that there was a striking number of appointments of staff from these two countries over the whole legislative cycle, and asks the Secretary-General to explain the reason for this disproportionate result;"

The results of internal competitions are solely based on merit. Selection boards operate independently with full involvement of the representation of the staff committee. The Appointing Authority is therefore not in a position to comment on the decisions taken by the boards.

§50: "Regrets the difficulty of recruiting staff at lower grades in Luxembourg, especially in the assistant-secretaries category; stresses that the introduction of a correction coefficient that takes account of the higher living costs in this place of work together with recruitment at higher grades is necessary to solve this structural problem; calls for European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO)-based recruitments to be reformed so that it is better able to meet the institutions' needs, including through shorter recruitment procedures;"

According to the third paragraph of Article 64 of the Staff Regulation, no correction coefficient shall be applicable in Belgium and Luxembourg. Any change to the current state of play would require a revision of the Staff Regulations and would be justified. The institutions based in Luxembourg are looking into possible solutions to enhance the attractiveness of Luxembourg also for these categories of staff.

An inter-institutional Special Working Group, chaired by the Director-General of DG PERS, worked in the second half of 2019 on ways to reform EPSO and its procedures. The work is currently ongoing with the aim, inter alia, to reduce the length of EPSO selection procedures. Furthermore, the Court of Auditors is carrying out a performance audit of EPSO and the Special Report is expected to be adopted in autumn 2020.

A preliminary factual analysis that the Court of Auditors addressed to the Secretary-General in this context shows that the selection process organised by EPSO is not adapted to small-scale, targeted competitions, which are those most suited to the current recruitment needs of EU institutions. The Bureau took note of these preliminary findings and instructed the Secretary-General to organise specialist competitions in house when appropriate.

§51: "Recalls that Rule 11 of the Rules of Procedure has introduced an obligation for rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and committee chairs to publish information on meetings held with interest representatives in the context of their reports; notes with satisfaction that, since the start of the new legislature, the necessary infrastructure is available on Parliament's website to allow Members to publish scheduled meetings with interested representatives; invites the secretariat to disseminate detailed information and organise trainings in order to make it easier for Member's offices to abide fully to this obligation; regrets that the current infrastructure does not include a process for Members and APAs to provide suggestions and their feedback for improvement based on user experience; calls on the Parliamentary services to develop a feedback questionnaire on a yearly basis and for the results to be included in a report on the use of the tool; welcomes the fact that the Secretary-General has instructed Parliament's services to connect the tool to the Transparency Register and Legislative Observatory and encourages any effort that would further improve this tool, including by providing access for processing of the data provided by Members in the Parliament website infrastructure concerning meetings with interest representatives in a machine readable format, providing an option to link the meeting to membership in a delegation, to indicate that the meeting took place at staff-level, to link the entries on Parliament's website to the Member's own website and to make this infrastructure available in all official languages of the Union; further calls on Parliament to improve its communication towards Members about the obligation for rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and committee chairs to publish such meetings;"

Detailed information on Members' obligations under Rule 11(3) has been sent by email to all MEPs on two occasions: on 2 July 2019 and on 6 November 2019. Attachments to these emails gave information on which meetings to publish and how to use the IT tool made available on the Member's respective page on Parliament's website. Information has also been provided to the secretariats of parliamentary committees so they can raise awareness of these obligations with their committee chairs as well as rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs appointed in their committees. Parliament's IT services regularly follow up on client satisfaction.

A dedicated training-course on the Transparency Register, "Who is lobbying you?", is available in the Learn.MEP catalogue.

The course covers the following topics:

-) Applicable rules of procedure and internal rules;
-) Voluntary legislative footprint;
-) Rationale and functioning of the EU Transparency Register;
-) Concrete examples on how to find summaries of lobbying activities for a particular organisation or stakeholder: what, where, who and how much they spend on directly or indirectly influencing EU decision-making;
-) Advantages linked to the Transparency Register.

In this context, it should be recalled that Political groups have been proactively provided with the offer of specific trainings for their Members, which both individual Members and national delegations have made regular use of since the beginning of the legislative term. In addition, regular information sessions and trainings remain available for all EP staff on Parliament's Transparency policy and the Transparency Register.

§52: *"Welcomes this positive step towards increased transparency and the possibility for all Members who wish to do so, to be able to publish this information via the infrastructure of Parliament's website, even if the Member is not a rapporteur, shadow rapporteur or committee chair; considers that this increased transparency helps European citizens to better understand the work of their Members; regrets therefore that this meeting declaration infrastructure only exists in English and not in all the official languages of the Union;"*

The request to provide the tool in all languages will be further analysed on the basis of the first year of its use.

§53: *"In addition to the joint Parliament and Commission report on the activities of the Transparency Register, requests Parliament to draft an annual detailed report on the interest representatives and other organisation that were given access to Parliament's premises."*

On 31 December 2018, there were 11 901 entities registered in the Transparency Register. 2 510 of them requested accreditation for their representatives to access the European Parliament.

| | |
|---|--------------|
| I - Professional consultancies/law firms/self-employed consultants | 1 320 |
| II - In-house lobbyists and trade/business professional associations | 654 |
| III - Non-governmental organisations | 326 |
| IV - Think tanks, research and academic institutions | 29 |
| V - Organisations representing churches and religious communities | 64 |
| VI - Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc. | 117 |
| Total | 2 510 |

In 2018, 15 261 individuals were accredited to Parliament as interest group representatives. The EP registered a total of 51 804 entrances throughout the year.

Furthermore, a total of 183 Regional, Local Authorities and Public Authorities requested accreditation for 511 people to enter Parliament in 2018.

According to the relevant provisions of the Transparency Register, regional and public authorities are not expected to subscribe, but may register if they so wish.

Finally, representatives of States, territories or communities which are directly involved in institutional relations with Parliament, as well as representatives of the UN agencies or international organisations assimilated to the United Nations, may also request long-term access cards to Parliament. This possibility has also been extended, on a case-by-case basis, to entities of third countries employing non-diplomatic staff. In 2018, a total of 82 entities requested accreditation for 316 individuals.

§56: "Notes that the results of roll-call votes in plenary should be available in an open, machine-readable format and easily visible on Parliament's website; calls on Parliament therefore to publish the machine-readable version of the roll-call vote results next to the non-machine-readable versions, on the plenary minutes' webpage;"

In the framework of a continued effort to develop an active open data policy for plenary documents, making them easily available and in a wider array of formats, EP services are working on a project to publish machine-readable version of the roll-call vote results next to the non-machine-readable formats on the plenary minutes' webpage. Such changes are foreseen to come into effect during the last quarter of 2020.

§57: "Notes that the revised rules governing the payment of financial contributions for sponsored visitors groups entered into force on 1 January 2017; calls on the Secretary-General to release the assessment of these rules without delay; is of the opinion the current system disregards the fluctuating accommodation and transport costs and fails to keep pace with inflation, and strongly calls for a review of the system for calculating the financial contribution for the groups of visitors as soon as possible in order, inter alia, to avoid Members being able to derive any material benefit from the system; calls on the Bureau to generalise the system of reimbursement based on submission of bills for visitors groups; reiterates its call to remove the possibility of appointing an APA as the head of a group;"

In addition to the standard continuous monitoring of the operational situation done by the Visits and Seminars Unit, the Bureau Working Group on Information and Communication endorsed a major assessment at its meeting of April 2018.

Concerning the question of the fluctuating accommodation and transport costs and the question of inflation, it should be noted that, in accordance with Article 13 of the revised Bureau Rules governing the reception of groups of visitors, the financial contribution is intended to cover part of the eligible expenditure incurred by the sponsored group. The revised rules offer Members more flexibility to adapt to the different needs of the groups, by allowing the interchangeability of the use of funds resulting from the calculation method based on three factors (travel, accommodation, meals and minor local expenses).

A decision to adjust one or more of these three factors would need to be taken by the Questors (Art 17, 18 of the rules).

Given the total costs declared by groups and the number of recoveries and amounts returned to the European Parliament since the entry into force of the revised Bureau rules, no decision to increase the ceilings has been taken.

The financial compensation system which is applicable since 2017 was put in place in order to ensure maximum transparency when it comes to the handling of EU public funds. It is based on the declaration of real costs actually incurred during the visit (as detailed in the expenses breakdown reported by the head of group after the visit, using the document foreseen in Annex II of the Rules (Final financial) and a subsequent verification process by Parliament services. Furthermore this is backed up by a control of supporting documents made ex-post on a number of groups.

This setup guarantees that the information provided in the final financial declaration (Annex II) is accurate enough to minimize any possibility of errors, while at the same time keeping the overall control effort at a manageable level.

Concerning the use of APAs as heads of groups, the revised rules have introduced the possibility for Members to alternatively designate either a paying agent or a travel agency to hold the financial responsibility for the group.

In April 2018, the Bureau Working Group on Information and Communication acknowledged that the main objectives of the revision had been met, namely: cash payments are currently avoided as much as possible and Members make use of the possibility offered to give the financial responsibility of sponsored visits to professionals (i.e. paying agents or travel agencies).

Since the introduction of the revised rules, the percentage of groups with an APA as Head of group has sharply decreased compared to previous years.

§59: *"Commends Parliament's commitment to green public procurement; notes that Parliament's objective is to increase the value-weighted percentage of contracts among certain priority products classified as 'Green', 'Very Green' or 'Green by Nature'; notes that 44.9 % of contracts by value in priority product categories were classified as 'Green' or 'Very Green', or 'Green by Nature' in 2018; points out that, when all contracts classified as 'Green by Nature', regardless of the product category, are included in the figure, the greenness of Parliament's contracts increases to 55,8 % for 2018, which is close to the intermediate target of 60 %; underlines the need to develop further green public procurement by setting ambitious targets for greening contracts in the medium term;"*

In 2019, 89.13% of contracts by value in priority categories were classified as "Green", "Very Green", or "Green by Nature" under the current classification system.

On 16 December 2019, on proposal of the Secretary-General, the Bureau adopted a new ambitious key performance indicator target for green public procurement (GPP). On average 90% of contracts in the following priority product categories should be classified as "Green" or "Green by Nature" over the 2020-2024 period: Buildings, cleaning, food and catering, furniture, gardening and green areas, IT and imaging equipment, lighting, office supplies, paper, sanitary and water equipment, textiles, vehicles and transport, waste management. These priority categories encompass products and services with the highest environmental impact, representing a large share of Parliament's total purchases by number and amount.

§62: *"Is of the opinion that after the declaration of Climate Emergency, Parliament shall lead by example and commit itself to achieving a zero-carbon footprint by 2030; requests that Parliament develop a strategy to become carbon-neutral by 2030 and to present its strategy to the discharge authority; instructs it's Bureau's EMAS working group to amend the key performance indicators and the current CO₂ reduction plan for reaching carbon neutrality by 2030; asks further for reporting and accounting of Parliament's CO₂ offsetting as a matter of urgency;"*

The European Parliament is the first European Union institution to have become carbon-neutral since 2016, as confirmed in the European Parliament Resolution of 14 May 2020 on Parliament's estimates of revenue and expenditure for the financial year 2021 (2019/2214(BUD)), point 37:

"Underlines that since 2016, Parliament is the first Union institution to become carbon neutral, because after making all possible efforts to reduce its CO₂ emissions, it offsets 100 % of its irreducible emissions".

Parliament's policy to reduce its carbon footprint is based on the principle of preventing emissions and reducing them in the first place. If emissions cannot be reduced any further, CO₂ offsetting is used annually as a final step in a complete carbon management plan in order to compensate Parliament's residual emissions from the previous year.

In 2019, Parliament has reduced its carbon emissions by around 37 % per FTE² compared to 2006. This sizeable reduction in carbon emissions achieved since 2006 has been achieved through various actions of Parliament's administration, such as the purchase of 100% green electricity in the three places of work, improved energy efficiency of technical installations (heat pumps, cooling systems, etc.) and measures to promote sustainable mobility at the European Parliament.

The remaining emissions, which are unavoidable or cannot be reduced any further, are offset in accordance with the Bureau decision on carbon offsetting from October 2015. Such offsets are typically achieved through financial support for projects in the areas of renewable energy or energy efficiency, which aim at reducing the emission of greenhouse gases in a global context.

Full reporting on Parliament's activities related to CO₂ offsetting is provided in the annual key EMAS documents, the Environmental Statement addressed to the public and the EMAS competent bodies, and the Environmental Management Review addressed to the Bureau of the European Parliament. This report includes the quantity of credits used to offset Parliament's emissions from the previous year, the economic operator to whom the annual contract was awarded, the amount spent to purchase the carbon credits, and a description of the emission reduction projects which generated those credits.

² In accordance with the EMAS Regulation 1221/2009, organisations applying EMAS must report on their environmental performance using core indicators relating to the overall output of the organisation. The EMAS Regulation also provides that, for organisations in the non-production sectors (administration/services), the overall annual output of the organisation shall relate to the size of the organisation expressed in number of employees. The FTE figures reflect the size of the European Parliament based on the number of people working for and at the Parliament, and visiting it. Therefore, calculation of FTE takes into account Members, Accredited Parliamentary Assistants, political group staff, administrative staff (officials, temporary and contract agents, and seconded national experts), trainees, subsidised visitors, and external contractors working at EP premises (mainly in security, IT, catering, cleaning, maintenance, and temporary work).

§63: *"Emphasises that approximately 67 % of Parliament's carbon footprint originates from the transport of persons; recalls that, by its decision of 15 May 2017, the Bureau approved the proposal to provide an efficient and high-quality way for Members while minimising the environmental impact through a gradual transition towards electric vehicles for Parliament's fleet of cars and the promotion of all types of green transport which operate with zero-emissions in the urban environment and to have a fully-electric fleet from 2024; welcomes the various measures and instruments introduced in this respect by DG INLO; expects the Bureau to work out a travel reimbursement system which includes the cost of the CO₂ offsetting in the price of the travel and to incentivise the use of eco-friendly transport;"*

Parliament's CO₂ is offset in line with the EMAS Action Plan, which is supplied yearly with comprehensive details of MEPs' travels.

Carbon emissions have been reduced by 23 % per FTE in the area of transport of persons compared to 2006 as a result of various actions implemented by Parliament, such as the use of high-speed trains instead of charter flights between Brussels and Strasbourg, co-financing staff's public transport costs, increased use of economy class for travel by Members, gradual increase in the number of parking places and charging stations for e-cars, continuous extension of the bicycle fleet and the introduction of e-bikes, occasional teleworking, which has led to 24 256 days teleworked by staff by the end of 2019 (18 600 days in 2018) and videoconferencing, which has made it possible to hold 12 356 virtual meetings in 2019 (11 729 in 2018).

Parliament's responsible services are currently working on an EMAS Mid-Term Strategy to achieve the new ambitious 2024 environmental performance targets adopted by the Bureau on suggestion of the Secretary-General in December 2019. A key feature of the strategy will be teleworking and videoconferencing, as they provide alternatives to travel.

During the last 6 months, thanks to the decisions of the Secretary-General, the EP administration changed its working methods radically with the introduction of full teleworking due to the Covid19 crisis and its transformation as of July 2020 into teleworking based on operational needs as assessed by the DGs. The survey on teleworking conducted among staff in June 2020 proves its overall high acceptance. 90% of staff who took the survey declare a relatively positive or very positive overall experience with teleworking and around two thirds wish to continue teleworking at least 1 to 3 days per week.

Another key feature of the strategy will be the reduction of emissions resulting from the transport of persons, including travel by more environmentally friendly means of transport for business travel as well as for commuting. Parliament's responsible services started to discuss a possible comprehensive revision of the relevant Mission Rules taking into account all aspects and developments for a revision with a view to update, adapt and further improve the administrative framework for missions and business related travel.

In September 2020 all the leased cars of Parliament's car service are either full electric or plug-in hybrids. In the course of 2021, depending on market availability, the hybrid cars of the first generation will be replaced by either fuel cell or full electric zero emission cars. As the market offer for vans is lagging behind in this development, minibuses and vans will be replaced at a later stage, hopefully leading to a zero emission fleet at the latest during 2023, potentially earlier depending on the availability of vehicles that correspond to the needs of the EP transport services.

§66: *"Welcomes Parliament's efforts to increase the number of paperless meetings; calls for more training sessions to be offered to all Members, members of staff and APAs about the paperless tools which have been created to enable less documents to be printed and for further communication campaigns;"*

From November 2019 to February 2020, in the context of the project for paper-smart Bureau meetings, MEP IT Support created and delivered an ad hoc training module focused on the use of mobile devices with a view to moving to a paperless way of working, specifically conceived for the members of the Bureau and their teams.

The service improved tools on hybrid devices, prepared a specific e-brochure for Members, "Go Mobile, Go paperless", and provides a personalised course for those Members and their offices willing to use a paperless way of working with the EP hybrid and/or tablet devices. The course is on demand and tailor-made to the way of working and the needs of each office.

The offer of training courses available since the beginning of the 9th parliamentary term also includes standing info-sessions for MEPs and APAs in a biweekly format (from June to October 2019 Mondays and Fridays EN-FR) and bimonthly recurrence as from November 2019; a paperless way of working and mobility are also addressed in the info sessions.

During the COVID-19 period, a targeted "APA IT Window" webinar series has been proposed to raise awareness of the IT tools available at the EP with a focus on facilitating the APA's teleworking life. A survey on remote ways of working was launched to improve understanding of the needs and situation of MEPs and APAs, and the feedback was taken into account for the preparation of the APA IT Window.

A course for the whole staff (Secretariat, APAs) on effective use of digital tools based on different use cases is available in the training catalogue from September onwards.

§67: *"Asks Parliament to improve its communication to Members informing them of the possibility to use the direct train between Parliament and Brussels airport which takes 20 minutes door to door, and which Members may use free of charge, and to use its influence to advocate for those trains to run at regular and smaller intervals to make this possibility as attractive as possible;"*

Parliament's Travel Management Unit distributes the SNCB/NMBS free railway passes to Members. These are valid for travel within Belgium (so called "Libre Parcours"). The paper passes distributed at the beginning of the parliamentary term can currently be exchanged with plastic cards (MOBIB) that should eliminate problems encountered by Members while scanning and passing through automatic doors at the rail platforms.

On 25 August 2020, a communication was sent by the Quaestors reminding Members to collect their MOBIB cards and reminding them about the available train connection connecting the stations of Brussels-Luxembourg and Brussels National Airport Zaventem.

At the beginning of the current legislative term, Members also received a leaflet with information on the transport and mobility services. The leaflet highlights the benefits in terms of travel time of taking the train between Brussels-Luxembourg station and Brussels-Airport Zaventem instead of relying on the car service especially during peak hours.

§71: "Welcomes the Quaestor and Bureau decisions, in April and June 2018 respectively, to reduce plastic waste and waste management activities; calls upon Parliament to swiftly undertake further ambitious action, towards a plastic-free Parliament;"

The 2018 EMAS action plan was successfully implemented and several communication and awareness-raising activities such as the "Plastic free event" took place.

As of April 2018, plastic cutlery, straws and coffee stir sticks were removed or replaced by biodegradable equivalents in Brussels and Strasbourg. In addition, the new catering companies in Brussels propose solutions which ensure the reduction and eventually total elimination of single use plastic material and packaging as well as a waste-free approach.

As of 1 July 2019, in Strasbourg plastic bottles were replaced by a deposit/voucher system for glass bottles in place at all catering sale points, restaurants and bars. As of 1 July 2019, single use plastic bottles are no longer available in Parliament's catering outlets, sales points nor in the Staff Shop in Luxembourg.

Following the Quaestors and Bureau decisions of April and June 2018 respectively:

- J no bottled mineral water is provided at Parliament's official meetings as of 1st of July 2019;
- J when attending official Parliament's meetings, participants are invited to use one of the newly installed 351 water fountains equipped with anti-bacteriological devices providing cooled still and sparkling water.

At present, there are 364 water fountains on Parliament's premises, of which 260 in Brussels, 88 in Strasbourg, 14 in Luxembourg and 2 in the Jean Monnet House. In Brussels, 2 new water fountains will be installed in the kitchenettes of the SPINELLI building. In Luxembourg, 53 fountains are foreseen for the ADENAUER II building.

The gradual introduction of water fountains allowed for a 44% reduction of sales of plastic bottles in the first half of 2019 leading to their complete abolition on 1 July 2019. This also led to a considerable reduction of the related European Parliament budget line. The phasing out of single-use plastics bottles in vending machines has been completed in Brussels, with the introduction of still water tetra packs as of March 2020.

§76: "Stresses that moving Parliament's official vehicles to Strasbourg and back empty apart from their respective drivers further adds to the financial and environmental impact of the 12 annual missions to Strasbourg; welcomes the fact that opportunity exists for APAs to join for the trip to Strasbourg and back, but regrets that this option is not used to its full capacity; calls on Parliament to allow for all the Parliament and Political groups staff to also use this option for their trip to Strasbourg and to improve its communication concerning this possibility;"

Aiming at reducing the number of service cars travelling between Brussels and Strasbourg without passengers, several measures have been put in place.

For the journey between Brussels and Strasbourg first priority is given to Members and their APAs to take cars and minivans of the service car fleet. Approximately 20 Members regularly use this mode of transport during part-session weeks.

Furthermore, three service cars are available per Directorate-General for duty travel between Brussels and Strasbourg during part-session weeks.

Additional transport for Parliament's staff between Brussels and Strasbourg is being organised on Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons of the part-session weeks with one coach (53 places) and two mini busses (19 places). During each part-session approximately 70 Parliament staff members use this transport arrangement.

The number of service vehicles available during the working hours as stipulated in the current rules and working time restrictions for drivers do currently not allow for an extension of this transport offer to Political groups.

§82: *"Calls on DG COMM to inform the discharge authority in future discharge cycles of the targets set in the respective year so that it can assess the effectiveness of the directorate-general's activities;"*

The Secretary-General established an integrated framework for planning, objective setting and reporting for the European Parliament ensuring a coherent approach across DGs.

In this context, as of 2020, DG COMM established an annual work program, setting out the general and specific annual objectives with key performance indicators and targets for each of them. In the annual activity report, DG COMM will report inter alia on the achievement of the objectives set and the related performance indicators.

§83: *"Calls on DG COMM to continue its efforts to improve Parliament's public website, in particular with regard to the optimisation of search engines, and to increase its visibility; urges DG COMM to create an easy-to-browse website, easily accessible from all devices (i.e. smartphones, tablets and desktop computers), with a particular emphasis on a simplified mobile version of the website;"*

All the parts of the European Parliament website managed by the DG COMM - except for the EPLOs websites, for which the migration process is currently ongoing - are now in Responsive Web Design allowing all users to access an easy-to-browse website from smartphone to desktop computers.

While reviewing Parliament's platforms to make them all-devices compatible, DG COMM took the opportunity to simplify them. For instance, the 3 multimedia platforms (audiovisual, EP Live and EuroparlTV) were integrated in order to have one single and more efficient Multimedia Centre, where all the multimedia content is easily accessible and downloadable. This service is particularly relevant for media outlets, who can download valuable footage of Parliament events for free.

Any new website is now fully SEO (Search Engine Optimization)-compliant and accessible, allowing everyone, including people with disabilities, to easily navigate and interact.

A SEO content strategy started during the summer of 2017. To improve SEO it is necessary to introduce a thematic organisation of the website. This is being done without undertaking a full and complex reshuffle. The improvements have had a clear positive impact, as the European Parliament is already highly visible in the results of search engines.

§88: *"Recalls that 2018 marked the first full year of operation for the House of European History; notes that the House of European History welcomed 164 158 visitors; welcomes the co-financing agreement with the Commission, ensuring a yearly contribution to the running costs; remains deeply concerned by reports on working conditions in the European House of History under the previous contractor and urgently requests the Secretary-General to inform Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control on the situation of European House of History employees under the new contractor; also asks the Secretary-General to publish figures on the total costs of the contractor and the amount spent on the wages of the European House of History employees;"*

Parliament has taken the issue of working conditions of external staff very seriously. Under the previous contract the floor staff was recruited after a rigorous competition and the contractor was under the obligation to apply Belgian labour law, including on pay and working conditions. The House of European History Staff regularly verified that these obligations were observed.

More recently, in view of the expire date of the previous framework contract for provision of floor staff services on 6 January 2020, the responsible services launched a new open call for tender procedure in the second half of 2019. To further improve working conditions of floor staff, the tender assigned an even higher specific weight to the motivation and work satisfaction of the floor staff. The quality criteria of the service provided, including motivation and work satisfaction, counted for 70% in the evaluation.

The new framework contract was awarded to Sodexo Belgium S.A., the winner of the tender procedure. As a result of the aforementioned tender criteria floor staff now receive a substantial package of secondary employment benefits. The contractor started delivering the services on 7 January 2020.

The responsible services continue to follow the implementation of the contract in respect to the working conditions scrupulously.

§91: *"Insists on the importance of effective communication in Member States while ensuring cost-effectiveness; invites all decision-making parties involved to strive for added value, particularly with regard to running costs;"*

The objectives of the EPLOs are to inform and communicate locally on the European Parliament and its Members and promote their work. The 2019 Election Campaign has impacted significantly on the overall work of the EPLOs. This concerns, inter alia:

-) New tasks and modus operandi: campaigning, ground gaming and direct citizen outreach. These have also provided Parliament with a powerful asset for the future.
-) Much more intensive media and social media activity.
-) More integration and alignment around universal campaigns and coordinated messaging.
-) More decentralisation and local autonomy within this: messaging, budgetary, resource, local cooperation with EC Representations.

All this has been implemented with a cost effectiveness policy. For example, in 2018 around 50% of the 1100 events organised by the EPLO were events without any financial impact on the operational budget of Parliament (seminar with citizens or journalist in the House of Europe, group of students in a Europa Experience, online debate between MEPs and stakeholders).

Running costs remain at their minimum with a low and stable percentage compared to the operational expenditure for communication actions (around 7% of the total budget in 2016, 2017 and 2018).

§92: *"Appeals to Parliament and to the Member States to intensify cooperation with their respective EPLOs; demands that the EPLOs increase their visibility through events and intensive activity on social medias in order to out to citizens; calls on EPLOs to step up their cooperation and communication with individual European institutions with an aim to streamline the operation of EPLOs;"*

1. On the cooperation with other Institutions and Member States

2018 was the first full year for the implementation of the new EPLO mission statement (adopted in November 2017) which states that inter-institutional cooperation at the national level “should be intensified”. It also specifies that the EPLOs and the European Commission Representations in the same city should, as far as possible, join forces “to cooperate towards common objectives on behalf of the EU” and “should share and coordinate planning”. This cooperation was carried out in the first place through the use of the European Public Spaces (EPS) - in 18 EPLOs - where common initiatives were organised. Moreover intense cooperation took place outside the EPS, in all Member States, for the organisation of joint events with stakeholders and citizens (e.g. seminars and Europe Day events), also with the support of the Europe Direct Information Centre network. In 2018, 291 events were organised in cooperation with the European Commission.

Starting from September 2018, all EPLOs activities were re-oriented and set to support the European Elections 2019 information actions. Inter-institutional cooperation, in particular with the European Commission, at headquarters and at local level, was also streamlined and deepened thanks to a memorandum of understanding on how to join forces in implementing the campaign. One sign of this is that campaign material was simply branded with the EU flag and a common baseline, eschewing the use of institutional logos.

In autumn 2019, EPLOs and EC Representations tightly cooperated in communicating about the hearings of the commissioners-designate. In March 2019, a seminar with national parliaments’ communicators was organised in Brussels, with the participation of European Commission representatives, in order to identify ways of cooperation at national level. In the framework of the programming exercise for 2020, the EPLOs and the EC Representations agreed on a set of joint activities. This approach was also reflected in the preparation of the EPS work plan for 2020.

In the course of 2020, Parliament’s and Commission’s communication services cooperated in the communication about the pandemic. In addition, a new cooperation path has been established with the Secretariat of the Council aimed at cooperating on communication matters related to the post-COVID recovery plan. National delegations participating in the Council's Working Party on Information were involved in this process.

2. On the EPLOs activities

2018 was a pivotal year for the EPLOs with a total volume of 1100 events in total compared to around 400 in 2017, driven especially by election campaign activities in the second half of the year. This trend continued with the intensification of the information actions towards the European Elections, including many activities organised in the context of community and volunteer mobilisation, reaching a total number of 3200 events for 2019.

This intense activity has been accompanied by a remarkable increase on the social media channels managed by the EPLOs; with a global 10% increase of fans on Facebook pages; 12% increase of followers on twitter and 65% increase of followers on Instagram. This resulted in an extremely well connected basis of supporters ahead of the European Elections 2019.

§93: "Notes that the EPLO office based in Athens has spent EUR 38 400 in 2018 for the rental of parking spaces; considers that these costs are disproportionately high considering that only six employees currently work in this office; calls on Parliament to investigate reasons for these costs and if necessary, take appropriate measures to remedy the situation;"

The European Parliament Liaison Office (EPLO) in Athens counted 8 permanent officials and other agents (the 2 trainees excluded) in 2018, and 9 in 2019.

The EPLO is located in central Athens (opposite to the parliament). Permanent parking facilities do not exist.

10 parking slots are reserved for the overall needs of the EP Liaison Office, with any extra places put at the occasional disposal of third users having official meetings in the Athens EPLO.

As demonstrations often take place in the surroundings, the parking slots are within a covered, guarded parking located on the same street as the EPLO.

There has been no increase in the price paid since 2008 when the lease was first signed.

§95: "Notes with concern the Bureau decision of 11 February 2019 regarding parliamentary support to the EU Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, the EU delegation to the African Union in Addis Ababa and the EU Delegation to the UN in New York; considers that given the specific nature of this parliamentary support, Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control should be provided with detailed information on resources and output on an annual basis in the framework of the Parliament discharge; asks the Secretary-General to carry out a cost/benefit analysis of this parliamentary diplomacy support before the end of 2020 and prior to any envisaged extension to other regions of the world;"

On 11 February 2019 the Bureau decided to make available parliamentary support in external delegations of the European Union with an initial focus on regional delegations (EU mission to ASEAN, EU delegation to the African Union and the EU delegation to the UN in New York) and agreed to reinforce cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS) in this respect. In this regard, it should be recalled that EP staff is embedded in EU delegations.

The Bureau decision did not entail any increase in Parliament's staffing plan.

As shown by the example of Washington DC in the last 10 years, a representation of Parliament within an EU delegation has significantly improved not only the access of Members to their American interlocutors, but also the visibility of Parliament among Transatlantic stakeholders. It can be expected that the same will happen once Parliament's officials are embedded within other EU Delegations.

Expected benefits include, among others, strengthening relations with the parliamentary dimensions of those regional organizations, developing further the inter-parliamentary relations and enhancing legislators' dialogue.

In the specific case of Jakarta, the main purpose is to activate and deepen cooperation at an inter-parliamentary level with the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), in the framework of a multilateral dialogue with ASEAN as well as, where appropriate, to promote the adoption of EU based legislation in areas of common interest by ASEAN national parliaments.

So far, only one member of staff has been deployed to Jakarta,

The total costs incurred with mission costs were EUR 12 356.

§98: *"Notes with satisfaction the creation of the Accredited Parliamentary Assistants Front Office to manage the end-to-end recruitment of APAs, as well as the modification and termination of contracts and administrative support to APAs; believes that the Front Office's capacity to answer to APAs needs should be further strengthened; welcomes the introduction of a simplified and quicker procedure to recruit APAs and the progress towards paperless file management; calls for the Parliament administration teams responsible for the recruitment of APAs to be reinforced before the beginning of each new mandate, for the time necessary to provide comprehensive training beforehand and until the high work load has been completed;"*

The creation of the Accredited Parliamentary Assistants' Desk in 2018 has allowed DG PERS to provide Members and APAs with a dedicated service for APA contracts and many other aspects related to their administrative life. The APA Desk, with a team of 4 colleagues, is able to provide answers to APAs needs be it immediately or by facilitating the contacts with the specialised units in DG PERS.

In preparation of the start of the new legislative term , the APA Front Office Unit was reinforced with colleagues from other units in order to be able to treat the recruitment of more than 1 700 APAs in a period of three months. The APA Desk was supported by eight Schuman trainees and the Contracts Section by five colleagues with previous experience in APA contracts.

The lessons learned in 2019 will allow DG PERS to propose an enhanced strategy in 2024, taking into account the special needs of MEPs and APA candidates at the beginning of the parliamentary term.

§99: *"Reiterates its call on the administration to provide, as early as possible in the next parliamentary term, training courses or publications especially for new APAs, including as regards practical and administrative matters (mission orders, medical examinations, accreditation, parking stickers, groups of visitors, exhibitions, etc.) in order to avoid systemic errors that hinder the smooth running of administrative procedures that affect new APAs;"*

In June 2019 DG PERS created and published a video for newly recruited Accredited Parliamentary Assistants concerning their basic rights and obligations. It is available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=GEqAteriVZo&feature=emb_title

After they take up their duties, an introductory info session is offered systematically to new APAs by the InfoDesk in the "Staff Front Office". Every Friday, for the APAs recruited during the week, during the COVID-19 Teleworking period, this training has been provided individually by phone. This info-session focuses mainly on practical and administrative issues.

Moreover, a "Welcome on board App" is being developed in order to centralise and provide all newcomers with useful information even before they take up their duties in the EP.

Dedicated publications for APAs are available in the intranet, such as a brochure describing the tasks, rights and obligations of Accredited Parliamentary Assistants:

https://epintranet.in.ep.europa.eu/files/live/sites/epintranet/files/human-resources/rules-rights/apa-tasks/apa-tasks_en.pdf

§100: *"Reiterates its request that APAs receive the same subsistence allowance as statutory personnel for their missions to attend the part-sessions in Strasbourg;"*

The rules regarding the reimbursement of duty travel between Parliament's three places of work that apply to EP secretariat staff and APAs are different. The system of reimbursement of EP secretariat staff is laid down in the General Implementing Provisions concerning reimbursement of mission and duty travel expenses adopted by Bureau decision of 17 June 2009 and Internal rules governing missions and duty travel by officials and other servants of the European Parliament adopted by the Secretary-General on 1 September 2018. This system is based on the reimbursement of travel expenses upon the presentation of supporting documents (bills, tickets, etc.) and within the applicable ceilings for reimbursement.

In accordance with Article 132 of the CEOS, the arrangements for reimbursement of mission expenses for APAs are laid down in the Implementing Measures Governing the Statute of APAs. The system of reimbursement of duty travel between Parliament's three places of work of APAs is significantly different, as it is based on the reimbursement of travel and other expenses at a flat rate.

§105: "Recalls the fact that promoting equal opportunities is a key component of the Parliament's human resource management policy; takes note of the fact that the gender equality roadmap continues to be implemented through concrete actions: targets for women heads of unit was set at 40 %, women directors at 35 % and women directors-general at 30 % by the end of 2019; regrets however that the gender equality roadmap has not been fully implemented, especially as regards reaching the target for the representation of women in senior management positions of 40 % by 2020; calls for more ambitious targets to be urgently set and for them to be achieved over a short time frame;"

On 13 January 2020, the Bureau approved, upon a proposal from the Secretary-General, a set of new and more ambitious targets for gender balance in senior and middle management posts in the EP Secretariat to be achieved by 2024: 50% female Heads of Units and Directors, 40% female Directors-General. The minimum target of 30% to be achieved by individual Directorates-General with regard to female representation among Heads of Unit and Directors remained unchanged.

As a follow-up to the decision taken by the Bureau, on 29 January 2020, the Secretary-General informed the Directors-General about the overall situation of gender balance at the level of Head of Unit posts in the EP Secretariat and invited them to substantially contribute to the achievement of the new targets. In this regard, he also reminded the rules governing Head of Unit appointments, namely: shortlists for all appointments should include three candidates, if available, and at least one shortlisted candidate should be of the under-represented gender. If all else equal, the under-represented gender should be encouraged. The Secretary-General reserves his right to close the procedure and re-advertise the post, if these rules are not observed.

With the appointment of nine out of ten female Directors by the Bureau on 15 June 2020, Parliament is approaching parity at the level of Directors with 48% female and 52% male Directors as of 1 January 2021. This is a major step towards achieving the targets adopted.

A new gender action plan was adopted on 26 June 2020 by the High-Level Group for Gender Equality and Diversity. On 6 July 2020, the Bureau endorsed the proposed commitments and adopted the new gender action plan. A detailed roadmap for its implementation will be developed by the HLG.

In parallel, the Secretary-General strives to put in place a gender friendly environment in the administration, most recently by introducing the structural teleworking to the whole administration, but also thanks to the large scale of existing part-time formulas or trainings aimed at supporting women to take management responsibilities.

§106: "Proposes, in addition, that a greater focus be placed on equal opportunities for all, notably for example increasing the number of people with disabilities working in the Parliament administration; notes that within the Bureau a High-Level Group on Gender and Diversity already exists and requests that it conduct a study of measures taken in Member States and internationally that have been effective in increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the work place, including legislative measures; requests that the High-Level Group reports back to the Bureau with concrete suggestions once the study has been undertaken and the results analysed; calls for ambitious targets to be urgently set, including those that reflect the need for geographical balance, and for them to be achieved over a short time frame;"

Disability issues are systematically monitored and Parliament's Secretariat works towards increasing the number of staff with disabilities.

A number of substantial measures have been put in place: reasonable accommodation, special financial assistance for persons with disabilities, annual positive action schemes for recruiting contract agents with disabilities, in addition to the organisation of thematic training courses and awareness raising events, both for general and specific audiences (e.g. for EP security agents). DG PERS has been monitoring thematic reports prepared by the EU Member States and pan-European associations and liaising with other EU institutions and other international organisations/corporations for best practices in this field.

The High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity, at its meeting of 19 February 2020, endorsed the note of the Secretary-General to the Bureau on Disability Management in the administration of the European Parliament. This note sets out the state of play and proposes ten individual commitments to be pursued during the current legislative period in the fields of: accessibility (digital and physical), inclusion, support, awareness raising, recruitment and participation, which are aimed at enabling Parliament's administration to make further progress in terms of implementing equal opportunities at all levels. The note also details many other initiatives designed, inter alia, to support individual staff members.

At its meeting of 6 July 2020, the Bureau took note of the information provided in the note and endorsed the proposed commitments which will be pursued by Parliament's administration during the current legislative term.

§107: "Notes with satisfaction that the High Level Group on Equality and Diversity tasked DG PERS in 2018 to elaborate a report with a roadmap containing the list of measures to eliminate discrimination based on any ground such as ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity in the Parliament Secretariat; takes note that the Bureau adopted the report in April 2019 and it is already being implemented; asks the High Level Group to continue reinforcing and improving this kind of measures and initiatives in order to foster an inclusive working environment in Parliament;"

The Report on diversities other than gender in the European Parliament's Secretariat was unanimously adopted by the Bureau in April 2019, together with the accompanying roadmap for the period 2019-2020. These documents set up thematic guidance on key measures to be implemented by the EP Secretariat. In addition to the specific crosscutting measures, the report lists other measures to be implemented with respect to disability, gender identification, and race/ethnicity/religion.

§110: "Notes that there are Member States that do not hold any director or general-director position, and that, despite many years having passed since the 2004, 2007 and 2013 enlargements, there has been no corresponding increase in representation for the new Member States at management level, where some nationalities continue to be heavily overrepresented; recommends addressing this situation; recalls the importance of all recruitment being based on competency, while respecting the importance of achieving a geographical balance among the Parliament's staff; to this end, calls on Parliament to ensure that staff at all levels, including at director and director-general level, is hired and promoted without discrimination based on nationality and to ensure that employment at Parliament is equally attractive to all nationalities;"

The European Parliament observes non-discrimination in all areas, including in recruiting and promoting staff members. The promotion procedures used in the EP Secretariat guarantee transparency and equality at all levels and are solely based on merit.

As mentioned in reply to question 47, a Special Working Group was set up by the European Personnel Selection Office EPSO in April 2019 with a mandate to review the current way EPSO is conducting competitions for the Institutions in order to improve the selection procedures and among others to tackle the issue of geographical imbalance already at this stage.

Within the EP DG PERS has launched a project on attracting and retaining top talent. One part of the project is to strengthen the link to Member State Permanent Representations' talent pools to make sure that Parliament as an employer stays attractive for candidates from all nationalities. It is to be noted that recruitment from certain countries in combination with certain job profiles and work places has become increasingly difficult because of the job market situation in those countries.

The Secretary-General closely monitors the geographical balance in the EP administration. On the basis of the ratio of the number of staff to the number of MEPs from that same Member State, there is no division between older and newer Member States in terms of over or underrepresentation. In fact, the five highest ratios concern staff from Belgium, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia and Malta, while the five lowest those from Poland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Cyprus.

At the moment, the EP has middle managers from all EU Member States on which future appointments of senior managers can build upon. The pool of Heads of Unit from the newer Member States is constantly growing and the ratio of managers to MEPs from the same Member States constantly evolves in favour of managers from the newer Member States. In fact, currently Slovenia and Lithuania count among the seven Member States with the highest ratio of managers to MEPs. On the other hand, the Netherlands count among those with lowest ratio.

§112: "Welcomes the extension and streamlining of teleworking possibilities for the Secretariat-General of Parliament but calls for the extension of the possibility of teleworking with a fixed schedule, as at the Commission and other institutions; supports conducting a survey on the experience of teleworking and asks for the evaluation results to be shared with the Members and all the Parliamentary services;"

The European Parliament conducted a satisfaction survey on teleworking at the end of 2017. Its results were published in the EP Intranet and presented in various meetings with managers, Staff Committee and different working groups. The results were used as a basis for developing new teleworking rules that entered into force on 1 November 2019.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting shift of EP staff to almost 100% telework, the EP Project Management Office launched a new Survey on the future use of teleworking in June 2020 to evaluate staff satisfaction with teleworking conditions during the crisis.

90% of the staff members taking the survey expressed either a positive or very positive overall experience with teleworking.

A closer look on the assessment of technical working equipment, accessibility of applications needed for work, contacts with colleagues, hierarchy, political groups and MEPs over the EP Secretariat on the one hand and on work life balance and overall wellbeing of the staff shows that the satisfaction rates with these aspects reach at least 75%. Beneficial outcomes of teleworking such as increased productivity and better life quality were indicated by one quarter of the respondents. Environmental protection and space/cost saving as global effects of teleworking complete the list of positive effects. The conclusions and findings of the survey will be taken into account for the drafting of new rules on teleworking in the EP.

The aim of the new rules on teleworking is to strike the right balance between office work and teleworking based on the operational needs of each unit in each DG.

§114: "Recognises Parliament's zero tolerance policy towards harassment at any and all levels including Members, staff and APAs and the actions put in place to discourage harassment in the workplace, in particular the adoption, by the Bureau, on 12 March 2018, of an updated roadmap for the adaptation of preventive and early support measures to deal with conflict and harassment between Members and APAs, trainees or other staff, an external audit of Parliament's internal practices and procedures, the creation of a network of confidential counsellors and of a mediator function, and the organisation of a public hearing with experts in harassment in the workplace; notes that the results of the external audit were expected by early November 2018, and requests that they be communicated without delay, once available; calls for an explanation for such a delay: welcomes the fact that some groups have strongly encouraged their Members to participate in training sessions on dignity and respect at work, in order to lead by example, and calls for training sessions for Members and members of staff; expects the full and transparent implementation of the roadmap; takes note that the Advisory Committee on Harassment and its Prevention in the Workplace received some 20 complaints regarding psychological or sexual harassment at work each year from 2014 to 2017 and 7 complaints in 2018, which can not be ignored in a context where every case is one too many;"

The external audit examined investigations into individual confidential cases conducted by the Advisory Committee dealing with harassment complaints concerning Members of the European Parliament under the old system before the implementation of the roadmap. As such, the results of the external audit are confidential and were provided only to the Advisory Committee for the purposes of the improvement of its working procedures. The documents of the Advisory Committee are also confidential (Article 13 of the relevant Bureau Decision of 2 July 2018).

The Parliament strives to put in place a policy of zero tolerance towards harassment. Important steps were achieved since the adoption of the roadmap and most of the proposed measures were implemented. More specifically in July 2018 the Bureau adopted a Code of Appropriate Behaviour in the Workplace, as well as the rule ensuring the payment of salary to victims of harassment. New rules on the scope and functioning of the Advisory Committee entered into force on 1 September 2018 and appropriate sanctions against Members were introduced in the Rules of procedures.

Regular campaigns against harassment were also designed, the last one took place in 2019. Harassment prevention training for Members has been provided since 2018.

Training sessions on harassment prevention are an integral part of the induction courses for Accredited Parliamentary Assistants and are also a long-standing part of the training catalogue for staff of the European Parliament.

§115: "Asks for the full implementation of the measures recommended in Parliament's resolution of 26 October 2017 on combating sexual harassment and abuse in the European Union, namely the implementation of the anti-harassment training for all staff and Members on a compulsory basis, as well as the restructuring of the two existing committees into one independent committee; requests that the judicial and medical expenses of victims of harassment be covered in accordance with Article 24 of the Staff Regulations;"

The Bureau, as the body responsible, discussed on several occasions the proposal to make the harassment prevention training compulsory for Members and decided to opt for a voluntary training because of legal considerations linked to the principle of the free and independent mandate. The Advisory Committee dealing with Harassment Complaints concerning Members, in cooperation with Parliament's responsible services, has systematically launched initiatives to encourage Members to follow the available trainings and will continue to do so in the future. So far 126 Members have followed the training course.

As regards the restructuring of the existing two Committees into one independent Committee, it must be recalled that the rules applying to Members and staff are different. The Staff Regulations apply to staff but not to Members. This has implications on the procedure, on the composition of the Committee, as well as on the competent authority deciding on the existence or not of harassment. Complaints can therefore not be dealt with by the same Committee.

Article 24 of the Staff Regulations is not exclusively related to harassment at the workplace as it covers different forms of assistance. Decisions on request for assistance on the basis of Article 24 of the Staff Regulations are taken by the competent authority on the basis of all the facts of the case. However, victims of alleged harassment have the right and are encouraged to introduce a written request for assistance under Article 24 to the Institution. Assistance measures could include covering of judicial expenses for victims of harassment.

The medical expenses of victims of harassment are normally covered by the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme (JSIS). If not, they can be covered by Article 24 of the Staff Regulations. The legal expenses in cases of harassment may also be covered by Article 24 of the Staff Regulations.

In addition, the Medical Service is at the disposal of the victims of harassment.

Assistance provided by the Institution has been extensively communicated through dedicated webpages on harassment on the EP Intranet and in different harassment prevention brochures published by the EP.

§117: "Notes that, from 1st February 2020, the company 'Esedra' has taken over as the new service provider of Parliament's crèches and nursery sections; notes with anxiety the limited information given by the relevant Parliament services (DG PERS) about the changes that this new contract will entail before the change of service provider took place; underlines the need for Parliament always to place the well-being of the children in its nursery at the top of its criteria when evaluating a call for tender, as well as to give high importance to the working conditions of the staff employed by the service provider;"

Parliament communicated that the service provider of Parliament's nursery (Wayenberg nursery) would change as early as legally possible and immediately engaged in a dialogue on this change with all persons concerned. Parents were invited to an information session already at the beginning of December and again on 17 January 2020 to keep them updated on the newest developments. DG PERS has been in close contact with the parents association ever since and has had regular meetings with the board of this association.

The wellbeing of the children of Members and staff has the highest priority when awarding a tender to a new service provider for the Wayenberg nursery. ESEDRA was chosen for its high-quality offer in terms of its pedagogical approach; it was not the cheapest offer received.

Although Parliament is not the direct employer of the childcare workers at the Wayenberg nursery, DG PERS has been very attentive throughout the whole process of change of contractor to safeguard the working conditions of the caretakers, offering them a good working environment where their rights are guaranteed. Two months before the start of the new contract, the services of the Parliament facilitated a meeting between the new service provider and the childcare workers in order to reassure them of the continuity of their employment before the Christmas break. In a subsequent meeting, Parliament asked the new contractor to postpone any changes of caretakers' timetables to September 2020 in order to allow a broader consultation of staff on this issue. Additionally, while the previous contractor employed several caretakers with fixed-term contracts, the new contractor has given permanent contracts to all caretakers.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when the nurseries were closed, Parliament has also been particularly attentive to the fact that all caretakers would keep their employment and be fully paid, while requesting ESEDRA that this time would be used, to the extent possible, to provide them with training, and to keep the contact with parents and children.

§118: "Underlines the importance of clear rules governing crèches and nursery; requires Parliament's Crèches and Nursery Sections Management Committee to adopt sufficient specifications to make its rules clear, transparent and broad enough to cover any unusual and specific situations, such as individual family situations or children with special needs; suggests to keep updated information about crèches and nursery services on the websites including the contributions and the current capacity; recommends, in addition, amending Article 4 of the rules governing the crèches and nursery sections run under the supervision of the European Parliament in order to clearly state the maximum parental contribution in order to ensure sufficient transparency is provided and to prevent any potential discrepancies;"

The rules governing the crèches and nursery sections run under the supervision of the European Parliament in Brussels date from 26 April 2018 and are published on the website of Parliament's nurseries <https://creche.europarl.europa.eu/home.html>.

They cover all relevant administrative aspects related to the running of the nursery in a clear and transparent manner and are complemented by FAQs:

<https://creche.europarl.europa.eu/home/bruxelles/faq.html>.

Not all specific and individual family situations can be covered by the rules. However, particular situations can always be taken into account by the service responsible for the nursery and solutions can be found, provided that there is no contradiction with the rules and as long as equal treatment for all children and parents is guaranteed.

Children with special needs are considered as “priority 1” and have priority access to the Wayenberg nursery in order to benefit from the medical service. Additional assistance can be organised in collaboration with the medical service.

The website of the nurseries was modernized and updated in spring 2020 and was published on 18 May 2020. It is more user-friendly, intuitive and makes it easier to find any information and documents that parents may need.

All information on parental contributions are listed in the rules. The maximum financial contribution is capped at 2.85 x the dependent child allowance, minus a fixed deduction of 10% for annual leave days where the children are not present. Thus, the maximum amount is EUR 1 073 per month at the moment (state of play June 2020).

§119: "Recalls the need for all service providers to fully respect Belgian law and to ensure that the subcontractor is aligned with Parliament's policy of respect and dignity at work; calls on the responsible Parliament services to ensure a smooth transition and that none of the possible changes to how the crèches and nursery sections operate, introduced by the new management, results in a reduction in the quality of service and in working conditions, as compared to the previous service provider;"

Although Parliament is not the direct employer of the childcare workers, the services has been very attentive to safeguard the working conditions of the caretakers throughout the whole process of changing the contractor for the EP nursery in Brussels. It is important that childcare workers be offered a good working environment where their rights are respected, as that is one of the main prerequisites in attracting and retaining qualified and motivated staff and thus providing optimum service to EP staff and their families.

While the previous contractor employed several caretakers with temporary contracts, the new contractor gave permanent contracts to all caretakers, which represents a considerable improvement. All other contractual conditions have been maintained during the change of contractor.

DG Personnel is fully committed to ensuring a first-class child-care facility for children of Members and staff. In this respect, DG Personnel services monitor very closely compliance of the new service provider with tender specifications in all aspects, including that all staff working in the Wayenberg nursery are fully qualified and able to deliver the high-quality service, which is the standard since the creation of the Wayenberg nursery.

§127: "Notes with concern that, as in previous years, new mopping-up transfer for the pre-financing of the Konrad Adenauer building project - EUR 29 million - was authorised; stresses that 'mopping-up' is a relaxation of the principle of specification and deliberately contravenes the principle of budgetary accuracy; disagrees with the ongoing practice of the year-end 'mopping up transfer' to contribute to current building projects; calls for a better budget management in order to reduce such transfers to the bare minimum possible and to improve the clarity and transparency of the related budgetary lines;"

Over the last 5 years, the mopping-up transfer represented generally 2 % of the year's final appropriations, in line with the levels in other institutions.

All decisions with respect to mopping-up transfers have always been duly taken by Parliament, in its prerogative as budget authority. The mopping-up transfer has allowed financial savings of around EUR 100 million in interest compared to loans.

The financing of important multiannual building projects is the subject of planning and submitted to the Committee on Budgets pursuant to Article 266 of the Financial Regulation. The mopping-up exercise is used to anticipate scheduled payments in order to reduce debt faster, and its use has to be considered from a sound financial management perspective. Though some items occur frequently as important donor items in the mopping-up, this is not the result of a systematic over-budgeting, but due to inherent uncertainties - reference is made to in the Answers by the Secretary-General to the questions raised in the resolution of 23 October 2019 on the draft budget for the financial year 2020.

The exact amounts needed cannot be fully foreseen beforehand and may vary until the very end of the budget year. The reason is that in most cases Parliament's budget is de facto established at the beginning of the preceding year, based on the need to comply with legal obligations and on the most accurate estimates available at that moment. During the course of implementation, however, fluctuations are likely, and they occur more often in some areas (briefly summarized as follows):

-) in Members and staff expenditure: fluctuations in estimated expenditure and real outturn (lower than authorised number of recruitments, lower number of applicants for benefits, lower than estimated increase in salaries);
-) in infrastructure, logistics, IT, etc.: postponement of projects, delay in awarding and/or implementing contracts, etc.);
-) in the area of political and communication activities: postponements, cancellations, lower number of participants, etc.

However, over the last 5 years, Parliament's administration has been steadily able to keep the level of cancellation of appropriations at around 1% of the final budget. This level could be achieved by using the mopping-up transfer mechanism, which has been common practice for many years now. Thanks to this transfer, the level of commitment of appropriations could be raised on average from 97 % (average level before mopping-up transfer) to 99% over the last 5 years.

§130: "Notes with regret that a number of crucial service-providers have recently decided not to extend long-term contracts signed with Parliament (banks and food shops) and asks the service to investigate the reasons for the decline in services available at Parliament;"

As a general consideration, which applies to all sites, it should be stressed that despite all efforts in doing the widest possible ex-ante publicity and in contacting all operators on the market, external companies, be it post offices or banks or other providers, tend more and more to reduce the number of open branches and to shift to remote and electronic services. The consequence is that there are fewer candidates when it comes to renew especially long-term service contracts in the European Parliament premises.

LUXEMBOURG

The Post Office recently closed its office in the Tower B building as part of their general policy to decrease the number of branches. The Post has in fact reduced their number of local branches for the last couple of years now, since the postal services are becoming more and more automated (e.g. automatic pack-up boxes, on-line services etc.).

BRUSSELS

Two of the three bank agencies previously installed on site as well as the supermarket have decided not to extend their concessions within the premises of the Parliament in Brussels.

- **Banks**

A first call for tender, launched in 2019 in order to conclude contracts for new banking facilities, ended with only one bank, KBC, choosing to submit an offer for the same space the bank previously occupied (SPINELLI building, level 00). The new contract started on 8 December 2019, renewable on an annual basis for a maximum of seven years.

For two more banking areas, previously occupied by BNP and ING, a second call for tender was organized during the first quarter of 2020. In order to permit a wider tender interest, the tender was open to all banks licenced in Belgium. The open call for tenders was published on the 25 February 2020 and immediately afterwards, the services responsible proceeded with direct publicity measures towards the banks contacted to ensure the attention of the candidates.

Unfortunately and despite the best efforts of the services, no offers were received on the date of closure for submissions, the 6 April 2020. The banking industry is currently consolidating its physical operations and relocating its services online. The experience of Parliament and that of other Institutions in Brussels shows that the banks are in the process of reducing their physical branch network, including the dispensing of cash. The banking sector is moving towards digitalisation and their focus is on services provided online.

Fortunately, some bank agencies are located in Parliament's direct neighbourhood (Place de Luxembourg, Rond-Point Schuman) ensuring sufficient coverage in the European district.

- **Supermarket**

The operators cite low sales as a reason for their decision to quit the Parliament's premises. The supermarket was located on the parking level and was not easily accessible.

The future food market concession will be located on the ground floor of the SPINELLI building in one of the locations of the former bank concessions.

This location ensures good visibility and allows the concessionary to develop a sustainable value offer that would equally benefit Members and staff. In the context of the ongoing procurement process, offers have been received for the food market concession and, on the condition of the successful completion of the procedure, the concession contract is foreseen to be signed in autumn 2020. For the concession to become operational, a few weeks of refurbishment and fit-out works will be required with an opening envisaged after the summer break.

§135: "Supports the internalisation of the drivers' service and notes the very high satisfaction rate (99,9 %) for the official car service in 2018; suggests that official cars should not travel empty and that, when driving from Brussels to Strasbourg and back, they should be used to transport Members, staff and APAs with mission orders ; takes note of the new rule requiring drivers to wait for a maximum of five minutes at the pick-up location and understands the need for such a rule but is, however, concerned that this time limit is too tight; notes the long waiting time for Members at the airport before cars depart to the Parliament and suggests finding a more efficient way of managing these delays;"

According to the rules governing the transport arrangements for Members, the use of service cars is subject to availability of drivers and vehicles. In the interest of all Members requesting the use of the transport service, registered journeys are carried out in accordance with the conditions set out in the annex to these rules and also with regard to the sound functioning of the transport service.

According to the applicable rules, during peak hours in the morning and in the evening, drivers would not wait for Members longer than five minutes after the agreed pick-up time. Drivers are however instructed to apply the rule in a flexible way for meetings and events important for the exercise of the Members' mandate.

In order to further enhance the service provided to Members, DG INLO and DG ITEC are jointly working on the implementation of a mobile application complementing the central reservation system currently in place (CARMEP-Web). This application will provide real-time information about the position of the reserved car as well as any possible changes in the pick-up time of the transport request directly to the Member concerned (e.g. early arrival or delay).

By the end of 2020, the responsible services envisage the introduction of a pilot phase of the mobile application for thorough testing of all technical and practical aspects.

Within its remit, the drivers' service strives towards an efficient use of resources, namely its vehicles. Where possible, transport requests are grouped in order to make best use of available resources and limit the number of individual journeys especially in situations of mass arrivals at airports.

Experience shows that the average waiting time for Members before the departure of the service car does not exceed 10 minutes.

Regarding official cars from Brussels to Strasbourg, please refer to the reply to §76 above.

§136: "Expresses strong concern for the working conditions of the staff of two of the external concessions contracted by Parliament, namely the cleaning staff and the restauration staff, and strongly recommends that DG INLO organises an independent survey of their satisfaction with the working conditions, in order to ensure respect and dignity at work; calls for an evaluation of Parliament's public procurement policy with a view to improving transparent and predictable working conditions for all contracted services; calls on Parliament to report to the discharge authority on the results of such evaluation; acknowledges that Parliament respects the relevant legislation;"

In accordance with Article 166(2) of the Financial Regulation, Parliament defines minimum requirements for its procurement procedures, which shall “include compliance with applicable environmental, social, and labour law obligations established by Union law, national law, collective agreements or the applicable international social and environmental conventions listed in Annex X to Directive 2014/24/EU.”

In line with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation, Parliament as a contracting authority shall exclude any economic operator from participating in procurement procedures where they are found guilty of child labour or other forms of trafficking in human beings as well as any economic operator who is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions.

Parliament's contracts for external staff additionally benefit from the social protection under national labour law and collective conventions governing contracts signed in its places of work (Belgium, Luxembourg and France).

Moreover, Parliament does not rely only on the price in its procurement procedures but regularly uses quality criteria including on social and environmental aspects for the award of its contracts.

- **Cleaning contracts**

Parliament is strongly committed to respecting legislation, including social and labour law, in force in all its public procurement and requires its application by the contractors. To this end, Parliament co-operates very closely with the service providers as well as with local and national authorities to ensure compliance with the regulatory framework.

The Prevention and Protection at Work Service (SPPT) closely cooperates with other administrative services to ensure that the working conditions of cleaning staff meet the highest health and safety standards during their performance of services. Parliament has been taking into account occupational health and safety standards and compliance with European and national legislation during the procurement procedures for selecting cleaning service providers.

This includes compliance with requirements related to the adoption of specific measures in the field of personal hygiene, the provision of personal protective equipment, and having in place preparedness plans for special circumstances. The SPPT is actively involved in conducting analyses of any new cleaning process or product, and advises and helps contract managers with the identification and assessment of risks associated with cleaning activity and use of products containing health-damaging or hazardous substances.

Article 1.7 of the cleaning contract specifies that the contractors must comply with social and labour law obligations as provided for by EU law, national law and collective conventions or by international obligations in social and labour law such as indicated in Annex X of Directive 2014/24/EU. This text was drafted by Parliament's Legal Service.

As a follow up to the alerts on possible breaches of Article 1.7 of the cleaning contract by the cleaning contractors (harassment in the workplace, racism, etc.), the services have submitted a request to the two separate Belgian authorities on labour protection and fight against racism for verification.

- **Catering staff**

Catering contracts are purely concession contracts, thus control mechanisms over the economic operator are rather limited. Regarding the concession holder's internal staff, the Unit regularly reminds the contractors about their obligations concerning labour rights. In this context, the contract managers of the Catering and Staff Shop Unit regularly follow-up on the implementation of the concession contracts in each aspect, including staffing issues. They provide support and assistance, as well as advise the catering operator's management to respect staff working conditions and their general satisfaction level.

§137: "Is concerned that the service has still not been able to solve the problem with Parliament's hot water system and asks the committee responsible in future to provide information on action taken to combat legionella in Parliament;"

The decision to discontinue the distribution of warm water in Members' offices in Brussels and Strasbourg was taken by the Questors on 24 October 2017 (Ref. Notice 27 /2017 of 14 November 2017) in connection with the health risk posed by the presence of harmful legionella bacterium within the ageing and deteriorating hydraulic systems of the buildings. Upon recommendation by the Medical Service, the Questors unanimously endorsed the proposal to close the warm water hydraulic system in European Parliament's buildings.

Parliament also applies a legionella risk management scheme that includes a number of specific actions to combat the presence of pathogens:

-) Water quality & microbial analyses are regularly performed in compliance with local legislation on hot and cold water samples on all places of work. Systematic network monitoring indicators have also been put in place.
-) The physical hot and cold water hydraulic networks are continually checked against silting and regularly upgraded or replaced as part of standard building maintenance procedures.
-) In 2018 Parliament has installed an interdisciplinary Water Safety Group based on the World Health Organization model that carries out water safety plans on a yearly basis upon the hydraulic systems of all its buildings and ensures that any required corrective action is subsequently carried out. This group brings together the Medical Service, the Well-being & Prevention Services and the Facility Management services.

In order to allow the use of hot water in areas such as kitchenettes, small local productions of hot water are installed in such areas. Local hot-water production bears no risk linked to legionella.

The water system control procedure is regularly monitored by the Service for Prevention and Protection at Work (SPPT). The Service closely collaborates with relevant DG INLO services in the Water Safety Group, set up after the successful resolution of the legionella incidence in the EP sports centre, and is informed about the periodic sampling and testing of water on the presence of legionella. The SPPT is also informed about the implementation of specific measures of water treatment required for prevention and control of legionella occurrence.

All the documentation and analysis' results are kept together with other relevant health and safety records, including those on any corrective activities carried out on each of the systems. These records include the coordinates of the persons or services who carried out the work.

§138: "Welcomes the increase in the variety of the food on offer in Parliament's self-service canteen; is, however, concerned that, despite holding a public call for the cost/benefit assessment of the price/quality balance, the food on offer has been found to be unsatisfactory; calls for a reassessment of the evaluation of quality and price of potential service providers on the market; calls for necessary amendments to be made regarding the unbalanced quality-price ratio stemming from the results of the survey; expresses serious concern about the price and quality of the food and beverages;"

In 2013 the Bureau adopted a Catering and Restaurant Strategy for Parliament, shifting the paradigm from the previously subsidised and "one operator per site" approach towards a diversified, environmentally more respectful and non-subsidised food offer.

In the framework of Parliament's latest call for tender in Brussels in 2019, and in respect of the Institution's social responsibility, the new service providers in Brussels (that started operating in August 2019) have been asked to apply Belgian Value Added Tax (reduced rate of 12 % for food and 21 % drinks/ including coffee) in line with the relevant EU tax directive, following an opinion issued by the Legal Service. The application of VAT was already the case with the catering contract in Strasbourg and with the smaller outlets on Parliament's premises in Brussels (*Les Filles, Cafe Europa*).

The following should be recalled:

-) Each restaurant is offering a daily dish at a fixed price (EUR 5.50), with a further reduction granted to trainees and students (EUR 0.60). In addition a daily soup is available at a fixed price (EUR 1.00) and a daily dessert at a fixed price (EUR 1.70).
-) The catering providers are regularly adapting prices and since August, several reductions in different meal offers have taken place (e.g. at the salad and fruit bar in the KOHL building as well as with several offers in the MARTENS building, such as the "Grill" option).
-) The new operators are regularly adapting their food and price offer, aiming at bringing more satisfaction to clients and a larger variety (including more vegetarian and vegan options).

In addition, Parliament's service responsible for managing catering contracts and relations with the catering providers, regularly monitors quality and the overall running of the catering outlets. They advise and ensure the implementation of all contractual obligations.

The launch of an independent client satisfaction survey via the *Happy or Not* terminals setup in the main outlets in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg have proved very useful in the relations with the caterers and to identify the outlets where changes and improvements are necessary. The *Happy or Not* terminal have shown a constant and solid improvement rating of the catering services in the KOHL and MARTENS buildings; whereby the satisfaction rate is lower in the SPINELLI and SPAAK buildings. This measuring tool has been used in the daily contacts with the caterers and has encouraged them to further innovate and adapt to clients' needs. Accordingly, for instance, a new dedicated and comprehensive vegan offer will soon be available in the main canteens, together with new ways of ordering and extended take-away offers and options.

§149: *"Calls attention to the fact that there are large differences in the cost of translation from particular languages and asks the service to investigate the reasons for these major discrepancies;"*

The cost of translation in a language is presented as an average cost per page. This cost is calculated by dividing the cost of translation by the total number of pages delivered. The cost of translation is determined by the cost of the internal translations and the cost of external translations.

Internal translations

The different composition of the units and the difference in the demand per language are the reasons for the difference in the price per internal page.

The cost of translation is calculated on the basis of the staff working on internal translations. As the linguistic units have different numbers of staff members, and the units translate a different volume of pages, the cost estimated per language is also different.

External translations

The cost of external translation is calculated on the basis of prices which are established in the framework contracts following open calls for tender. Price differences between each language and different volumes of translated pages per language result in a different price for each language.

§153: *"Observes that new tasks for translators were introduced in 2018, transforming translation into intercultural linguistic mediation, for instance, via the establishment of the Audio Capacity Service, which involves some of the translators translating the flash news (daily news bulletins) into 24 languages and podcasts into 6 languages; notes that DG TRAD hired a voice coach who trained almost 180 members of staff; is concerned that DG TRAD staff were faced not only with an exceptionally high workload due to the end of the legislative term but also with uncertainties related to upcoming new and unfamiliar tasks; calls on DG TRAD's high-level management and staff to continue discussions on the impact of the cyclical workload on the well-being of staff; encourages the establishment of a joint follow-up group, which would consist of representatives of the administration and of translators, similar to the one established by DG LINC;"*

The fast evolution of machine translation has a strong impact on the work of human translators.

New language-related tasks create new opportunities for staff translators while fulfilling communication needs for Parliament. Translators are invited on a voluntary basis to participate in these new fields of activities that allow them to further enlarge their skills. Working with new and modern media contents within the framework of translation might also create an added value and dynamism and reduce repetitiveness of translation tasks.

At the initiative of the Secretary-General, a working group was set up in November 2019, composed of DG TRAD's senior management, a representative of the Secretary-General's Office, the chair of the Staff Committee, the chairs of the translators and translation assistants' delegations. The working group's mandate is to discuss the impact of workload on the well-being of staff in DG TRAD through concrete examples with a view to preventive approaches.

According to a well-established practice, DG TRAD's senior management has been available for attending meetings of the two delegations, upon invitation.

DG PERS services are currently working on contracting an external provider for psychosocial risk assessment that could be used to further assess risk factors related to the work of DG TRAD staff, on DG TRAD request. The aim of this type of assessment is to analyse the work environment and identify those risk factors that may represent a risk to staff well-being and performance. Based on the assessment, a targeted action plan could be developed in order to remove whenever possible, or in some cases, mitigate the impact of identified risk factors.

§157: "Expresses great concern about the obsolescence of the directorate-general's IT applications and the risk of IT failure, which are both considered as high; calls on DG FINS and DG ITEC to step up their constructive cooperation in order to implement appropriate mitigating measures, including the smooth deployment of the new financial management and accounting system;"

The new IT planning methodology introduced by the Secretary-General in 2019 comprises a cost-benefit analysis streamlined into the process. This methodology allows obsolescence replacement projects to be valued adequately, taking account both business continuity and the need to continuously adapt rather than simply to replace tools.

In parallel, Parliament has prepared for contingencies: A new corporate Business Continuity Policy and the corresponding new Crisis and Business Continuity Governance Scheme for the European Parliament are in place on the basis of the Bureau decision of March 2018.

For IT systems in particular, a business continuity plan, which specifies the corporate plan, will constitute the contingency plan.

The new financial management and accounting system (FMS) has been smoothly deployed and is being used successfully since November 2019 for all transactions related to the execution of the 2020 budget. The FMS, which is the most modern system of its kind inter-institutionally, has proven stable since and has allowed Parliament to keep its financial administration in operation during COVID-19 lockdown of early 2020. Unlike former obsolete applications, FMS is remotely accessible.

§158: "Approves of significant efforts for ongoing investment in the digitisation of financial processes, such as Members' electronic signatures, with a view to enhancing client service, administrative efficiency and the level of checks, in particular, the introduction of online reimbursement of Members' medical expenses and automation of the central attendance register, with a view to speeding up payments of related entitlements and extension of the functions of the e-Portal, as the single entry point for Members to manage their financial and social entitlements; deplores time-consuming inefficiencies in entering and checking the data, notably that data on Members' travel costs is entered into the system twice, first by Members and in a second step again by the administration;"

The full integration of the data entered by Members for travel and subsistence expenses will be completed at the beginning of 2021 with the e-Portal incorporating the new IT system PAM-iTEMS.

§159: "Notes that Parliament's new travel agency started operating on 1 January 2019, following a public call for tenders; notes the limited use of the travel service's call centre, available at weekends but which does not cover all the companies used by the travel agency; deplores the fact that Members have experienced difficulties reaching the travel service's call centre during and outside working hours; deplores the limited opening hours of the agency, notably the fact that it is shut on Friday afternoons, except for Friday afternoons before a Strasbourg session, which seriously limits Members' staff's ability to work efficiently; calls for an improvement of availability; insists on the mandatory implementation of a simple and user-friendly complaints mechanism, which would allow for quick resolution of any problems; deplores the slow reaction time of the agency when dealing with requests for tickets; finds it absolutely unacceptable that tickets proposed by the agency are not always the most cost effective ones (often above online prices) and that Members experience considerable delays in the reimbursement of their travel costs; calls on DG FINS to launch a satisfaction survey on the services of the travel agency, and, with the aim of presenting the results by 30 June 2020 at the latest, to inform customers of the organisation and responsibilities of DG FINS and Parliament's travel agency; urges the new travel agency to reflect on the results provided by the satisfaction survey and implement improvements accordingly;"

The 24/7 Emergency Service is part of the contract and close monitoring is done by Parliament's Travel Management Unit. It cannot yet provide rebooking assistance for railway because there are several booking channels for rail per country. It should be noted that neither the previous travel agency, BCD, nor any of the tenderers offered this service. Pending a Parliament's request to find a solution, the Emergency Service has engaged to provide any traveller with all the necessary direct contact information of the railway provider.

Since 1 January 2019, the opening hours of the travel agency are aligned with the MEPs Portal, remaining open during lunchtime. The limited number of requests on Friday afternoon would not make it cost effective to maintain the offices open, while urgent requests can be treated by the 24/7 Emergency Service.

Response times of the travel agents are also monitored. The teams were reorganised and calls will be automatically distributed in order to improve reactivity and reachability. Each traveller has a single point of contact for all travel arrangements.

An efficient and solid complaint procedure is in place to ensure that every complaint is registered, then thoroughly examined and monitored by Parliament's Travel Management Unit until resolution by the Travel agency.

A dedicated mailbox was recently created. It will be supervised by the Travel Management Unit: dgfins-complaints-travelagency@europarl.europa.eu or "DGFINS Travel Agency Complaints" via Microsoft Outlook. Members and staff members are invited to send their complaints or comments on the services rendered by the travel agency, transport companies or hotels, to the new functional mailbox.

Compared to previous year, the yearly number of complaints remained stable (63 complaints, representing 0.043% of the total 144.913 transactions in 2019). The majority of the complaints registered in 2019 concerned the quality of services rendered by the new travel agency, resulting from the changeover (new working processes and tools).

The travel agency is instructed to follow the guidelines given by the various authorising officers' services responsible for the reimbursement of travel to abide by the relevant traveller profile rule. Given that especially Members' agendas are very often subject to changes, Members may choose flexible fares which offer the possibility of changing or cancelling tickets without considerable fees. Consequently, in addition to a flexible business class rate, the travel agency offers compliant proposals for the same itinerary, i.e. the maximum refundable amount, the lowest business class rate, the lowest flexible economy class rate, and the cheapest fare available. Members choose the best of those options according to their professional commitments and needs. DG Finance carries out random ex-post checks on reservations (mainly air tickets) made by the travel agency to confirm the compliance with the rules in force.

A client satisfaction survey by the Travel Management Unit and was launched beginning of July 2020. Members and staff making bookings from June 2020 are invited to reply to the survey, with the aim to evaluate quality of the services rendered by the travel agency.

The deadline for reimbursement of Members' travel expenses has come back to a regular figure of 3-4 working weeks during 2020 (see table below).



§161: "Recalls that a separate bank account for the reception of the general expenditure allowance is mandatory; calls on Parliament to regularly inform the discharge authority of how many Members comply with this obligation;"

All Members have a separate bank account to receive the General Expenditure Allowance (GEA). If this rule is not respected, the GEA is suspended pending the setting-up of a corresponding bank account. In the case of a new Member, the GEA is not paid until a separate bank account is set up for the receipt of the payments.

§162: "Draws attention to the fact that, at its meeting of 2 July 2018, the Bureau adopted a new non exhaustive list of expenses which may be defrayed from the general expenditure allowance that contains the most common examples of eligible expenditure; notes that for Members who so wish, the costs relating to a voluntary verification audit of the use of general expenditure allowance can be covered from general expenditure allowance; recalls that all Members are free to document their use of general expenditure allowance, and to have this information published in their personal websites; calls on Parliament to regularly inform the discharge authority of how many Members follow these recommendations;"

In accordance with the infrastructure implementing Rule 11(4) of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, as adopted by the Bureau in its meeting of 11 March 2019, Members have at their disposal forms whereby they may, should they so wish, publish a voluntary confirmation or audit on their use of the General Expenditure Allowance on their respective profile pages on the Parliament website. These publications are made individually and optionally in the Members' own responsibility. Parliament's administration is not responsible for compiling the information provided.

§163: "Acknowledges the improvements made in the last years in the efficient and transparent verification and control of expenditure reimbursements, such as Members' travel cost reimbursements and Parliamentary Assistant's allowances, in respect of which documentation for costs incurred must be provided; calls for a strict handling of cases where misconduct has been uncovered; urges the Bureau to draw conclusions from past incidents of fraud and issue severe punitive measures in cases of fraud; strongly urges Members to use their General Expenditure Allowance strictly for the purposes laid out in the Implementing Measures for the Statute for Members of the European Parliament; urges the Bureau to proceed with the evaluation of the guidelines as it is foreseen in the last bureau decision; seeks, in the interest of the citizens and the reputation of the House and its Members, a well adjusted balance between the Freedom of the mandate and the combat against risks of misuse and fraud; considers a regular evaluation of the relevant provisions every five years towards the mid-point of a parliamentary term to be appropriate;"

Pursuant to Rule 177, the Bureau is responsible to examine appeals lodged by Members against sanctions imposed to them by the President.

Pursuant to Article 72(3) of the Implementing Measures for the Members' Statute (IMMS), the Bureau is responsible to take the final decision within Parliament in relation with an appeal lodged against a Quaestors' decision by a Member who disagrees with the implementation of the IMMS by Parliament's administration in his/her case.

In this regard, the Bureau cannot impose any sanctions but can only confirm or reject decisions taken by the Quaestors following complaints by Members. In the past, the Bureau has taken several such decisions and in all cases has confirmed the decision of the Quaestors and the administration. As a result, Members were asked to reimburse to Parliament amounts in light of irregularities or non-compliance with the IMMS.

The latest decision taken by the Bureau on 2 July 2018 in relation with the General Expenditure Allowance (GEA) provides that the Bureau will evaluate the decision taken on the basis of the experience gained during the 9th parliamentary term and maintain it until the end of 2022.

Where financial irregularities involving Members' allowances are discovered following an OLAF investigation and/or internal checks, an administrative procedure with a view to recovery of amounts potentially unduly paid may be required pursuant to Article 68 of the Implementing Measures for the Statute for Members (IMMS). Such procedures are conducted in full respect of the Member's right to be heard, the freedom of his/her mandate and the smooth running of Parliament, and in accordance with the principles of impartiality, equal treatment and the protection of personal data.

§164: "Recalls Articles 62(1) and 62(2) of the Decision of the Bureau of 19 May and 9 July 2008, as amended (last modification on 1 July 2019), concerning implementing measures for the Statute for Members of the European Parliament, which stipulates that the sums paid', including the general expenditure allowance, shall be reserved exclusively for the funding of activities linked to the exercise of a Member's mandate and may not be used to cover personal expenses or to fund grants or donations of a political nature' and that Members shall pay back any unused amounts to Parliament except where they are defrayed in the form of a lump sum'; calls upon the Secretary-General and the Bureau to ensure that those provisions are fully implemented and complied with and to regularly inform the discharge authority of how many Members have paid back their unused amounts;"

The General Expenditure Allowance is paid on a monthly basis as a lump sum to a dedicated account of each Member. Members are free to document their use of the GEA, summarising that use by type of cost or in detail, to have it audited and/or to seek confirmation that they have complied with the provisions of the Implementing Measures, and to have this information published in whole or in part on their personal websites.

For each request made or question put by Members regarding the use of the GEA, DG Finance reminds Members that the GEA is intended to cover costs incurred which directly relate to the exercise of the Member's parliamentary mandate and which are provided for by the list of defrayable expenses.

In 2019, 58 Members returned EUR 1 234 931 of unused GEA, some of which covered the allowance for several years or for the complete mandate.

§166: "Further recalls that the plenary has adopted the following additional changes concerning the general expenditure allowance on top of those already issued by the ad-hoc Working Group, requiring: a 5 % sample check of general expenditure allowance spending by Parliament's internal auditing, the final results and the findings of which should be part of the annual internal audit report published by Parliament, Members to publish, on an annual basis, an overview of their expenditures by category (communication costs, office rental, office supplies, etc.);"

§167: "Urges the Bureau to implement the democratic will of the plenary concerning the general expenditure allowance as soon as possible;"

Pursuant to Rule 25(3), the Bureau is responsible to take financial, organisational and administrative decisions on matters concerning Members.

The latest decision taken by the Bureau on 2 July 2018 in relation with the General Expenditure Allowance (GEA) provides that the Bureau will evaluate the decision taken on the basis of the experience gained during the 9th parliamentary term and maintain it until the end of 2022.

§168: "Welcomes the fact that the Bureau of the past legislative term created the necessary infrastructure on Members' online page on Parliament's website for those Members who wish to publish a voluntary audit or confirmation of their expenditure that their use of the general expenditure allowance complies with the applicable rules of the Statute for Members and its implementing measures; calls on Parliament to improve its communication towards Members about this possibility and how to make use of it in practice;"

It is envisaged to offer a training-course on Members' disclosure obligations and options in the "Learn.MEP" Catalogue which will include a section on the possibility, under Rule 11(4), for Members to publish a voluntary audit or confirmation of their use of the General Expenditure Allowance.

§173: "Calls on the Secretary-General, as well as the Bureau, to exhaust - in full accordance with the provisions of the Statute for Members, namely Article 27(1) and (2) - all possible avenues to find a fair solution to the problem while keeping Parliament's liability to a minimum, as taxpayers' money is involved and to inform the discharge authority of the measures taken in this regard;"

At its meeting of 10 December 2018, the Bureau decided to modify the rules applicable to the additional voluntary pension scheme (by increasing the retirement age from 63 to 65 years and introducing a levy of 5 % to pension payments for future pensioners) with a view to improving the sustainability of the voluntary pension scheme, address the increasing liquidity problem and reduce the actuarial deficit. The Bureau's decision has been challenged before the Court of Justice of European Union by a number of members of the pension fund. Any decision regarding the voluntary pension scheme will be therefore taken at a later stage.

§177: "Acknowledges the fact that it is very difficult for DG ITEC to recruit enough highly qualified experts with very specific profiles, knowledge and experience; calls on Parliament to ensure that this request is properly transmitted to the European Personnel Selection Office to better respond to such specific needs of Union institutions;"

DG PERS works closely with DG ITEC to determine the precise needs. DG PERS does its utmost to ensure that such needs are translated into the organisation of appropriate competitions to address them at first available opportunity. There are nevertheless challenging external factors that affect the supply of qualified candidates for highly specialised IT posts, such as a highly competitive job market involving many private sector players.

DG ITEC confirms the benefits of following the proposed approach. Indeed, the 2016 EPSO specialists' competition let to partially close ITEC's capacity gaps and skills required to perform and deliver its activities and services.

The fast evolution of technology and its growing challenges and complexity justify the need for a new competition that could be organized in house.

§178: "Insists that DG ITEC make stronger efforts to guarantee continuity and resilience of Parliament ICT infrastructures achieved since the IT outage of October 2017; calls for increasing the efforts and capacity to provide assurance on Parliament ICT robustness; calls for continuing the work and progress made in the areas of business continuity, risk management, incident management and recovery capability; stresses the existence of deficiencies in the functioning of the internet network in Parliament;"

Following the IT outage of October 2017, the Secretary-General tasked the Risk and Business Continuity Manager and DG ITEC to put in place an action plan to ensure more robust business continuity.

Key achievements can be summarised as follows:

Risk Management

-)] improved supervision of contractors and sub-contractors activities;
-)] drafting of an IT Risk Manual, including COBIT practices for risk management;
-)] reassessment of current risk levels, risk appetite, risk capacity, and associated costs.

Incident Management & Recovery Capability

-)] strengthening of the datacentre's capacity management;
-)] implementation of the new Secretary-Generals instructions on Crisis and Incident Management;
-)] development of a communication plan coherent with the new Business Continuity framework and escalation.

Business Continuity

-)] review of the Virtual Servers Policy in order to ensure timely interventions;
-)] clear prioritisation of IT applications supporting the EP's core activities;
-)] finalisation of the Cloud testing report;

J delivery of the 2019 ICT Operations Disaster Recovery Plan.

Long-term actions continue to be monitored by DG ITEC in close cooperation with the Business Continuity Management Unit. Data centre diversification and support of overall contingency planning for long-term system blackouts, have been integrated in DG ITEC's general business as usual scheme, and supervised by general internal control measures and annual reporting.

In the field of Crisis Management, in June 2019, the Bureau endorsed the proposal presented by the Secretary-General to enlarge the existing SMS alert system into a comprehensive SMS system to communicate to all MEPs and their assistants, all staff from the administration and from political groups during an incident or a crisis. The new system is expected to become operational in 2020.

§179: "Highlights the increasing risks related to data and privacy; points with concern to recent reporting on storing and processing user's data when logging in to Parliament's wi-fi; strongly questions the need to retain data for up to six months³; calls on Parliament to develop an information security policy and strategy; stresses that close cooperation between DG ITEC and DG SAFE is of utmost importance; encourages the directorate-general's to plan common activities over the medium and long term;"

Information security and privacy are of utmost importance for any modern organisation.

In early June 2020 an information security policy was implemented. This information security policy is consistent with the Bureau Decisions of 15 April 2013 governing the treatment of confidential information and of 7 September 2015 on the EP communications and systems security policy. This policy further reflects the increasing correlation between Cybersecurity and information security and complements the already validated cybersecurity policy.

With a view to ensure an integrated approach on security matters, the services closely work together in synergy in many of their fields of activity with overlapping elements (security investigations, cybersecurity, online threats, etc.).

Regarding the data processing operations on Parliament's Wi-Fi network, DG ITEC and the EDPS are currently reviewing the processes in place and will implement any EDPS recommendations and guideline needed to ensure compliance with EU Data Protection Regulation.

§181: "Is concerned by the results of the recent DG SAFE staff survey, and hopes that a solution can be found in the near future that responds to staff concerns;"

The management of DG SAFE regularly meets with the Security Delegation and the Staff Committee to discuss and exchange views on specific issues. In this context, the results of the recent staff survey organised by the Staff Committee focusing on the introduction of the organisation of safety and surveillance tasks on an annual basis approved by the Bureau early 2018 have been discussed with both the Staff Committee and the Delegation.

³ <https://euobserver.com/institutional/146270>

The dialogue will be continued, also taking account of the recent Judgment of the General Court (First Chamber) of 10 June 2020 (Case T-131/19) in respect of the organisational reform of DG SAFE in early 2018. In dismissing the complaint, the Court noted, among others, that the new work organisation of Parliament addresses the need to take measures for the health of the agents concerned and that Parliament interprets the allowance system for night-time duties favourably to the security agents.

§189: "Approves of the Legal Service strategy of making lawyers more readily available to the parliamentary committees; calls on a reinforcement of staff dealing with parliamentary activities;"

Since 2009, the number of AD staff in DG PRES, DG IPOL, DG EXPO and DG EPRS occupying a job profile linked to parliamentary assistance has globally increased from 360 to 509, corresponding to an overall increase of over 40%.

The staff dealing with parliamentary activities in the Legal Service was consolidated despite the 5+1% reduction of staff imposed to all services. On the contrary, the number of lawyers dealing with parliamentary activities slightly increased, as posts were redeployed internally (within the LS) through revaluation of AST posts in order to make them available for parliamentary activity. However, there is still a need to further reinforce staff of the Legal Service dealing with these matters. As all means of internal transformation have been exhausted, this reinforcement would require additional posts.

§201: "Points out that, pursuant to Article 6(10) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014⁴, the director of the APPF shall submit annually a report to Parliament, the Council and the Commission on the activities of the Authority; notes that the annual report was sent to Parliament's President and Secretary-General on 21 November 2019; deplores the fact that the 2018 report was submitted to Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control in January 2020 only; expresses concerns about the decision to consider the report as confidential, following an express request from the APPF making it available only to a limited number of persons under restricted conditions; considers that by limiting access to this document, which concerns the use of public funds, it gives the regrettable impression that there is something to hide; insists that the APPF report be made public each year, and that it is sent to Members at the same time as it is sent to Parliament's President and Secretary-General;"

In line with Article 6(10) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations, the Authority for European political parties and European political foundations prepares each year a report on the activities of the Authority and submits that report to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

The Authority was consulted as the originator of the report and has communicated that its Annual Activity Report for 2019 will be made public and provided to Parliament without restrictions on circulation once it is finalised.

⁴ Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 1).