Press release | 14.10.2013

European Parliament seat

MEPs seek to break omerta and call for right to decide on parliament's location

The European Parliament's constitutional affairs committee today voted with a strong majority to adopt a report on the location of the European Parliament's seats, co-drafted by Green MEP **Gerald Häfner** (1). After the vote, **Gerald Häfner** said:

“This report is an important step towards resolving the unsatisfactory modus operandus of the European Parliament. The report adopted by MEPs today breaks the omerta on officially discussing the flaws of the multi-seat operation of the European Parliament. Crucially, it calls for the European Parliament to be finally given the power to decide itself on its own place of work.

"It is high time that democratically-elected MEPs were able to decide on the seat of the parliament to which they are elected. The dated agreement between EU governments on the EP's seat needs to be reviewed.

"The European Parliament's operating arrangement has sadly become a symbol of waste in the EU. The practise of shifting thousands of people and resources from place to place is not only costly, inefficient, wasteful and environmentally-damaging (2), it also seriously damages the public perception of the EU. It is time that the public's representatives were able to decide on the issue."

(1) The report was co-drafted by Gerald Häfner and UK Conservative MEP Ashley Fox. The committee endorsed the report with 22 votes in favour and 4 against and will now be voted by the European Parliament as a whole in November.

(2) See the study commissioned by the Greens/EFA group on the environmental impact of the multi-seat operation, which leads to an excess 20,000 tonnes of CO2 per year being emitted (pdf):

/legacy/fileadmin/dam/Documents/Studies/EP%20two-seat%20operation%20-%20Environmental%20costs%20Transport%20and%20Energy.pdf

*** Press conference, tomorrow (Tuesday, 15 October) - 10.30, Room ASP 5G2, European Parliament, Brussels**

Background:

- The seats of the EU institutions are determined by Article 341 of the EU-Treaty and by Protocol #6 (of 1992): The official seat of the Parliament is Strasbourg, with 12 plenary sessions each year. Further plenary sessions and committee meetings take place in Brussels. The secretariat is located in Luxembourg.
- The Lisbon Treaty allows the EP to initiate treaty changes with own proposals.
- Nowhere in the world is the distance between two chambers of the same legislature as big as in the case of the EU: the seats of Council and the EP are separated by 345 km e.g. 2.2 km in France, 1.5 km in Germany.
- The EP budget committee estimates the costs of the separated working locations to lie between €156-204 million per annum.
- The heads of states and government of the EU member countries moved their summits to Brussels – but they keep blocking a similar improvement of efficiency for the Parliament.
- During the plenary meetings in Strasbourg, the EP is not only isolated from Council and Commission, but also from European civil society organisations, from the representations of the member states, as well as from the Brussels-based press corps.
- 78% of all official missions of Parliament staff take place between the three places of work.
- The buildings in Strasbourg are only used 42 days per year i.e. they are empty 89% of the time.

The report accepted today suggests that the EP should call for a European Convention to change the Treaties in a way that would give Parliament the right to decide on all questions concerning its own organisation, including its seat, working locations and calendar.

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