Press release | 20.11.2013

European Parliament seat

MEPs take crucial step to decide themselves on parliament's location

The European Parliament today voted with an overwhelming majority to adopt a report on the location of the European Parliament's seats, co-drafted by Green MEP **Gerald Häfner** (1). Crucially, the report calls for the European Parliament to use its powers to initiate a procedure to change the current EU Treaty provisions on the seat location. After the vote, **Gerald Häfner** said:

"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 and the European Parliament itself should have the power to decide on this. The report adopted by MEPs today breaks the deadlock 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, and calls for the parliament to use its power of initiative to this end for the first time (2).

"What was once a symbol for peace and reconciliation in Europe is becoming a symbol for the absolute incapacity of the EU to reform itself. The practise of shifting thousands of people and resources from place to place is not only costly, inefficient, wasteful and environmentally-damaging (3), but, above all, it is bad for European democracy. This must change and it is time that the European public's representatives were able to decide on the issue and determine how, when and where they work. The overwhelming majority for this report is also a signal to the governments: the Parliament takes this fight seriously and it will not give in until there is a reasonable and satisfactory solution for European citizens."

(1) The report was co-drafted by Gerald Häfner and UK Conservative MEP Ashley Fox.

(2) The report calls for the European Parliament to use its power under Article 48 of the EU Treaty to launch a procedure to change the treaty, with a view to allowing the Parliament itself (rather than the European Council) to decide on the location of its own seat.

(3) 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

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 (Article 48 of the EU Treaties). No one member state can block this procedure, as Council decides with a simple majority on whether or not to convene a European Convention on the issue.
- 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 435 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.

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