

Brussels-Strasbourg Study

For immediate release - July 14, 2011

BRUSSELS-STRASBOURG: MEPS URGE FRANCE TO COME CLEAN ON COURT CASE

As the European Parliament closes for the summer break, more than 100 MEPs jointly signed a request to the French government to publish its pleading in a closed court case against their decision to cut the time spent in Strasbourg. At the same time, an absolute majority of MEPs, 373-285, have expressed their wish for a single seat.

In March, MEPs voted in a secret ballot to merge two of their monthly four-day sessions in Strasbourg into a single week in 2012 and 2013 and the French government started an action in the European Court of Justice to contest this. In their letter the MEPs - most of whose activities now take place in Brussels - call on the French government to "stop the political and legal posturing on this issue, and to enter into a real debate".

Since last October, a cross-party informal Brussels-Strasbourg Seat Study Group of senior MEPs has been examining the Parliament's controversial two-seat arrangement, which costs €180 million and 19,000 tonnes of CO₂ each year.

The Study Group's chairman, European Parliament Vice-President Edward McMillan-Scott (Liberal, UK) said today [Thursday, July 14]: "This important court case should not be in secret because it involves vast sums of taxpayers' money. It concerns the waste of time and money that makes the European Parliament less effective".

The letter comes in the wake of a public hearing held on Tuesday July 12 called "Alternatives to Strasbourg and what next for Brussels?", organised by the Study Group. The Hearing was attended by 75 MEPs, staff, assistants, media and representatives of interested governments.

The event's strong turnout follows support by an absolute majority, 373-285 MEPs out of a total of 736, on a paragraph in their June resolution on the EU's Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2014-2020, which pointed to "the significant savings which could be made if the European Parliament were to have a Single Seat".

ENDS



M. Jean Leonetti
Secrétaire d'Etat aux affaires européennes
Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes
37, Quai d'Orsay
75351 Paris
France

Brussels, 14 July 2011

Dear Secretary of State,

Open letter: MEPs should have the democratic right to decide where they meet

Please accept our congratulations on your appointment as France's new Minister for Europe. We wish you success.

There is now an Absolute Majority in the European Parliament in favour of a Single Seat. Following the vote on June 8 on the Multiannual Financial Framework, enough MEPs have now adjusted their record to achieve an Absolute Majority (373-285) on the paragraph pointing to "the significant savings that could be made if the European Parliament were to have a Single Seat". This Absolute Majority - as well as the 2012/2013 calendar vote in March - fundamentally shifts the debate.

As you know, the EU Treaty requires the European Parliament to hold 12 monthly plenary sessions in Strasbourg. As a result, we meet in Strasbourg 48 days every year. From next year, this will be 45 days, following our vote to hold two autumn plenary sessions during the same week to save money, time and the environment. This democratic decision of the Parliament is being contested by France before the European Court of Justice in closed proceedings.

All of the Parliament's other activities take place in Brussels (with the exception of a part of the administration, which is based in Luxembourg). Brussels is where committee and political group meetings are held. It is where most of our staff are based. It is where the other two institutions that form the EU decision-making triangle (the Council and the Commission) are located. Over the last 50 years, Brussels has evolved into the EU's democratic capital. It is where companies, NGOs, national, regional and local governments, industry associations and trade unions all have their offices. It is where the EU press corps has its hub, including technical facilities.

When the European Parliament started meeting in Strasbourg over 50 years ago, it was a consultative assembly with part-time Members who were not directly elected; it was purely advisory and had no powers. Today, it is on a par with the Council of Ministers when it comes to making laws and its Members are full-time legislators, directly elected by the peoples of Europe. Yet unlike national parliaments, it cannot decide when and where it wishes to meet.

Recent votes in the European Parliament as well as several surveys have shown that a majority of MEPs believe the European Parliament should have a Single Seat, in Brussels. The Dutch and UK governments have publicly backed this view. More than 1,25 million European citizens have signed an online petition to this effect.

Over time a number of parliaments have moved to reflect political reality: the US Congress moved from Philadelphia to Washington; the French Parliament moved from Versailles to Paris; and more recently, the German Parliament moved from Bonn to Berlin. We believe that in a modern Europe, the European Parliament must be able to do the same. We call on the French government to stop the political and legal posturing on this issue, and to enter into a real debate.

All we ask is that MEPs should be able to exercise their democratic rights and decide when and where to meet. In return, we are ready to help identify alternatives for the city of Strasbourg, both in institutional and in economic terms.

For Strasbourg, a better and brighter future lies ahead. The European Parliament has now far outgrown it. It would be better to find an alternative that matches its facilities and can be a more grateful guest.

Yours sincerely,

(Please see attached list of MEP signatories)

Edward McMillan-Scott
Alexander Alvaro
Bill Newton Dunn
Lena Ek
Phil Bradbourn
Christian Engström
Sarah Ludford
Ashley Fox
Alyn Smith
Ágnes Hankiss
Fiona Hall
Judith Sargentini
Dirk Sterckx
Raul Romeva i Rueda
Catherine Bearder
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Sophie In't Veld
Leonidas Donskis
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Martin Callanan
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