



M. Jean Leonetti  
Secrétaire d'Etat aux affaires européennes  
Ministère des Affaires étrangères et européennes  
37, Quai d'Orsay  
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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  
Frieda Brepoels  
Bart Staes  
Ivo Vajgl  
Sonia Alfano  
Krzysztof Lisek  
Sophie In't Veld  
Leonidas Donskis  
Liam Aylward  
Martin Callanan  
Jan Philipp Albrecht  
Cecilia Wikström  
Carl Haglund  
Chris Davies  
Sari Essayah  
Giommaria Uggias  
Stanimir Ilchev  
Sajjad Karim  
Jens Rohde  
Liz Lynne  
Keith Taylor  
Vincenzo Iovine  
George Lyon  
Mara Bizzotto  
John Attard Montalto  
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Charles Tannock  
Anna Maria Corazza Bildt  
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Marije Cornelissen  
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Francesco De Angelis  
Alexander Lambsdorff  
Jelko Kacin  
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Anna Rosbach  
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Olle Ludvigsson  
Anneli Jäätteenmäki  
Glenis Willmott  
Arlene McCarthy  
Ulrike Lunacek  
Vicky Ford  
Jean Lambert  
Judith Merkies  
Esther de Lange  
Diane Dodds  
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Marina Yannakoudakis  
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Anne E. Jensen  
Erminia Mazzoni  
Margrete Auken  
Satu Hassi  
Richard Ashworth  
Sir Robert Atkins  
Robert Sturdy  
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Jacqueline Foster  
Syed Kamall  
Julie Girling  
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Graham Watson  
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Monica Macovei  
Dr Kay Swinburne  
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