

'Strasbourg, seat of the European Parliament' from Tribune pour l'Europe (March 1999)

Caption: Strasbourg: the workplace and seat of the European Parliament. The new 'hemicycle' was opened in December 1999.

Source: Tribune pour l'Europe. Informations du Parlement européen. Mars 1999, n° 3 : spécial élections. [s.l.]. ISSN 0255 - 8815. "Strasbourg, siège du Parlement européen", p. 4 (France).

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Strasbourg, seat of the European Parliament

For many years, the issue of the seat of the European institutions gave rise to debate, sometimes even rivalry, between various cities keen to host the institutions of the new Europe in the making. The European Parliament was one of the institutions most affected.

Initially, its secretariat was located in Luxembourg so that it would be close to the High Authority, but its first plenary session was held in 1952 at the Maison de l'Europe in Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe. Since the Treaty of Rome was being prepared in Brussels, as well as for practical reasons, the European Parliament held meetings of its parliamentary committees in that city, where the European Commission had established itself.

The use of three places of work became a source of confusion. In the 1970s, for example, the European Parliament met alternately in Strasbourg and Luxembourg. A final decision (other than confirmation of the status quo) was a matter for the national governments, who took their time about it. It was not until December 1992 that all the governments of the Member States met in the margins of the Edinburgh Summit to adopt a final position.

Henceforth, Strasbourg is the seat of the European Parliament. The first article of the Edinburgh decision states that: 'The European Parliament shall have its seat in Strasbourg where the twelve periods of monthly plenary sessions, including the budget session, shall be held. The periods of additional plenary sessions shall be held in Brussels. The committees of the European Parliament shall meet in Brussels. The Secretariat of the European Parliament and its departments shall remain in Luxembourg.'

On the strength of that decision, taken by common accord under Article 216 of the EEC Treaty, the European Parliament was able to push ahead with its installation. In Strasbourg, where it had been sharing a debating chamber with the Council of Europe, a new building was erected to accommodate the Parliamentarians of the new millennium. The Louise Weiss Building, named after the oldest Member of the first European Parliament elected by universal suffrage, rises like an ocean liner above the banks of the River Ill. With over two million square metres of floor space, it will enable the European Parliament to play its role to the full by hosting all the meetings of political groups, committees, intergroups and visitors in optimum working conditions.