

The seats of the institutions of the European Union

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The seats of the institutions of the European Union

The Treaties establishing the European Communities do not stipulate the seats of each of the three organisations. Instead, they state that the seat of the institutions is to be determined by common accord of the governments of the Member States.

Since the creation of the Communities, the location of the seats of Community institutions and bodies has been a recurring topic of discussion among the Member States. The plan to establish a European District, envisaged by Jean Monnet as the single seat for all the institutions, could not be successfully implemented. Since it proved impossible for all the States to agree on one location, three cities have emerged over time as the ‘seats of the institutions’: **Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg.**

At the Conference of the Founding States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) held on 23 July 1952, Luxembourg was chosen as the provisional place of work for its institutions. By contrast, the Assembly would meet in Strasbourg.

When the two new Communities were created, namely the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom), Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg were chosen by the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held on 6 and 7 January 1958 as provisional venues for meetings on practical organisational grounds, pending a final decision by the governments on a joint seat. As a general rule, the Commissions and Councils met in Brussels or Luxembourg and the Assembly in Strasbourg. The Court of Justice remained in Luxembourg.

On 8 April 1965, when the executive bodies were merged, the representatives of the governments of the Member States established, in a *Decision on the provisional location of certain institutions and departments of the Communities*, that Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg would remain the provisional places of work of the institutions of the Communities.

The establishment of a single Council and a single Commission led to most of their departments being accommodated in Brussels. As a result, the 1965 Decision included a number of provisions designed to compensate Luxembourg for its ‘losses’. The Court of Justice, the Secretariat and the services connected with the Assembly remained in Luxembourg. Furthermore, the European Investment Bank and some of the departments of the Commission were to be located there. Luxembourg also became the location-elect for other, future Community bodies and departments, especially in the financial field. Moreover, during the months of April, June and October, the Council was to hold its sessions in Luxembourg. In other respects, the 1958 Decision was confirmed. In principle, the Assembly would continue to meet in Strasbourg.

Despite the provisional decision taken in 1965, the issue of the seat of Parliament remained a source of difficulty. Against the advice of France, the European Parliament held a few plenary sessions in Luxembourg between 1967 and 1981. Moreover, in order to be closer to the other political decision-making bodies based in the Belgian capital, Parliament held committee meetings and meetings of its political groups in Brussels and, in 1985, decided to build a Chamber there for the holding of some part-sessions. Spread as it is over three different places of work (Secretariat in Luxembourg, committees in Brussels and plenary sittings in Strasbourg), Parliament must overcome daily difficulties in the practical organisation of its work. In order to surmount those difficulties and to ensure that it operates properly, Parliament may take some decisions by virtue of its power of internal organisation but without exceeding its powers and encroaching on those of the Member States in respect of the location of its seat.

On 12 December 1992, at the Edinburgh European Council, the representatives of the governments of the Member States adopted by common agreement a *Decision on the location of the seats of the institutions and of certain bodies and departments of the European Communities*. That decision states that the European Parliament has its seat in Strasbourg and that additional plenary sittings are to be held in Brussels. Nonetheless, the European Parliament declared that it did not consider itself bound by a decision which, by effectively splitting its activities definitively between three different Member States, would be incompatible with the Treaties and with its natural rights and powers.

In confirmation of the Edinburgh decision, a *Protocol on the location of the seats of the institutions and of certain bodies and departments of the European Communities and of Europol* was annexed to the Treaties by the Treaty of Amsterdam dated 2 October 1997. Consequently, in response to the declaration by Parliament, the location of seats acquired the status of primary law.

The seats of the institutions were provided for as follows:

— The **European Parliament** has its seat in Strasbourg, where the 12 monthly part-sessions, including the budget part-session, are held. Additional part-sessions are held in Brussels. The committees of the European Parliament meet in Brussels. The Secretariat of the European Parliament and its departments remain in Luxembourg.

— The **Council** has its seat in Brussels. During the months of April, June and October, the Council holds its meetings in Luxembourg.

— The **Commission** has its seat in Brussels. Certain departments are established in Luxembourg, including the Office for Official Publications and the Statistical Office (Eurostat).

The **Court of Justice** and the **Court of First Instance**, the **Court of Auditors** and the **European Investment Bank** have their seats in Luxembourg.

The **Economic and Social Committee** and the **Committee of the Regions** have their seats in Brussels.

The **European Central Bank** has its seat in Frankfurt.