



QUAESTORS' Quarterly

Issue 4
June 2016

It is difficult to comprehend that I have already been Chair-in-Office of the Quaestors for six months and that it is soon time to hand the baton over to my colleague Quaestor, Karol Karski, for the second half of the year.

My time chairing the Quaestors meetings coincided with the tragic events of 22 March with the terrible attacks on Brussels' airport and metro system. Parliament's services reacted in an exemplary fashion on the day in taking care of our security whilst maintaining core services in operation. The Institution was soon back on its feet again, and special measures were put in place to transport Members to and from Brussels via other Belgian airports and even as far as Paris or Amsterdam where necessary. Several visitors' groups cancelled their trips in the aftermath of the attacks as many parents and group leaders were naturally worried about the safety of visiting the Institutions in Brussels. But parliamentary work must go on and we cannot give in to such vile attempts by terrorists to dictate our way of life.

Nevertheless, I warmly recommend this latest edition of the Quaestors' Quarterly and invite you to contact me or one of my

colleagues should you have any questions about any of the issues mentioned.

Andrey KOVATCHEV

Chair-in-Office of the Quaestors



Quaestors meet the Ombudsman

On 10 May, the Quaestors met Emily O'Reilly, the European Ombudsman, for an informal working lunch to discuss her work as coordinator of the European Network of Ombudsmen as well as some of her ongoing casework, including the updating of the Transparency Register. The lunch coincided with the presentation, on 3 May, of the Ombudsman's 2015 Annual Report to the President of Parliament. In 2015, the Ombudsman's office handled

2077 complaints and opened 261 inquiries with transparency issues being the most common complaint. Parliament was addressed in 8% of the inquiries, compared to 55% for the Commission.



IN THIS ISSUE

[Quaestors meet the Ombudsman](#)

[Written Declarations - survey**](#)**

[Discount train travel for Members](#)

[Members' salaries and taxation in Belgium](#)

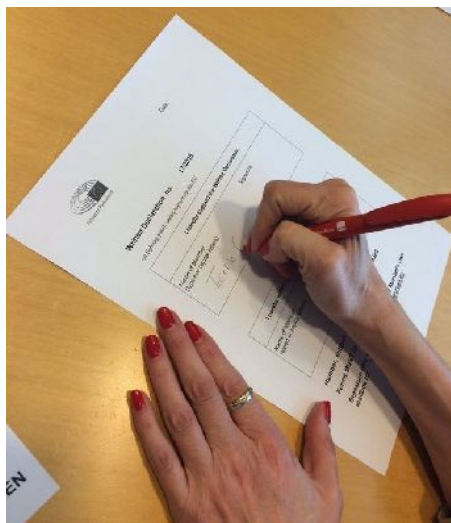
[Private filming in the European Parliament](#)

[EP Sports Centre](#)

[Internalisation of the drivers' service](#)

Written Declarations - survey

The procedure and rules governing written declarations (Rule 136) are the competence of the AFCO committee. The Quaestors recently discussed the practical application of the procedure following some concerns that the number of successful written declarations (those obtaining the signature of at least half the Members of Parliament within the 3-month deadline) have fallen significantly in recent years.



Prior to 2007 there used to be a tabling desk outside the plenary chamber in Strasbourg for Members to sign. However, following complaints about increasingly aggressive 'lobbying' and pressure on Members to sign the declarations as they passed on their way to vote as well as concerns of obstructing access points to the Chamber by people distributing leaflets about the various declarations, the Quaestors decided, in 2010, to remove the desk from in front of the Hemicycle.

Subsequently, the Rules of Procedure were revised, providing for an electronic register of signatures whereby Members can sign and scan a form to submit by email to the tabling office. Members may still go to the office to sign physically in PHS 02A49 (Brussels) or LOW To2024 (Strasbourg).

WritDeclSign@europarl.europa.eu

WHO TO CONTACT

For additional information, contact the Member's Activities Unit, DG Presidency:

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DeclEcrit@europarl.europa.eu

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European Parliament
2014-2019



XX.XX.2016

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WRITTEN DECLARATION

submitted under Rule 136 of the Rules of Procedure

One consequence of this has been that written declaration initiatives may have become less visible despite Members being informed by email, at the start of every part session, of all the written declarations pending and the number of signatures collected.

SURVEY

TELL US YOUR OPINION ABOUT WRITTEN DECLARATIONS

- **Do you find them a useful tool for your parliamentary work?**
- **Do you prefer to sign in person or by scanned signature?**
- **What suggestions for improvement, if any, to the current system would you propose?**

Please submit your answers, comments and suggestions to the following address:

SecrQuest@europarl.europa.eu

Discount train travel for Members



Did you know that Members of the European Parliament are able to travel anywhere in Belgium for free with the Belgian National Rail company, SNCB? At the beginning of the Parliamentary term, a free travel pass ('Libre Parcours') was issued by SNCB for each Member of Parliament. Parliament's Travel Service subsequently contacted each Member about this possibility and how to obtain one.

Members taking up office in the course of the parliamentary term are informed individually about the 'Libre Parcours'. If a Member loses the pass, a duplicate can be ordered through the Travel Organisation Service. SNCB charges a €20 administration fee for this replacement service. Members leaving the Parliament have to return the pass to the Travel Organisation Service.

Members of Parliament are also entitled to discounted rail travel with Thalys trains on cross border journeys such as Brussels to Paris, Amsterdam or Köln. Tickets can be purchased from any ticket office on presentation of your MEP badge. N.B. These fares only apply on the cross-border Thalys service and not if the journey is solely within Belgium.

TO COLLECT YOUR FREE TRAVEL PASS

If you have not already registered for your free rail pass, you can collect it from the following office ASP 03H161 in Brussels. Tel. 30466. Email: dgfins-organisationdesvoyages@europarl.europa.eu



Members' salaries and taxation in Belgium

Members' salaries are subject to Community tax on the same terms and conditions as those for officials of the European Union and deducted directly at source. The Statute stipulates however that national tax law may be applied, provided that any double taxation is avoided.



Belgian residents are subject to personal income tax, unless they provide evidence that they are not domiciled for tax purposes. It is in the interest of those who do not have Belgian nationality and are registered as resident in their own country to enrol in the special 'non-residents' register kept by each municipality, so that the presumption that they are domiciled in Belgium for tax purposes does not apply. You can contact your local commune for this. If you are not registered as being in receipt of taxable income in Belgium you do not have to fill out an income tax return. However, if you have received an income tax return at home, you must return it, signed and dated, in order to

avoid a fine and to ensure that you are treated as a non-taxable person in the future. You can enclose a tax certificate issued by the European Parliament and a photocopy of your Belgian special identity card.

If you are in receipt of taxable income in Belgium (occupational income other than the MEP salary or from renting out a property), you must complete and return the tax form with a tax certificate issued by the European Parliament.

Members, regardless of nationality, who have their principal private residence in Belgium, are required to fill in a personal income tax return in Belgium and to declare all income from anywhere in the world.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Should you require any further information, please contact the Members' Salary and Social Entitlements Unit: dgfins-mepremuneration@europarl.europa.eu.

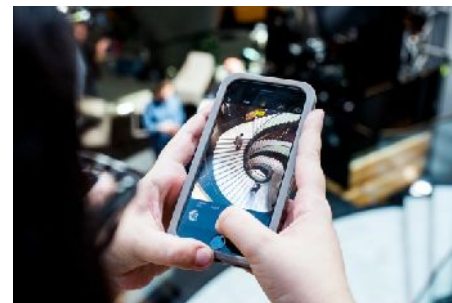
The tax certificates referred to above are available on request from the same address.

For further information concerning Belgian tax arrangements: http://finances.belgium.be/fr/particuliers/declaration_impot/declaration_non-residents

Private filming in the European Parliament

Following the adoption of the revised Rules governing recordings by media representatives on the premises of the

European Parliament by the Bureau at its meeting of 7 September 2015, the issue of external providers, who are not professional journalists, being invited by the Members to make audio-visual recordings of their activities in Parliament, was recently discussed by the Quaestors.



In order to avoid confusion and to make a clear distinction between media representatives and non-media representatives, a separate set of rules governing recordings by non-media representatives on the premises of the European Parliament was drawn up and subsequently approved by the Bureau. They cover all forms of sound or image recording within the Parliament's premises by non-media representatives and thus form a legal basis for Members who wish to record statements or videos of themselves or their visitors in Parliament without having recourse to a professional film crew.

For anyone wishing to film on Parliament's premises, it will still be necessary to request a filming permit and obtain a valid access card to Parliament. The use of hidden recording equipment is also forbidden and recording is only permitted in the areas and at the times requested on the application form.

Furthermore, all audio-visual recordings remain prohibited from all restaurants and bars, kiosques and banks and in security-sensitive areas such as at the entrances to Parliament, car parks and offices used by Parliament's services.



The Rules (and any infringements) are to be monitored by Parliament's media directorate, who may withdraw recording permits for up to a year, whilst any appeals against such a decision would be decided by the Quaestors.

EP Sports Centre



At the beginning of the year, Parliament's sports centre in Brussels was temporarily closed due to some legal issues between the outgoing and incoming sports management companies over the status of the existing personnel which is currently the subject of a case before the Belgian courts. Parliament itself is not a party in the case. As an interim measure, the fitness facilities in Brussels have been run with the assistance of the accredited sports monitor who supervises the fitness room in Strasbourg during part sessions and two ushers provided by DG INLO. Inevitably, the gym has had to operate a reduced service and restricted opening hours.

The Quaestors held a discussion on the various options for a more permanent solution - including the possibility of closure, launching a new call for tender for another external operator or managing the gym internally. It was a strongly held view that the Institution has a duty to look after the well-being of

its Members and employees by providing such facilities so the option of closing the gym down was rejected. The legal uncertainty arising from the ongoing court case, which could take a year or more to conclude, would also likely be problematic for any potential future external bidders to run the sports centre. Thus, the only viable solution left is to manage the Centre internally.



The Quaestors argued that the fitness centre should be open at least from 7.30 until 21.00 so that staff and Members can access the facilities before or after work. Contrary to reports which have appeared in sections of the media, the Quaestors also insisted that the Centre become entirely self-financing from its subscription base rather than be a drain on Parliament's budget. The more people who join, the lower the membership fees and vice versa. Parliament's Bureau approved the proposal at its meeting on 6 June.

Internalisation of the Drivers' service

In the light of recent terror attacks and enhanced concern for Members' safety as well as concerns over the respect for the social rights of the drivers working for Parliament and with a view to offering a better service to Members the Bureau recently agreed to pursue the internalisation of the service.

Security will be improved by more thorough background checks on drivers before employment and by procuring cars with a higher security standard. Regular security training for drivers will be ensured and the possibility of long-term employment opportunities will

improve loyalty of the drivers towards the institution.

Furthermore, there have been complaints by drivers alleging that they had not been paid the minimum wage or over-time by their employer. By internalising the service, Parliament will also ensure the recruitment of more female drivers and impose language training to ensure that all drivers are able to communicate in at least English and French with Members.

Through leasing contracts, Parliament will also ensure the use of more electric / hybrid cars for city driving, complying with the latest environmental standards.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This Newsletter is produced by the Secretariat of the Bureau and Quaestors. For further information on any of the articles in this edition, please contact one of the Quaestors responsible or the secretariat at the following address:

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