

# REPORT

## Study visit to the European Parliament and Belgian Parliament

21 to 28 March, 2011



Report on the Study Visit by Officers of Rajya Sabha  
Secretariat  
to the European Parliament and Belgian Parliament

21 – 28 March, 2011

P. Gopalakrishnan, AS & FA  
(Group Leader)  
P.P.K. Ramacharyulu, Director  
Bharti Tiwari, Director  
Ch. Ramakant Das, Director  
Mahesh Tiwari, Joint Director  
Ashis Chakravarti, Joint Director

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

1.0 Man learns throughout his life and it is an unending process. Meeting and discussing with people gives ample opportunity to him to increase knowledge and skills. Exchange of ideas amongst the officers of different parliaments help in understanding the systems and practices followed in other countries and adapting one's own system as per the requirements.

1.1 As part of the exchange programmes for the officers of Rajya Sabha Secretariat with the Parliamentary systems in other countries, a study visit to the European Parliament was organised from 21 to 25 March, 2011. The opportunity was also taken to visit the Belgian Parliament on 28 March, 2011 and study the system obtaining there.

1.2 During the week long programme in the European Parliament we had occasion to exchange ideas with the various officers. It was a sprawling gigantic modern structure that the European Parliament has. It was a wonderful experience to be there. The European Parliament is the only multi-national parliamentary assembly in the world, and the only EU institution directly elected by Europe's citizens. It represents approximately 500 million people in the EU's 27 Member States. Elections are held every five years and the last elections were held in June, 2009. During the elections held in 2009, 736 Members were elected to Parliament. They join together in political groups on the basis of political affiliation rather than nationality.

1.3 Similarly Belgian Parliament, since inception, in 1830, has always had bicameral parliamentary system. The Parliament consists of two assemblies, the House of Representatives and the Senate, which are independent from one another. The special feature of Belgium is the devolution of powers to local government. After the elections of 2010, due to lack of majority and understanding among the political parties, regular government has not been formed. Ad-hoc or interim government is still continuing. Despite this, the governance in the country is going perfectly well because of the devolution of powers.

1.4 The programme schedule was very meticulously drawn and well structured by the officials of our Embassy and of the European Parliament and the Belgian Parliament. Our Programme commenced on 21 March, 2011. Starting with an introduction by Mr. Dick Toornstra, Director, OPPD Division, Officers of various divisions discussed about the practices obtaining in the European Parliament. On the second day, Mr. Graham Watson, Member of

European Parliament discussed about the India and European Parliament. He is also the Chairman of the Delegation for relations with India. In that capacity, he requested us to impress upon our authorities in the Indian Parliament for early formation of Friendship Group for European Parliament. In both European Parliament and Belgian Parliament, our officers also had the occasion to have one to one discussions with the respective unit heads/officers. The European Parliament had organized visits to some of our officers to the related units for detailed understanding and study of the respective units. Director (RSTV) had visited the unit of Europarl TV channel. Similarly, Director (Interpretation) visited the interpretation unit and also visited the some interpretation booths while in action.

1.5 Our delegation received a warm reception from the Secretariat of the European Parliament. The officers of the OPPD Division who were attached with our delegation as well as the faculty extended a warm response to our delegation. A Member of the European Parliament addressing us and joining us for lunch explains the importance attached to our delegation. We had the occasion to visit the Plenary session of the European Parliament on 23 March, 2011. It was a great experience to see such a huge modern hall of the Parliament. We however, could not get the opportunity to witness the proceedings of any committee. Committee proceedings are open to public. Though we had visited the Belgian Parliament, but during that period, the Parliament was not in session. We therefore, could not witness the proceedings of the House or the Committees.

1.6 Chapter II gives a backgrounder about the European Parliament whereas Chapter III deals with the powers and functions including parliamentary questions in European Parliament. Chapter IV deals with law making process Chapter V deals with the Committee system in the European Parliament. Chapter VI gives a brief idea of the salary and allowances of Members of European Parliament and Chapter VII deals with the Secretariat of the Parliament.

1.7 European Parliament provides interpretation and translation for 23 languages which is the largest of its kind in the world. It is a great learning experience for this. The interpretation, translation and hansard are all closely knit together through IT and it is excellently organised and implemented and the same practice is followed in Belgian Parliament. Chapter VIII deals with this in detail. IT and Media play a prominent role in the day to day functioning of the European Parliament. This has been dealt in detail in Chapter IX. Chapter X deals briefly with the security system obtaining in European Parliament and Belgian Parliament.

1.8 Chapter XI gives a brief background of the practices and procedures obtaining in Belgian Parliament. Some observations and suggestions of the delegation have been given in Chapter XII.

1.9 The delegation got an excellent response, support from the Indian Embassy in Brussels. The meticulously prepared programme and discussions in both the Parliaments were mainly due to the efforts of the officers of the Embassy. The members of the Delegation also got the opportunity to meet and interact with the Indian Ambassador to Brussels. The appreciable logistic support and the presence of an officer of the Embassy throughout the programme played a significant role in making the Exchange Programme a success.

## CHAPTER II

### EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – A BACKGROUNDER

#### THE EUROPEAN UNION

2.0 The European Union (EU) is a union of 27 member States. It is a unique entity with both inter-governmental and supranational features. It is an evolving political and economic entity. Turkey, Iceland, Macedonia and Croatia are candidate countries for accession to the EU while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia are potential candidate countries.

2.1 The EU was established under that name in 1992 by the Treaty on European Union (*The Maastricht Treaty*). However, many aspects of the EU existed before that date, dating back to 1951. The EU has its roots in the aftermath of World War II, when six countries pooled their coal and supplies of iron ore for steel production, to prevent further conflict.

2.2 The EU has evolved a system of a rotating Presidency from among its member countries for a period of six months. Hungary is presently holding the Presidency for the first half of 2011 and Poland will take over during the second half of 2011.

#### The EU Institutions

2.3 The European Union comprises four main institutions:-

- The European Council/Council of the European Union;
- The European Commission (EC);
- The European Parliament; and
- The European Court of Justice

2.4 The **European Council** which comprises of the Heads of States/Government of EU member States is the highest policy making organ of the EU and meets four or more times in a year. The Council of the European Union comprises of Ministers of the member States and the Members of the European Commission. It is the main decision-taking body of the EU.

Although the Council of the European Union is a single body, it meets in ten different configurations depending on the subject being dealt with.

2.5 The **European Commission** is the executive branch of the EU. It comprises 27 Commissioners (one from each member State) who work like EU ministers with different portfolio. The EC, based in Brussels, has various directorates dealing with subjects such as External Relations, Trade, etc.

2.6 The **European Parliament** is the directly elected, legislative body of the EU. The European Parliament is unicameral. However, the European Council, in its legislative functions, works like a more powerful Upper Chamber. The EP cannot initiate legislation; but it legislates laws initiated by the Commission, approves the budget, international agreements and the Commission nominations. The EP has multinational political groups and 736 seats at present. It is based in Strasbourg (plenary sessions) and Brussels (committee meetings and short plenary sittings) with its Secretariat based in Luxembourg.

2.7 The **European Court of Justice** has one judge from each country and is located in Luxembourg. It adjudicates laws and regulations adopted by the EU.

## **THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

2.8 The origins of European Parliament go back to the 1950s and the founding Treaties. Since 1979 its members have been directly elected by the citizens of the EU.

2.9 Elections to European Parliament are held every five years, and every EU citizen is entitled to vote, and stand as a candidate, wherever they live in the member countries.

### **Official seat of European Parliament**

2.10 The European Parliament's official seat is in Strasbourg, on the border between France and Germany, a city that symbolises the reconciliation of Europe after the two world wars. Every year Parliament holds 12 plenary sessions in Strasbourg. Its Members meet in parliamentary committees in Brussels, where additional plenary sessions are also held. Members go to Strasbourg only when the Plenaries are held there. Rest of the time they are in Brussels attending committees regularly and also plenaries when held in Brussels. Therefore, the visit of our delegation was organized in Brussels.

### **Increasing importance of EP**

2.11 Since 1979, successive European treaties have increased the powers of the European Parliament when it comes to drafting the EU budget and laws. Political control of the EU's other institutions and bodies have also been strengthened. The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on 1 December, 2009, extends Parliament's budgetary powers to cover all EU expenditure, including common agricultural policy spending, on which the Council (representing the Member States' governments) previously had the last word. European Parliament's legislative role has grown considerably. Previously, European Parliament adopted laws designed principally to facilitate the movement of persons, goods, services and capital within the EU or to protect the environment and consumers. Now, their approval is also required for laws to be adopted in areas such as agriculture, fisheries, energy, tourism, control of the external borders, police and judicial cooperation and civil protection.

### **Members**

2.12 The parliamentarians are known in English as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). They are elected every 5 years by universal adult suffrage and sit according to political allegiance; about a third are women. Before 1979 they were appointed by their national parliaments. As states are allocated seats according to population, the maximum number of MEPs is 736. Under Lisbon Treaty, there will be 751 members (however, as the President cannot vote while in the chair there will only be 750 voting members at any one time). In addition, the maximum number of seats allocated to a state will be lowered to ninety-six, from the current ninety-nine, and the minimum number of seats will be raised to six, from the current five. These seats are distributed according to "degressive proportionality",

### **Political Groups (Parties)**

2.13 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) do not sit in national blocks, but in EU-wide political groups. Between them, they represent all views on political issues and European integration, from the strongly pro-federalist to the openly Eurosceptic. Elections are fought in each country on political party lines. National level political parties are members of respective broad pan-European political alliance, commonly known as 'political groups'. They reflect broadly overlapping political ideologies cutting across countries. MEPs in Parliament are organised into seven different parliamentary groups, including over thirty non-attached members known as non-inscrits. The two largest groups are the European People's Party

(EPP) and the Socialists & Democrats (S&D). These two groups have dominated the Parliament for much of its life, continuously holding between 50 and 70 percent of the seats together. (List of Membership Group wise is at Annexure – I)

2.14 No single group has ever held a majority in Parliament. As a result of being broad alliances of national parties, European groups' parties are very decentralised and hence have more in common with parties in federal states like Germany or the United States than unitary states like the majority of the EU states. For a group to be recognised, it needs 25 MEPs from seven different countries. Once recognised, groups receive financial subsidies from the parliament and guaranteed seats on Committees, creating an incentive for the formation of groups.

### **Elections**

2.15 Elections take place, directly in every member-state, every five years since 1979. Occasionally, when a nation joins mid-term, a by-election will be held to elect their representatives. This has happened four times, most recently when Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007. Elections take place across several days according to local custom and, besides having to be proportional, the electoral system is chosen by the member-state. This includes allocation of sub-national constituencies; while most members have a national list, some, like the UK and France, divide their allocation between regions. Seats are allocated to member-states according to their population, with no state having more than 99, but no fewer than 5, to maintain proportionality. At present, there are 28 electoral procedures adopted by the different member countries. The most recent Union-wide elections to the European Parliament were the European elections of 2009, held in June of that year. They were the largest simultaneous transnational elections ever held anywhere in the world.

## CHAPTER III

### EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IN ACTION

#### **Powers and Functions of European Parliament**

3.0 The main role of the European Parliament is - Managing the European Budget; Scrutiny of Expenditure; Supervising the European Commission; Monitoring the Council's work.

##### **i. Managing the European Budget**

3.1 Every year MEPs spend long months negotiating with the Council on the basis of proposals from the Commission, to fix the Union's revenues and expenditure for the following year. Parliament has the power to reject the budget and demand a new draft if it does not believe sufficient consideration has been given to its priorities.

3.2 The latest reform of the treaties has extended Parliament's budgetary powers to cover all EU expenditure, including common agricultural policy spending, on which previously the Council had the last word. The procedure for adopting the annual budget has been simplified.

##### **ii. Expenditure under the microscope**

3.3 With the help of the European Court of Auditors, Parliament constantly checks that the budget is being properly managed and ensures that action is taken when any fraud is discovered.

3.4 Every year the European Commission and the other EU institutions are required to inform the Parliament that they have made appropriate use of the EU money made available to them. This is known as the 'budget discharge' procedure. The Commission must take into account any recommendations made by MEPs.

##### **iii. Supervising the European Commission**

3.5 The Commission President can only be appointed with the agreement of the European Parliament. A candidate is proposed by the Member States' Governments on the basis of the results of the European elections, and must then be elected by the MEPs.

3.6 MEPs approve the Commission *en bloc* in a vote of confidence. They may also force the Commission to resign, again *en bloc*, by means of a vote of censure. However, a censure is

viewed as a 'last resort' and has never been applied, although in 1999 the prospect of Parliament passing a vote of no-confidence in the Commission under the presidency of Jacques Santer led to resignation of the Commission.

3.7 Parliament keeps a close eye on the Commission's work, scrutinizing its reports on EU policies, legislation and the budget. Commissioners are often required to appear before MEPs, at Committee meetings or in plenary, to defend their policies, explain what action they intend to take and answer questions. At every plenary session, the President of the Commission is present for Question Hour, during which MEPs question him or her on current affairs.

#### **iv. Monitoring the Council's work**

3.8 Parliament's President states its key policy recommendations at the start of each EU summit (or 'European Council'), where the leaders of the Member States agree on overall policy guidelines. The president of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy report regularly to MEPs on their activities.

3.9 The Presidency of the Council, which is held by national ministers in rotation, often meets the chairs of Parliament's political groups and attends plenary sessions to present its programme and report on its results and discuss them with MEPs. The presidency also frequently takes part in committee meetings.

3.10 MEPs may put questions to the EU Council Presidency on any topic at a plenary session or in writing.

#### **v. Other Supervisory Powers**

3.11 The Parliament also has other powers of general supervision, mainly granted by the Maastricht Treaty. The Parliament has the power to set up a Committee of Inquiry, for example over mad cow disease or CIA detention flights—the former led to the creation of the European veterinary agency. The Parliament can call other institutions to answer questions and if necessary to take them to court if they break EU law or treaties. Furthermore it has powers over the appointment of the members of the Court of Auditors and the president and

executive board of the European Central Bank. The ECB president is also obliged to present an annual report to the parliament.

3.12 The European Ombudsman is elected by the Parliament, who deals with public complaints against all institutions. Petitions can also be brought forward by any EU citizen on a matter within the EU's sphere of activities. The Committee on Petitions hears cases, some 1500 each year, sometimes presented by the citizen themselves at the Parliament. While the Parliament attempts to resolve the issue as a mediator they do resort to legal proceedings if it is necessary to resolve the citizens' dispute.

### **BUSINESS ORGANISATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

3.13 The work of the European Parliament is structured according to a calendar divided up into different coloured weeks: pink, red, blue and turquoise, each corresponding to a different type of parliamentary activity. (A sample chart is at Annexure – II)

#### **i. Pink weeks for parliamentary committees**

3.14 The European Parliament has 20 standing committees, each specializing in a particular field, such as the environment, transport, industry or the budget. The make-up of these committees reflects the various political trends in Parliament and the number of MEPs they contain varies from committee to committee. They are responsible for preparing the work for plenary sessions. Committees are dealt in detail separately in this report later.

#### **ii. Red weeks for plenary sessions**

3.15 The plenary session is the highlight of the parliamentary month. This is when all the MEPs assemble either in the chamber in Strasbourg or, for additional, shorter sessions, in Brussels. The reports adopted in committee are once again debated, amended and adopted to reflect Parliament's official position.

3.16 Besides the Committee reports, MEPs also adopt resolutions and directly question Commission or Council representatives on topical issues. Plenary sessions may also be attended by Heads of State or Government and personalities from all over the world.

**iii. Blue weeks for the political groups**

3.17 During 'group weeks', which are generally in the week before the plenary session, each political group coordinates and formulates the positions it will take in the assembly on each of the subjects on the agenda.

**iv. Turquoise weeks: MEPs in their constituencies or on mission**

3.18 A number of weeks a year are set aside for MEPs to carry out constituency work and meet their electorate or to travel on mission to other parts of the world.

**Plenary Sitings**

3.19 The plenary sittings represent the culmination of the legislative work done in committee and in the political groups. The plenary sitting is also the forum in which the Members of the European Parliament or MEPs - take part in Community decision-making and express their standpoint vis-à-vis the Commission and Council.

3.20 In plenary, MEPs, officials, interpreters and translators follow very precise procedures in order to ensure the best possible conduct of the sitting.

**i. Work in plenary**

3.21 Parliament meets in plenary session every month (except August) in Strasbourg, for a 'part-session' lasting four days (from Monday to Thursday). It also meets in Brussels for two days (Wednesday and Thursday) six times a year. The part-session is divided into daily sittings.

3.22 Plenary business mainly focuses on debates and votes. Only the texts adopted in plenary and written declarations signed by a majority of Members formally constitute acts of the European Parliament. These concern different types of text depending on the subject under consideration and the legislative procedure applicable:

- legislative reports are the texts examined by Parliament in the framework of the various Community legislative procedures: codecision, assent and consultation. Only the codecision procedure gives Parliament an equal role as legislator with the Council of the European Union. Certain parliamentary reports thus have more legislative weight than others;

- the budgetary procedure: the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union make up the budgetary authority of the European Union which determines, on an annual basis, the expenditure and revenue of the Union;
- non-legislative reports are drawn up by Parliament on its own initiative, within the parliamentary committee responsible. By adopting these texts, Parliament addresses the other European institutions and bodies, the national governments, or indeed third countries, with the aim of drawing attention to a specific matter and eliciting a response. Although they have no legislative value, these initiatives are founded on a parliamentary legitimacy which may well convince the Commission to come up with proposals on the matter concerned.

3.23 During the plenary sitting, Parliament can decide to express its opinion on any matter which it considers important. It can also ask the Commission to submit an appropriate proposal on issues which in Parliament's view require a legislative act to be adopted. The sitting also includes a period set aside for Question Time with the Council and/or the Commission.

3.24 Parliament's annual calendar of work is adopted each year in plenary, usually in June, on a proposal from the Conference of Presidents of the political groups. The calendar indicates the weeks set aside for committee meetings and for political group meetings. The plenary agenda indicates whether the statements by the Council, Commission or European Council and the oral questions to the Council and Commission are to be followed by a vote on a motion for a resolution. These texts are generally tabled by a committee, a political group or at least 40 Members.

3.25 The minutes of each sitting give details of the exact proceedings and business of the day (documents tabled, debates, votes, explanations of vote, appointments, etc.). The results of votes are also annexed to the minutes.

## **ii. The plenary in action**

3.26 A parliamentary report put to the vote in plenary is generally the subject of a debate in which the Commission, the representatives of the political groups and individual MEPs express their views. Speaking time per person, often very short, depends on the number of Members who have asked for the floor.

3.27 Unlike the voting, which is sometimes held at a very rapid pace, the debates can last for several hours, depending on the number of Members who wish to speak. They usually speak in their own language, and what they say is interpreted simultaneously by the interpreters into the other official EU languages.

3.28 Speaking time in the Chamber is allocated according to the following criteria: a first fraction of speaking time is divided equally amongst all the political groups, then a further fraction is divided among the groups in proportion to the total number of their members. MEPs who wish to speak are entered on the list of speakers in an order based on the numerical size of their group. However, a priority speaking slot is given to the rapporteurs of the committees responsible and to draftsmen of other committees asked for an opinion.

3.29 Distinguished visitors regularly come to address Parliament, including Heads of State, who are normally received in formal sitting. The then Indian President Shri A.P.J. Abdul Kalam addressed the European Parliament in April, 2007.

### **iii. The voting marathon**

3.30 Votes are generally held around midday. Voting generally proceeds at a rapid pace. Members sometimes have to vote on hundreds of amendments.

3.31 During the vote on a parliamentary report or a resolution, Members can change the text submitted to them by adopting amendments, which may seek to delete, reformulate, replace or add to the content of the text under consideration. MEPs first vote on each amendment individually and then on the whole text as amended.

3.32 Normally MEPs vote by show of hands, and the President of the sitting determines the majorities in each case. If the show of hands is unclear, the president calls for an electronic vote to secure a more precise result. A roll call vote must be taken if requested by a political group or at least 40 Members one day before the vote. In this case, the individual vote cast by each MEP is recorded and published in an annex to the minutes, unless voting by secret ballot has also been requested.

3.33 In plenary, the European Parliament normally takes decisions by an absolute majority of votes cast. A quorum (minimum number of Members who must be present in order for the result of a vote to be valid) exists when one third of the component Members of Parliament are

present in the Chamber. If the president, at the request of at least 40 Members, establishes that the quorum is not present, the vote is held over to the next sitting.

3.34 The Commission can respond to the result of the vote and announce its conclusions. At the end of voting time, Members who so request may take the floor again to give an explanation of vote and to make their analysis and explain their choice or that of their group.

## **PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS**

3.35 Parliamentary questions are questions addressed to the Commission and Council by MEPs. They may be followed by a debate. This is a direct form of parliamentary supervision of the Commission and Council. (One Sample Question is at Annexure III)

3.36 There are three categories of parliamentary question:

### **i. Questions for oral answer with debate**

3.37 Questions may be put to the Council or the Commission by a committee, a political group or at least 40 Members with a request that they be placed on the agenda of Parliament. Such questions shall be submitted in writing to the President who shall immediately refer them to the Conference of Presidents. The Conference of Presidents shall decide whether and in what order questions should be placed on the agenda. Questions not placed on Parliament's agenda within three months of being submitted shall lapse.

3.38 Questions to the Commission must be referred to that institution at least one week before the sitting on whose agenda they are to appear and questions to the Council at least three weeks before that date.

3.39 One of the questioners may move the question for five minutes. One member of the institution concerned shall answer. The author of the question is entitled to use the whole period of speaking time mentioned. No Member may put more than one question to the Council and one question to the Commission at any given part-session. Questions shall be submitted in writing to the President, who shall rule on their admissibility and on the order in which they are to be taken. The questioner shall be notified immediately of this decision.

**ii. Questions for Written answer**

3.40 Any Member may put questions for written answer to the President of the European Council, the Council, the Commission or the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Questions shall be submitted in writing to the President who shall forward them to the addressees. Doubts concerning the admissibility of a question shall be settled by the President. The questioner shall be notified of his decision. If a question cannot be answered within the time limit set it shall, at the request of the author, be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the committee responsible. Questions which require an immediate answer but not detailed research (priority questions) shall be answered within three weeks of being forwarded to the addressees. Each Member may table one priority question each month.

3.41 Other questions (non-priority questions) shall be answered within six weeks of being forwarded to the addressees. Members shall indicate which type of question they are submitting. The final decision shall be taken by the President.

**iii. Questions for written answer to the European Central Bank**

3.42 Member may put questions for written answer to the European Central Bank. Such questions shall be submitted in writing to the Chair of the committee responsible, who shall forward them to the European Central Bank. The questions and answers shall be published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

## **CHAPTER IV**

# **LAWMAKING IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

### **Ordinary Legislative Procedure**

4.0 The ordinary legislative procedure is, as the name suggests, the main legislative procedure of the Union's decision-making system. It was introduced under the name "codecision" by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and strengthened by the subsequent changes to the Treaties. The name "ordinary legislative procedure" was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. It is based on the principle of parity and aims to ensure that neither of the two decision-making bodies (the European Parliament and the Council) can adopt legislation alone without the agreement of the other. It applies to the majority of legislations governing most of the areas of policy where the Union can act, such as the internal market and economic governance, free movement of workers, agriculture, regional and social development policy, justice and home affairs, education and culture etc.

4.1 Co-decision, which puts the European Parliament on an equal footing with the Council, has become the 'ordinary legislative procedure' for the adoption of EU laws.

4.2 The ordinary legislative procedure is divided into three stages. The general outline of this procedure is as follows.

4.3 The Commission submits a legislative proposal to the European Parliament and the Council.

4.4 At first reading (the first stage of deliberation of the text) Parliament adopts or does not adopt amendments (changes) to the Commission proposal. If Parliament does not adopt amendments and if the Council also accepts the Commission proposal, the legislative proposal is adopted. It is also adopted if the Council accepts Parliament's amendments. The new law can then enter into force. If the Council does not approve all the MEPs' amendments, it submits an alternative text to Parliament setting out the Member States' position in first reading.

4.5 A second reading then begins. The legislative process is completed if, within three months, the MEPs approve the Council's position, reject it or do not take a decision. If, however, the MEPs propose amendments to the Council's position, the Council is required to

examine those amendments in a second reading. The legislative text is adopted if the Council approve all the amendments.

4.6 If it does not approve all the amendments, a consensus must be reached: this is the stage known as conciliation. This task is given to a conciliation committee, composed of representatives of the two institutions. The Commission is also involved throughout the procedure. If, within six weeks, the conciliation committee does not approve a joint text, the proposal falls.

4.7 If, however, the representatives of the two institutions reach an agreement on a joint text, that text is submitted, in a third and final reading, to a plenary session of Parliament and to the Council. If the text is then approved it becomes law. If no decision is taken, the proposed act is deemed not to have been adopted.

4.8 At the very beginning of the legislative procedure, the proposal is also sent to the national parliaments, who have eight weeks to assess its compatibility with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. If a number of parliaments raise objections, the EU institutions are required to re-examine the proposal and, if necessary, substantiate their decision to pursue the procedure.

### **Special legislative procedures**

4.9 Some acts must be adopted unanimously by the Council, with Parliament's prior approval. MEPs thus have a kind of veto, allowing them to reject or accept a proposal as a whole, without the possibility of proposing amendments. This is the case with the multi-annual financial framework and measures to combat discrimination or extend the rights associated with citizenship (which also require national ratification).

4.10 Other acts are adopted by the Council unanimously or by qualified majority after Parliament has been 'consulted'. In such cases the MEPs' opinion is not binding and it is the governments that have the final word. The procedure applies, for example, to social security and protection acts, tax-related provisions in the area of energy and harmonization of turnover taxes and indirect taxation. It also applies to operational police cooperation and to measures governing intervention by a Member State's authorities in the territory of another EU country.

4.11 The rules on the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal and European elections in the Member State of residence are also subject to this procedure, although the Council may choose - by unanimous decision taken after consulting Parliament - to apply the ordinary legislative procedure.

### **Legislative initiative procedure**

4.12 The Commission has the legislative initiative. However, under the Treaty of Maastricht enhanced by the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament has a right of legislative initiative that allows it to ask the Commission to submit a proposal.

4.13 According to the Treaty, the Commission shall initiate the Union's annual and multi-annual programming. In view of achieving that goal, the Commission prepares its work programme, which is its contribution to the Union's annual and multi-annual programming. The European Parliament already cooperates with the Commission in the process of drafting the Commission's work programme and the Commission shall take into account the priorities expressed by Parliament at that stage. Following its adoption by the Commission, a trilogue between Parliament, the Council and the Commission is foreseen with a view to reaching an agreement on the Union's programming. Parliament adopts a resolution on the annual programming. The President asks the Council to deliver an opinion on the Commission's work programme and Parliament's resolution. Where an institution is unable to comply with the timetable laid down it is required to notify the other institutions as to the reasons for the delay and to propose a new timetable.

4.14 On the basis of a report by one of its committees, Parliament, acting by a majority of its Members, may request the Commission to submit any appropriate legislative proposal. Parliament may, at the same time, set a deadline for the submission of such a proposal. The Commission may agree or refuse to submit the proposal requested. Before opening the procedure, the committee responsible must check that no legislative proposal of the same type is in preparation.

4.15 A proposal for a Union act on the basis of the right of initiative granted to Parliament under Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union may also be proposed by an individual Member of the European Parliament. Such a proposal shall be submitted to the President of the Parliament who refers it to the committee responsible for consideration. It may decide to submit it to the plenary.

**Consultation**

4.16 Consultation is a special legislative procedure, whereby Parliament is asked for its opinion on proposed legislation before the Council adopts it. Parliament's consultation is also required, as a non-legislative procedure, where international agreements are adopted.

**Consent**

4.17 In certain legislative areas, the European Parliament is requested to give its consent, as a special legislative procedure. The consent procedure gives Parliament the right of veto. Parliament's role is thus to approve or reject the legislative proposal without further amendments and the Council cannot overrule Parliament's opinion. Consent is also required as a non-legislative procedure when the Council is adopting certain international agreements.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **COMMITTEES AND DELEGATIONS**

5.0 Preparatory work for the Parliament's plenary sittings takes place in the Parliament's 20 committees, which cover everything from women's rights to health and consumer protection. A committee consists of 24 to 76 MEPs, and has a chair, a bureau and a Secretariat. Parliament can also set up sub-committees and special committees to deal with specific issues as well as committees of inquiry under its supervisory remit. Debates in the committees are open to the public.

#### **Standing Committees**

5.1 Standing committees in the European Parliament play an important role in the legislative process. The members are elected during the first part-session following the re-election of Parliament and again two and a half years thereafter.

#### **Special Committees**

5.2 On a proposal from the Conference of Presidents, Parliament may at any time set up special committees, whose powers, composition and term of office shall be defined at the time the decision to set them up is taken. Their term of office may not exceed 12 months, except where Parliament extends the term on its expiry. These Committees are like the Ad-Hoc Committees constituted in Indian Parliament.

#### **Committees of Inquiry**

5.3 Parliament may, at the request of one quarter of its component Members, set up a committee of inquiry to investigate alleged contraventions of Union law or alleged maladministration in the application of Union law which would appear to be the act of an institution or body of the European Union, of a public administrative body of a Member State, or of persons empowered by Union law to implement that law.

#### **Composition of Committees**

5.4 Members of committees and committees of inquiry are elected after nominations are submitted by the political groups and the non-attached Members. The Conference of Presidents

submit proposals to Parliament. The composition of the committees shall, as far as possible, reflect the composition of Parliament.

### **Duties of Committees**

5.5 Standing committees examine questions referred to them by Parliament or, during an adjournment of the session, by the President on behalf of the Conference of Presidents. The responsibilities of special committees and committees of inquiry are defined when they are set up. They shall not be entitled to deliver opinions to other committees.

5.6 In case, two or more standing committees are competent to deal with a question, one committee shall be named as the committee responsible and the others as committees asked for opinions.

5.7 A question shall not, however, be referred simultaneously to more than three committees unless it is decided for sound reasons to depart from this.

5.8 Any committee may, with the agreement of Parliament's Bureau, instruct one or more of its members to undertake a study or fact-finding mission.

5.9 The following are the Standing Committees functioning in the European Parliament:

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Committee on Development

Committee on International Trade

Committee on Budgets

Committee on Budgetary Control

Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

Committee on Transport and Tourism

Committee on Regional Development

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Committee on Fisheries

Committee on Culture and Education

Committee on Legal Affairs

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

Committee on Constitutional Affairs

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Committee on Petitions

### **Joint Parliamentary Committees**

5.10 The European Parliament may set up joint parliamentary committees with the parliaments of States associated with the Union or States with which accession negotiations have been initiated. Such committees may formulate recommendations for the parliaments involved. In the case of the European Parliament, these recommendations shall be referred to the committee responsible, which shall put forward proposals on the action to be taken.

### **DELEGATIONS**

5.11 European Parliament keeps relations with countries outside the European Union as such relations are vital for the Union. It, therefore, has a series of delegations which interact with the Parliaments of countries that are not members of the European Union. They play an important role in helping to develop Europe's influence abroad.

5.12 There are different types of delegations:

- (i) Inter-parliamentary delegations, whose task is to maintain relations with the Parliaments of countries outside the European Union that have not applied for membership;
- (ii) Delegations to the Joint Parliamentary Committees, which maintain contact with the Parliaments of countries that are candidates for accession to the European Union and States that have association agreements with the community;

(iii) Delegations to the multilateral parliamentary assemblies.

5.13 India Delegation is one of many country specific official friendship groups in the EP. In EP such delegations have their own Secretariat staff and they work closely in cooperation with the European Council and the European Commission. Like other delegations in EP, the India Delegation is focused on its work and determined to carry out EU agenda with India. The India Delegation is currently chaired by a British MEP, Mr. Graham Watson.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES**

#### **Salary of MEPs**

6.0 MEPs, in general, receive the same salary under the single statute which came into effect in July 2009. The monthly pre-tax salary of MEPs under the single statute is, in 2011, € 7.956,87. The salary is paid from Parliament's budget and is subject to an EU tax and accident insurance contribution, after which the salary is €6.200,72. Member States can also subject the salary to national taxes. The basic salary is set at 38.5% of the basic salary of a judge at the European Court of Justice.

#### **Pensions**

6.1 Under the statute, former Members are entitled to an old-age pension from the age of 63. The pension will be 3.5% of the salary for each full year's exercise of a mandate but not more than 70% in total. The cost of these pensions is met from the European Parliament budget.

#### **MEPs' allowances**

6.2 Like Members of national parliaments, Members of the European Parliament receive a number of allowances that are intended to cover the expenditure they incur in the performance of their parliamentary duties.

#### **General expenditure allowance**

6.3 This allowance is intended to cover expenditure in the Member State of election, such as Members' office management costs, telephone and postal charges, and the purchase, operation and maintenance of computer and telematics equipment. The allowance is halved in the case of Members who, without due justification, do not attend half the number of plenary sittings in one parliamentary year (September to August). The amount of this allowance in 2011 is EUR 4 299 per month.

**Travel expenses**

6.4 Most meetings of the European Parliament, such as plenary sessions, committee meetings and political group meetings, take place in Brussels or Strasbourg. MEPs are refunded the actual cost of their travel tickets for attending such meetings on presentation of receipts, up to a maximum of a business class air fare, a first class rail fare or €0.50 per km for car journey, plus fixed allowances based on the distance and duration of the journey to cover the other costs of travelling (such as motorway tolls, excess baggage charges or reservation fees, for example).

**Annual travel allowance**

6.5 Members often have to travel outside their home Member State in the performance of their duties but for purposes other than official meetings (for example, to attend a conference in another Member State or to make a working visit to another country in his/her capacity as rapporteur). To cover this eventuality, Members receive reimbursement from a fixed yearly travel allowance for their travel, accommodation and associated expenses. Reimbursement is made on the basis of the actual air fare or rail fare on presentation of the relevant travel vouchers and the requisite supporting documents. For 2010, the allowance was fixed at a maximum of EUR 4,243.

**Subsistence allowance**

6.6 Parliament pays this flat-rate allowance of EUR 304 for each day of attendance at official meetings of the Parliament bodies on which the Member serves that, are held within the European Community. It covers accommodation, meals and all other expenses involved in such attendance. Parliament pays the allowance only if the Member has signed an official attendance register.

6.7 Parliament pays a sum of EUR 152 per day, plus accommodation and breakfast expenses, for attendance at meetings held outside the European Community, provided that the Member has signed the official attendance register for the meeting.

**Staff for MEPs**

6.8 MEPs can choose their own staff within a budget set by Parliament. Accredited assistants, based in Brussels (or Luxembourg/Strasbourg) are administered directly by Parliament's administration, under the conditions of employment for non-permanent EU staff.

Assistants based in MEPs' Member States are handled by qualified paying agents, guaranteeing the proper tax and social security arrangements. In 2011, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved is € 19 709 per MEP. None of these funds are paid to the MEPs themselves. In general, MEPs can not have close relatives among their staff, though there is a transitional period for those who were employed in the previous term.

## CHAPTER VII

### SECRETARIAT AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

7.0 The European Parliament is assisted by a Secretariat. Its task is to coordinate legislative work and organize part-sessions and other meetings. The Secretariat is located in Luxembourg and Brussels, while plenary sittings of Parliament are held in Strasbourg and Brussels. The Secretariat consists of about 5,400 officials and temporary and contract staff. Its main organizational units are the Secretary-General's Office, ten Directorates-General and the Legal Service. The Secretariat's establishment plan and the internal administrative rules for officials and other staff are drawn up by the Bureau. The employees are mostly officials recruited by competition from all the EU countries. They are in the service of the European Parliament.

7.1 The Secretariat's task is to coordinate legislative work and organise plenary sittings and meetings. It also provides technical and expert assistance to parliamentary bodies and Members of Parliament to support them in the exercise of their mandates. The European Parliament also provides a fully multilingual service for all plenary sittings and meetings.

#### **Secretary-General**

7.2 The Secretary-General is Parliament's most senior official. He heads the Secretariat. The Bureau decides the Secretariat's membership and organisation. The Secretary-General is responsible for Parliament's administration. He is appointed by the Bureau.

7.3 His main duties are to assist the President, the Bureau, the political bodies and the MEPs, and ensure the smooth running of parliamentary business under the leadership of the President and the Bureau. With the President, he verifies and signs all acts adopted jointly by Parliament and the Council. He also prepares the basic elements of a report that the Bureau uses to draw up Parliament's draft budget estimates

#### **Legal service**

7.4 It advises Parliament on legal questions and represents it in legal cases. Its main tasks are to provide legal assistance for Parliament's political bodies (the President, the Bureau, the Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Committee Chairmen, the Conference of

Delegation Chairmen, the College of Quaestors and the committees) and for its Secretariat. It also helps the committees with their legislative work represents the European Parliament in European and national courts.

### **Directorate-General for the Presidency**

7.5 The Directorate-General for the Presidency is at the heart of Parliament's work. It is responsible for the organisation of plenary sittings and for follow-up activities in a multilingual environment.

7.6 It is mainly responsible for:

- work associated with Parliament's political activity involving the plenary sittings, inter-institutional legislative programming, the Conference of Presidents, the Bureau, the Quaestors and Members' activities
- assisting Members and the President with the legal-linguistic verification of texts, amendment of legislative texts and the admissibility of amendments, through the work of the Directorate for Legislative Acts and the Verification Department
- supporting Members' activities by providing Library services
- relations with national parliaments
- practical but essential aspects of running a large organisation, such as protocol, the mail department, the transmission of documents, the register, archives and security.
- On procedural questions, the Directorate-General for the Presidency reports to the President and the President's Office

### **Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union**

7.7 The Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union is responsible for organising the work of Parliament's committees in the field of internal policies and contributing to the exercise and development of the legislative and control powers of the European Parliament.

7.8 Its main responsibilities are:

- ensuring the smooth running of the legislative and non-legislative activities of parliamentary committees in the field of internal policies,

primarily by providing a secretariat for 17 committees and 1 temporary committee

- coordinating Parliament's legislative activities, mainly through the Conference of Committee Chairs; supporting committee members, particularly the committee Chairs and rapporteurs, in the exercise of their duties
- providing the committees, other parliamentary bodies and the President's Office with briefings, background notes and long-term studies on all aspects of Parliament's activities in the field of internal policies
- helping the committees to develop their work programmes in close cooperation with the Commission and Council
- promoting and coordinating all activities relating to better law-making in Parliament.

### **Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union**

7.9 The Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union (DG ExPo) is responsible for organising the work of all parliamentary bodies in the field of external policies

7.10 Its main tasks are:

- Ensuring the smooth running of the Parliamentary Committees in the field of Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Security and Defence, as well as Development and International Trade;
- Supporting the work of the Interparliamentary Delegations and regional multilateral Assemblies;
- Providing professional support and advice to the Chairs of these bodies, in the exercise of their duties;
- Planning, organising and following-up EP election observation missions, including assistance to the Election Coordination Group;
- Assisting a range of other bodies, working groups, ad hoc delegations et al;
- Providing expertise in external relations to parliamentary bodies and Parliament's President;

- Facilitating initiatives for dialogue and support to new and emerging democracies;
- Cooperating closely with the European Commission and the Council, including the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission.

### **The Directorate-General for Communication**

7.11 The Directorate-General for Communication works to ensure that information is circulated to the public, the media and opinion leaders on the wide range of Parliament's activities. Parliament has set up information offices in each EU Member State to provide information for the public on its operation and activities. The information offices act as intermediaries between Parliament and the public. The Directorate-General for Communication makes extensive use of various means, activities and communications networks to help publicise Parliament's activities. It assists and provides information to a wide range of people by developing various means of communication.

7.12 Its main tasks are:

- ensuring that the media, the public and opinion leaders (associations, civil society bodies and local elected representatives) are aware of the role, operation and views of the European Parliament.
- providing a library and documentation service for MEPs, committees and other European Parliament bodies for their official parliamentary duties

### **Directorate-General for Personnel**

7.13 The Directorate-General for Personnel helps ensure that Parliament's other directorates-general have the human resources necessary to carry out their work.

7.14 Its main tasks are:

- managing Parliament's human resources, i.e. the officials and political group and other staff, in accordance with the regulations applicable to officials and other staff of the European Communities
- developing political strategies to improve women's working conditions and promoting equal opportunities for each employee

- successfully running Parliament's staff policy by keeping it under review and improving it if necessary, while meeting the challenge of the enlargement of the European Union.
- giving staff access to vocational training (language training, training in management technique, IT training, etc.)

### **The Directorate-General for Infrastructure and Logistics**

7.15 The Directorate-General for Infrastructure and Logistics is responsible for managing infrastructure and logistics in Parliament's various places of work.

7.16 Its main tasks are:

- technical and administrative management of Parliament's buildings in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg and the information offices in the Member States
- management of the equipment and services departments involved in running the buildings
- management of equipment (purchasing, transport, removals, message services, catering, furniture, shops, etc.) and practical arrangements for meetings.

### **The Directorate-General for Translation**

7.17 The Directorate-General for Translation ensures that Parliament's documents are available in all the official languages of the European Union, thus enabling Parliament to meet its commitment to the policy of multilingualism. By directly enabling Parliament to practise multilingualism, the Directorate-General for Translation plays an integral role in protecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Union. It facilitates transparency, understanding and the exchange of views.

7.18 Its main tasks are:

- translating documents out of and into the 23 official languages of the European Union, thus providing all EU citizens with immediate access to European texts in their own language and the opportunity to communicate with the institutions in their own language

- supplying a translation service which ensures both quality and efficiency, keeping costs at an acceptable level
- developing the appropriate IT tools and terminology databases to aid translators and integrating them into the workflow
- revising documents translated outside Parliament and monitoring the quality of external translations
- managing paid and unpaid translation traineeships.

### **Directorate-General for Interpretation and Conferences**

7.19 The Directorate-General for Interpretation and Conferences helps meet the political requirements of multilingualism in Parliament.

7.20 Its main tasks are:

- organising interpretation for all Parliament's meetings in and outside the three places of work
- administration of Parliament's meeting rooms
- providing technical assistance for all meetings organised by Parliament

### **Directorate-General for Finance**

7.21 The Directorate-General for Finance mainly looks after :

- drawing up Parliament's budget, supervising its implementation, accompanying the discharge procedure, keeping and closing the accounts and managing the treasury
- providing support and financial and budgetary assistance for all authorising officers by delegation in Parliament
- managing expenditure related to Members' allowances and social entitlements, and implementing financial support for political groups, European political parties and foundations and associations of former or current Members
- managing inter-departmental services for the whole of Parliament, such as the inventory and the travel office

### **Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological Support**

7.22 The Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological Support (ITEC) provides Parliament with information and communication technology services as well as printing and distribution services. It implements Parliament's policy of transparency and access to information and helps Parliament to work more efficiently.

7.23 Its main tasks are:

- developing and maintaining a shared internal working space allowing multilingual access at any time and from any place to all vital documents and data
- as part of an innovation strategy, analysing, designing, developing and maintaining Parliament's information systems for the Members, the political groups, the Directorates-General, the European Ombudsman and the Data Protection Supervisor
- drawing up and ensuring compliance with a secure and viable technical strategy and defining all the various components of computing and telecommunications systems
- printing and distributing (also electronically) Parliament's working documents (committee meetings, plenary sittings, etc.)

### **OFFICE FOR PROMOTION OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY**

7.24 Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) provides demand-driven parliamentary development support in new and emerging democracies (NED). The beneficiaries of the support of the OPPD are the parliamentary institutions of NED, their Members and their officials. This office had organised our programme in the European Parliament.

7.25 Since 2008 the European Parliament's support to new and emerging democracies has been developed through the Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD), which operates within the Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Parliament (EP). The OPPD support programme is aimed at new and emerging democracy (NED) parliaments beyond the borders of the European Union. The OPPD assists in the establishment and the reform of these parliaments and aims at strengthening their capacity to implement the chief

functions of lawmaking, oversight and representation. The creation of the OPPD responds to a rapidly increasing demand for support of NED parliaments and the willingness of the EP actively to share its experiences and expertise.

7.26 The main characteristics of the OPPD-EP parliamentary development support include: Demand-driven support for institutional capacity-building; Long-term relationships with NED parliaments based on equality and a joint ownership of customized support programmes; Peer-to-peer support and exchange of experiences; Coordination with other EU institutions and international actors; Capacity to provide follow-up to electoral observation missions (EOM).

7.27 The OPPD cooperates with parliaments in the European Union (EU), (sub)regional parliaments, parliamentary associations and international organisations active in the field of parliamentary development with the aim of creating a community of parliamentary practitioners. It also facilitates the sharing of experiences and best practices of parliamentary methods and applications. Therefore the OPPD is partnering with the UNDP, the World Bank Institute, USAID, and the European Commission in order to launch a global knowledge hub for parliamentary development which aims at being a one-stop-shop for all relevant information on parliamentary development and facilitating exchange and discussion on different aspects of parliamentary work.

7.28 The Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) contributes to building the institutional and administrative capacity of the parliaments of new and emerging democracies (NED) through counselling, training, internships, exchange of good practices and networking. The OPPD acts on the initiative of NED parliaments and targets the identified needs of each parliament. Support initiatives can also be derived from Resolutions adopted by the EP, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, or other transnational assemblies such as EUROMED, EUROLAT or EURONEST. The OPPD coordinates all the activities on democracy promotion within the European Parliament.

7.29 The Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) aims at establishing long-term cooperation following the initial request of new and emerging democracy (NED) national and regional parliaments. A request for cooperation and support is originated by a Speaker or Secretary-General of a NED Parliament. Following such a request and based on political guidelines established by the European Parliament leadership, the OPPD proceeds with a needs assessment mission in the partner country to identify the possible avenues for cooperation through discussions with all the stakeholders, most importantly of course the

parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, but also other actors engaged in supporting the Parliament.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INTERPRETATION, TRANSLATION AND HANSARD

8.0 In the European Parliament, all Community languages are equally important: all parliamentary documents are published in all the official languages of the European Union (EU) and every MEP has the right to speak in the official language of his/her choice.

8.1 Firmly rooted in the European treaties, multilingualism is the reflection of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the European Union. It also makes the European institutions more accessible and transparent for the general public, which constitutes a guarantee for the success of the EU's democratic system.

8.2 The right of each Member to read parliamentary documents, to follow debates and to speak in his/her own language is expressly recognized in Parliament's Rules of Procedure. In addition, in its role as legislator the European Parliament is obliged to guarantee that the linguistic quality of all the laws which it adopts is beyond reproach in all official languages.

8.3 The Treaty provisions also allow all European citizens to follow Parliament's work, to ask questions and to receive replies in their own language.

8.4 All Parliament's plenary sittings and meetings are fully multilingual. Members can speak in any official language of the EU, and everything they say is simultaneously interpreted. Parliament's working documents are available in all the official languages of the European Union. There are 27 member states and 23 official languages.

8.5 A quarter of Secretariat are translators and interpreters-who work in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg and in the information offices in the Member States.

8.6 The interpreters travel all over the world, accompanying delegations to overseas conferences, on visits to other parliaments and on election observation mission, working with all forms of interpreting (simultaneous, consecutive and whispering).

#### **Staff in DG interpretation & Conferences**

8.7 The staff in DG interpretation and Conferences consists both permanent and freelance officials. There are about 430 staff and 3000 freelance interpreters. Over 6000 meetings are

held every year out of which over 200 meetings are held outside Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. There are 23 language meeting + 506 possible language combinations and there will be a team of 3 interpreters per language. Multilingualism (interpreting and translating) for all European institutions only costs 1% of the EU budget.

### **Language arrangements for meetings**

8.8 Meetings are organized with the active and passive language requirements specified at least three months in advance to the Interpretation Directorate by the directorate-general for committees and delegations and the secretaries-general of the political groups.

8.9 An **active language** is one into which interpretation is provided. **Passive languages** are those from which interpretation is provided. Only the **official languages** of the participating members are covered in meetings of committees and delegations.

### **Order of priority**

8.10 Interpretation in the European Parliament is reserved for users in the following order of priority : the plenary sitting; priority political meetings, such as meetings of the President, Parliament's governing bodies; the parliamentary committees, the parliamentary delegations; press conferences, institutional media information actions, including seminars; other institutional communication events; other official bodies authorized by the Bureau and the Conferences of Presidents; some administrative events (competition tests, seminars, general meetings of staff, etc.).

### **Deadlines for the submission and cancellation of requests for meetings with interpretation and language coverage**

8.11 Meetings in the places of work

- (a) Requests for meetings with some exceptions must be submitted no later than three weeks prior to the date scheduled for the meeting in question.
- (b) Cancellation: The Directorate-General for Interpretation and Conferences must always be notified of the cancellation of a meeting or language as soon as possible.

## 8.12 Meetings outside the places of work

(a) Requests for meetings with some exception must be submitted no later than six weeks prior to the date scheduled for the meeting in question

(b) Request for languages

Requests for coverage of an additional language must be submitted no later than six weeks prior to the date scheduled for the meeting in question. Once that deadline has passed, such a request is granted only if the relevant resources are available.

8.13 Where a request for an additional language implies the cancellation of another language, the Directorate-General for Interpretation and Conferences informs the user of any supplementary costs arising from the replacement of one language by another.

8.14 The final deadline for submitting requests for coverage of additional languages (with no guarantee that the resources will be available) and for confirming requests already made is midday on the Thursday of the second week preceding the meeting in question.

8.15 Once that deadline has passed no such request will be granted unless another user in the same meeting place decides to give up the interpreting team providing the language concerned for a meeting in the same time-slot.

## **TRANSLATION**

### **Deadlines and translation lead times**

8.16 Texts for consideration in a parliamentary committee or delegation are submitted for translation via the internal computer system by the secretariat of the committee or delegation no later than 10 working days prior to the relevant meeting.;

8.17 Where the deadline of 10 working days (which includes 1 working day for Directorate for Legislative Acts) has been respected, translated texts are made available in electronic form not later than 2 working days prior to the relevant meeting. Texts are then printed and distributed at the meeting.

8.18 For questions, the following translation lead times are required: Questions for written answer: 5 working days; Priority questions for written answer: 3 working days; Questions for Question Time: 1 working day.

8.19 For all other texts, excluding documents for the President, Parliament's governing bodies, the conciliation committees or the Secretary-General, a general translation lead time of minimum 10 working days is applied.

8.20 Translation services are also available for the following users: the parliamentary delegations (in two official languages chosen by the delegation); the policy departments; the political groups (for documents directly linked to parliamentary activity - each group may also request the translation of urgent documents up to a total of 15 pages per group per week); other official bodies authorized by the Bureau and the Conference of Presidents: Members, in particular written questions and other texts directly linked to parliamentary activity; Parliament's Secretariat for administrative and communication needs.

8.21 Parliament also provides translation service for the European Ombudsman for the ACP-EU joint Parliamentary Assembly for the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and for the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly.

#### **VERBATIM REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (HANSARD)**

8.22 The verbatim reports and the minutes of proceedings in the European Parliament plenary sittings are produced and must be translated in all the 23 official languages of the Parliament. For each language, there are 35 to 40 translators. The two seats of the European Parliament in Brussels (host of 6 sessions) and Strasbourg (12 sessions) have a similar technical setup. Everything that happens in the plenary hall of either seat is streamed to and available with a 3 seconds delay in the Parliament's offices in Luxembourg where the transcribers and translators are located. An application called CARTON is loaded with the agenda, data about the Members of the European Parliament (nationality, language they will speak, etc.), the provisional list of speakers and the seating plan. The system is based on MEPs speaking from their own seat. An application called META is used to tag the video recordings. And CRE is the application used to actually produce the verbatim reports.

8.23 During the plenary session, a CARTON operator and a META operator sit in booths inside the room. One reporter sits next to, and assists, the President. When the President switches on the microphone, an electronic signal, with the corresponding metadata (name of the speaker, timestamps) is sent to the CARTON operator, and then to the META application unless blocked by the CARTON operator. The entire system relies upon the President switching the microphone on and off. As it does happen that the President just leaves the microphone on, for example when having a lot of announcements to make, the reporter of the CARTON operator will have to tag the recording for each specific segment of speech that should have a different title in the minutes.

8.24 When an MEP switches on the microphone to take the floor, the CARTON operator is similarly notified, and a picture of the MEP pops up on the CARTON screen. The operator must visually verify that the metadata is correct, as it may happen that several MEPs share one microphone or that they speak from a seat which is not theirs. The operator then displays the name of the speaker on the screens in the meeting room and sends the metadata to the META application, where it shows up automatically as the name of the speaker, his/her language, function and timestamps. After the reporter verifies and validates the information in META, it is automatically sent to the CRE application that translators and secretaries use to type the text in the different languages. When a secretary for a specific language logs onto CRE, he or she checks for recordings in his or her language that are available for processing. The secretary may use a pedal to control the flow of the audio recording while typing. The video recordings and the recordings of the interpretations are also available in CRE if needed. After the secretary completes the text, it is sent to a translator for revision. Although they can follow the proceedings via live streaming, the translators usually have a full workload translating various documents. It is the responsibility of the reporter who sits in the Chamber to capture into META and then CRE non-verbal information such as points of order (they require a good knowledge of the rules of procedures), off-microphone comments (kept in the system but transcribed only if they lead to a response on microphone), important observations (such as the President cutting off the speaker), interjections, waving of banner, laughter, heckling, applause, etc. This allows the secretaries and translators to have a better idea of the environmental context surrounding the text they are working on. After the text has been revised, it is sent back to the application. As soon as the Language Section validates the revised text, it is made available automatically on the Internet, usually within 3 to 4 hours. In the CRE application, the revised texts in all the languages are indexed to identify individual speeches. That index information is

used to produce and split the video recordings into individual interpreted speeches. The initial goal of the system was to replace the translation of the verbatim report, which costs lots of money, with interpreted videos of the speeches. However the MEPs decided to keep both products. The Parliament organizes training on the use of the system every 2-3 months for new members of the Translation Unit.

8.25 The texts of the speeches, as they have been transcribed, are available on the website of the European Parliament. It is possible to access all the speeches delivered by a specific MEP or to restrict the list by legislative sessions. On the page of a specific speech, there are links to its translations, the corresponding audio and video recordings, the text of the original *item* being debated, the minutes of the corresponding debate, and the final text adopted by the Parliament. Users can also perform a full text search to find verbatim reports, available from the year 2004. The video recordings are downloadable for single speeches as well as for entire debates.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **IT AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT**

9.0 The study tour to the European Parliament offered new insights into the modern methods and tools of media management, dissemination of quick and comprehensive information to the media persons covering 27 member states of the European Union and provision of media facilities to the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in order to enrich their participation in the proceedings and other communication activities.

9.1 The presentations on media management made by the concerned officers of European Parliament, interactions held with them and visits to the Audiovisual Unit and Europarl TV Unit, have been very enriching. In view of these the following observations have been made in detail:

#### **EP Press Service**

9.2 Information revolution and new technologies have dramatically increased the accessibility of information and have opened up the world of interactive media in the European Parliament. Digital technologies now offer new channels for communication on European issues, new forums for civic debate, new tools for cross-border democracy and new opportunities for the Members of European Parliament (MEPs).

9.3 The EP Press service provides oral information as well, through personal contacts and in Parliament's press rooms. It also regularly organises press conferences, briefings, seminars and other media events for the Brussels press corps or journalists from the Member States. All these efforts have contributed to a considerable increase of Parliament's presence in the media in comparison to previous years. All plenary sessions of Parliament, almost all committee meetings and election of special events are webcast on Parliament's website and web TV channel and also transmitted live by satellite. Other events may be recorded and summarised for TV transmission or webcast on demand. The EP press service is also responsible for implementing web communication strategies.

9.4 The EP Press service offers both copyright-free audiovisual material (images, sound and photos) and technical assistance, such as TV crews or editing suites, to journalists reporting on and from Parliament.

**Press breakfasts**

9.5 For major legislation, breakfast meetings between rapporteurs and selected journalists with a special interest in the issue, allow for more extended discussion of complex, high-profile issues in an informal setting.

**Pre-session press briefings**

9.6 On the Friday morning before each Strasbourg plenary session, a press briefing takes place in Brussels including the spokespersons from all the political groups who wish to take part. Parliament's spokesperson summarises the main events to come and the group speakers set out their priorities. These briefings are webstreamed on the EP and Europarl TV web sites and shown live on Europe by Satellite and published as an audio podcast.

9.7 The Press Service publishes a guide to institutional events of media interest taking place over the following seven days. This includes a highlights page, the full plenary agenda, a list of all the committee meetings including their main business, a timetable of high media-profile delegation visits and other official events are also included. The Agenda is published on the website with an e-mail alert to the Brussels press corps.

**Press Conferences**

9.8 MEPs' press conferences are held in the press briefing rooms in Strasbourg and Brussels. During the sessions in Strasbourg and Brussels, priority is given to items on the agenda. For institutional press conferences, such as with rapporteurs, MEPs are assisted by a press officer from the EP Press Service. In addition, EP press officers in the members states often organise press conferences and other media events. MEPs are invited to discuss new legislative work with the media, especially when they have an institutional role to play as rapporteur/ chair of delegation/ chair of parliamentary committee.

9.9 MEPs can book the press conference room for their press conferences, which are scheduled to last 30 minutes. Rapporteurs and members with an institutional role are entitled to interpretation on request. The press conferences are announced in the Agenda and on the EP website as well as on the screens in the press room. Some press conferences are webstreamed

and/ or transmitted via Europe by Satellite. The full set of rules for press conferences is distributed with each booking.

### **Press room facilities**

9.10 In both Brussels and Strasbourg, Parliament offers journalists free use of fully equipped press work rooms. Free WIFI internet access is available, and each workstation includes a telephone (chargeable for international calls) and a screen allowing reporters to follow the plenary session, committee meeting or other major events. Journalists can also choose to watch on dozens of TV channels available on the same screen. In Brussels, there is a desktop computer built into each workstation with slots for photo memory cards and a DVD drive. A helpdesk with Press Service staff and a technical support team are available. The press centres also have racks containing press releases from the EP Press Service and the political groups, and session documents.

9.11 The facilities are available to any bona-fide journalist, whether permanently accredited to the EU institutions or visiting, for example, at the invitation of an MEP.

### **Information Kiosks**

9.12 The Information Kiosks are installed in different areas of EP building which display information about plenary sessions, committee meetings and other important events of Parliament. Journalists can get quick and updated information flashed on these kiosks.

### **Newsletters on plenary sessions**

9.13 Ahead of each plenary, the Press Service produces a guide for journalists to what is coming up on the session agenda. Short articles give the essentials of what is at stake with each of the major events, giving journalists the information they need to pitch stories to their editors. The Newsletter includes a wealth of links to more detailed sources of information, and is published in 22 languages, tailored to include points likely to arouse media interest in different Member States.

### **Website of European Parliament ([www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu))**

9.14 The website of the European Parliament provides comprehensive multilingual news and information about the institution. It caters for both the general public and media professionals;

gives in-depth information about the parliament, its role and organisation; publishes profiles and contact information for all MEPs; links to all current plenary and committee business (with all current relevant documentation); and offers a multimedia resource, with live and recorded webstreaming of plenary and committees. More and more frequently, the website incorporates extra sections on special events.

9.15 MEPs can find a wealth of material on the site available for re-use on personal sites and blogs. The video-on-demand service in particular allows Members to download tailor-made video extracts of plenary proceedings and committee.

9.16 Through a powerful FTP server, the website gives easy access to professional standard video, audio and photo material. All news coverage and archive material is available to download both in high and low resolution. The website is also equipped with a high - performance search engine allowing users to search for video, audio and photo material related to EP activities and specific thematic packages.

9.17 The EP Facebook page had almost 150,000 fans in February 2011 and the numbers continue to grow steadily. The platform is now used among other things as a forum for direct interaction between Members and web users in "Facebook chats". Communication activities on social media networks come, of course, in addition to running and developing the EP website.

9.18 A major recast of the European Parliament's web presence is planned for 2011 and 2012, starting with introduction of mobile internet.

### **The Headlines**

9.19 All material – articles, photos, videos – is free for re-use, and can easily be shared via MEPs' own websites and blogs. Conversely, the web team relies on the members, contacting them to explain their work and putting them in touch, through the site, with over 1.5 million visitors per month, as mentioned above.

9.20 The "Headlines" page of Parliament's website provides daily updates on the activities of the Institution for the general reader. The material aims to be concise, attractive, varied and accessible for the non-specialist visitor, with an emphasis on the human dimension of EP politics: the real impact of MEPs' work on people's everyday lives, interviews with Members, straightforward explanations of EP business, and much more. Links are provided to all relevant

further information available on the website. All Headlines material is provided in 22 languages.

### **Audiovisual Archives – Media Library**

9.21 The European Parliament multimedia library contains an extensive collection of historical and topical photos, audio material, and over 14,000 hours of video footage fully digitalised dating back to the 1950s, as well as recordings of all plenary sessions since 1979.

9.22 Media Professionals can request relevant footage from the archives for television reports, news magazine programmes and documentaries. Footage and sound clips are offered free of charge, and free reproduction rights, for non-commercial use only.

### **Simultaneous Interpretation**

9.23 As to the detail of the press service activities, votes and debates at Parliament's plenary sessions are reported in all the official EU languages, distributed via the website, by e-mail and by press officers in Parliament's information offices to national, regional and local media in the Member States. Votes in the parliamentary committees are also covered in several languages, depending on the national media interest on a particular subject.

### **Europarl TV**

9.24 Europarl TV broadcasts in 23 languages and aims to inform citizens about events in the European Parliament through news, interviews, debates, magazines, in-depth analysis and reports. In September 2010 the Europarl TV Unit introduced a number of major improvements, including: a new-look website, an easier access to programmes, an improved search engine and the introduction of a newsletter. Europarl TV has also greatly expanded its dissemination beyond the web after signing a number of partnership agreements. The Belgian national television network RTBF, the Spanish regional television Canal Extremadura and the SKAI TV in Greece are the latest to broadcast EuroparlTV programmes. Similar agreements are under consideration with individual Member States' Parliamentary channels. Facebook and Twitter as well as on platforms such as EuroparlTV is also present on social party/ television channels such as Euronews.

### **Live coverage for media professionals**

9.25 Live coverage of events in the European Parliament is transmitted via Europe by Satellite (EbS/EbS+), the television news service of the EU Institutions. EbS/EbS+ provides the audiovisual media with a broadcast digital signal, non-coded and easy to downlink. EBS news items and illustration material can also be downloaded in high and low resolution from the new audiovisual website. EbS-EP provides broadcasters with the following news services:

- Live – major EP events, plenary sessions, press conferences, public hearings, etc. News – daily highlights of EP news
- Stockshots – video dossiers focussed on a topical subject
- Infoclips – short compilations of shots relating to a topical subject

9.26 Material on EbS/EbS+ is offered free of charge and free of rights for non-commercial use. However EP material must be credited as such.

### **Hotline Newsdesk**

9.27 The Audiovisual Hotline Newsdesk offers assistance to TV and radio journalists in finding relevant information on EP activities and MEPs. Its multilingual team provides media professionals with regular briefings or detailed information on upcoming events - such as meetings of parliamentary committees and delegations, press conferences, extraordinary meetings and visits by Heads of State and Government - as well as profiles of individual MEPs, their fields of expertise and languages spoken, so as to facilitate interviews.

### **Sound and video recording**

9.28 The European Parliament offers support to visiting TV and radio media organisations in their coverage of parliamentary activities. Facilities available include server based editing stations, play out facilities, TV and Radio studios, as well as live positions next to the Chambers for statements and interviews. On-site multi-camera sets are also available during plenary sessions or special events.

9.29 Facilities available are as follows:

- ENG crews
- Editing rooms
- Digital archives for audiovisual media

- Live 'stand-ups' available next to the chamber
- A new television studio equipped with high definition camera facilities and TV studio sets
- 6 multimedia radio studios, equipped with sound and recording facilities, as well as facilities for live broadcasting from 'Round Table meetings'.

9.30 MEPs can contact the TV bookings service to obtain more details about these facilities. Please note that, according to a decision by Parliament's Bureau, these services are available only to accredited audiovisual media, and not directly to MEPs.

### **TV studios and live facilities**

9.31 The EP has two TV Studios, one is Strasbourg and a larger one in Brussels. The Brussels TV studio is equipped with high definition camera facilities, virtual background and TV studio sets to cater for up to 10 participants, with an audience of up to 50 people and 2 interpretation booths.

9.32 In Strasbourg and Brussels journalists can use the EP live facilities for interviews and stand-ups. These facilities are placed very near to the chamber at both locations.

9.33 Many TV stations already use the TV studio for their occasional or regular programmes and MEPs can offer TV stations and journalists the possibility to record their programmes – on EP-related activities-in these state-of-the-art facilities, which are also equipped to enable live interviews to TV stations in the Member States.

### **Video on demand (VOD)/ Webstreaming**

9.34 Parliament's plenary sessions, committee meetings, press conferences and other major events are streamed live on the EP website. They are also available as video-on-demand in all EU official languages (when interpretation is available). Regarding the plenary session, members can extract and download a single speech or the whole debate.

9.35 The European Parliament is the first international organisation to provide a multi-lingual simultaneous transmission of more than 13 parliamentary committees. This service is available through the EP website in two video formats WMV (Window Media Video) and MPEG-4.

9.36 MEPs can watch the live broadcast or recorded meetings in WMV format, from their offices or from their personal computers equipped with Windows Media Player and a browser with the necessary plug-in. Any recorded event can be easily embedded in a website and extracts can be downloaded in the available EU languages, for emailing to contacts or journalists.

### **Photo Service**

9.37 The photo service of the European Parliament has a twofold mission: to cover news events in the EP and provide official pictures of MEPs. EP photographers follow Parliament's activities, ensuring photo Coverage of all major events. As a result, photos are uploaded and made available on the Audiovisual website.

9.38 The Photo Service archives (from 1959 onwards) are now fully available in the Media Library of the Audiovisual website, presented both by historical timeline and topic.

9.40 MEPs can call on EP photographers for their official portraits or to cover important political events in which they take part at the EP premises. Photo bookings are made on <http://audiovisual.europarl.europa.eu> at least 26 hours prior to an event. MEPs can consult and select photos on the same website. Please not that EP rules prevent the Photo Service from covering lunch/cocktail events.

### **Parliament on social media platforms**

9.41 Parliament has a strong and active social media presence across a variety of platforms, most importantly Facebook, (the European Parliament reached 100.000 fans before the end of 2010) MySpace, You Tune, Flicker and Twitter. These media allow the institution to communicate and interact with a new audience, promote online publications and events, share photo and video material, post web-applications etc. crucially, social media also provide increasing scope for direct interaction between members of the public and MEPs, for example through the popular "Facebook chat" format. Journalists also increasingly follow the European Parliament's activities on social media.

9.42 Members with a social media presence can participate in and use the networks established at an institutional level, both as a source of online material and in order to participate in direct interaction, notably on Parliament's Facebook page.

**Visits of journalist groups**

9.43 Press officers based in the Member States and in Brussels also arrange visits for national, local or regional journalists to the Parliament. The aim is to give journalists the opportunity to be informed about Parliament and see how it works in practice. They also learn about the press products, services and facilities available to them, including the audiovisual facilities. In 2010, one of the objectives was to increase invitations to groups of young journalists and students of journalism.

9.44 Invitations to journalists to attend plenary sessions in Strasbourg have been particularly successful. In recent years, individual invitations have also been made to attend committee meetings and other important events, such as the award of the Sakharov Prize.

9.45 Visits of journalist groups always include an exchange of views between the journalists and MEPs of their respective countries. This complements the many other contacts between MEPs and journalists linked to plenary sessions and other parliamentary activities.

**VoxBox multimedia studio**

9.46 The VoxBox multimedia studio is a facility located in the heart of the EP in Brussels, on the third floor of the ASP building. It is specifically designed to assist radio and Web journalists with live or recorded audio and video round-table discussions for web streaming.

9.47 MEPs can use the VoxBox services for 'on the spot' multimedia interviews, and to make recordings for use on their websites.

## CHAPTER X

### SECURITY

#### **European Parliament at Brussels, Belgium:**

10.0 There are three buildings interconnected to each other. The security services have been outsourced to a reputed security providing company, G4S. As the threat perception is very less, there is no such stringent security concept as adopted in India. The objective is to make the European Parliament user friendly. The security was reviewed recently, but MEPs have objected and opined that the European Parliament should be open to public. The visitors who wish to witness the proceedings of the Parliament can get their Casual Entry Permits from the Reception Office. These Casual Entry Permits are bar-coded plastic cards with photo on it. The employees of the Secretariat have been issued with Punch Cards. The employees gain access by swiping their punch cards which in turn opens the flap barriers. There is no concept of frisking through out the complex even in the Public Gallery. However, the materials entering the complex have to be passed through X-ray Baggage Scanners. There are Malls, Shopping complex, Restaurants, Metro Stations inside the complex. The Almira provided to MEPs have been kept in the Lobbies. The TV Station and the Radio Station is also stationed in the Lobby. It was observed that there were no marshals to assist the Presiding Officer, the employees of the Secretariat escort him. The press reporters inside the plenary sittings were allowed to carry mobiles and cameras, however, only still photography was not allowed. The strategic points in the entire complex were under CCTV surveillance.

#### **Procedure to Visits to European Parliament at Brussels:**

##### **Individuals**

10.1 For individual visitors, the European Parliament offers multimedia-guided visits and, during part-sessions, the chance to attend a parliamentary sitting.

10.2 Multimedia-guided visits to the debating chamber of the European Parliament take place from Monday to Thursday at 1000 hours & 1500 hours and on Friday at 1000 hours only. These visits are free of charge and are conducted in all of the official languages of the EU. It is not possible to reserve in advance.

10.3 If a visitor wish to take part in a multimedia-guided visit then he/she has to come to the visitors' entrance about 15 minutes before the start of the tour, for registration purposes and has to carry his/her passport, identity card or driving license with him/her.

10.4 In order to attend a plenary sitting of the European Parliament also, the same procedure is followed. As limited number of seats are available for attending a parliamentary sitting, the permits are given for one hour. Visitors must be at least 14 years old.

### **Groups**

10.5 Information visits are organised for groups composed of a minimum of 20 people and a maximum of 45. Exceptionally, larger groups can be accepted on request. Visits last between one and two hours and include a general introduction by an EP official to the role and work of the European Parliament. This could be followed by a discussion with an MEP if parliamentary business allows. When the European Parliament is in session, groups may be able to observe MEPs' debates 'live' from the visitors' gallery.

10.6 Groups have to arrive at the visitors' entrance 15 minutes before the start of the visit. Each group member has to bring his or her passport, identity card or driving license. There are no visits on official holidays or office closing days. Visitors must be at least 14 years old. These visits are free of charge. Visits are conducted in most of the official languages of the EU.

### **Security in Belgian Parliament**

10.7 Belgium's Federal Parliament is composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives as we have the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, respectively and even the colour representation of the Chambers is the same *i.e.*, red and green, respectively. The House Clerk announces the arrival of the Presiding Officer in the Chamber and there are no Marshals as such. The Secretary-General and other officers sit besides the Presiding Officer on both the sides on the Dias.

10.8 As the threat perception is very less, there is no such stringent security concept as adopted in the Parliament of India. The entry gates are unmanned and have card swiping system. The employees have been issued with punch cards. The outer cordon of the Belgium Parliament is looked after by Military Police. However, there are some Security Ushers, who are the permanent employees having entrusted with the responsibilities of taking the visitors to the galleries and keeps coordination with the Military Police as well. The entire complex is constantly monitored by the security staff through CCTV cameras.

## CHAPTER XI

### BELGIAN PARLIAMENT

11.0 Since its inception, in 1830, Belgium has always had a bicameral parliamentary system. Parliament consists of two assemblies, the House of Representatives and the Senate, which are independent from one another.

11.1 Originally, the Senate was to be a conservative counterweight against a progressive and liberal House of Representatives. Because of eligibility requirements, only the aristocracy and major landowners could sit in the Upper House. However, over time, the Senate became a second Chamber elected by the people similar to the House of Representatives. The Belgian parliamentary system thus evolved, into an undifferentiated and egalitarian bicameral system. The two Chambers had almost an identical profile, both in terms of composition and in terms of responsibilities, each in turn performing exactly the same work.

11.2 Firstly, while the majority of federal states are built by association (*e diversitate unitas*), federal Belgium was born of dissociation. Federalism in Belgium is centrifugal. Starting in 1970, the unitary Belgian state has slowly become a federal state. Federated entities (Communities and Regions) were created and gradually acquired ever broader autonomy.

11.3 Belgium is considered to be a double-layered federal state. The Belgian federal State consists of two types of federated entities that are superimposed one on another: the Communities and the Regions.

11.4 There are three Communities - the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community - which are competent for matters relating to culture, education, audio-visual media, health and welfare. The two main Communities, i.e., the Flemish and the French Community both have jurisdiction over certain institutions in Brussels.

11.5 There are three Regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. In Brussels, special protective measures exist to safeguard the interests of the Flemish minority. The Regions' competencies primarily concern the socio-economic sphere. Examples are, inter alia, employment, economy, agriculture, energy, water, environment, town and country planning, housing, foreign trade, transport and public works.

### **Composition of Belgian Parliament**

11.6 The House of Representatives consists of 150 Members, who are directly elected in 20 constituencies. The number of seats assigned to each constituency is based on its population.

11.7 The Senate's composition is more heterogeneous and reflects the objective to ensure, at least in part, a representation of the federated entities. The Senate has 71 elected members, divided into three categories.

11.8 40 Senators are directly elected in three constituencies, those being the Flanders constituency, the Walloon constituency and the bilingual Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency.

11.9 21 Senators are appointed by and from the assemblies of the three Communities: ten by the Parliament of the Flemish Community, 10 by the Parliament of the French-speaking Community and one by the Parliament of the German-speaking Community. Since they remain Members of the Parliament which appoints them, these Senators hold two offices (sometimes even three), sitting both at the federal and at a federated level.

11.10 10 Senators are chosen by the two above-mentioned categories of Senators. Six of them are appointed by all of the other Dutch-speaking Senators, and four by the French-speaking Senators.

11.11 Finally, the children of the King or, if there are none, the Belgian descendants of the branch of the Royal Family called on to reign, are Senators by right at the age of 18. They can only vote at the age of 21. They are, however, not taken into account for the quorum.

### **Term of Belgian Parliament**

11.12 The federal Chambers are elected for four years. However, they can be dissolved before the end of this period. This happens in most cases. Elections have to take place within 40 days of dissolution with the two newly elected Chambers reconvening within two months after the dissolution.

### **Privileges and Immunities**

11.13 Members of Parliament enjoy special rights and immunities to enable them to discharge their functions freely. One generally distinguishes between freedom of speech in debate and parliamentary immunity.

**Parliamentary Allowance**

11.14 The amount of the parliamentary allowance corresponds to the salary of a member of the Conseil d'Etat (Raad van State), the highest administrative court in Belgium, at the beginning of his career. This allowance is index-linked and subject to taxation. Members of Parliament are, in addition, entitled to a grant for expenses which amounts to 28% of the parliamentary allowance.

**Committees**

11.15 In the Senate, a standing committee consists of 15 members, while in the House of representatives, it has 17 members. Members are appointed using proportional representation. Committee presidencies are allocated to different parties following the same principle of proportional representation. As a result, some standing committees are chaired by Members of the opposition.

11.16 Standing Committees in the House of Representatives and the Senate examine legislative bills and proposals. They are at the core of the legislative work. For this purpose, committees organize hearings with representatives of civil societies, experts, etc.

11.17 In the House of Representatives, there are 11 Standing Committees and three Advisory Committees. Special or temporary Committees and Committees on Inquiry may also be created for particular purpose. In senate, there are six Standing Committees. In addition to Standing Committees in Senate, special committees, inquiry committees can also be appointed.

11.18 In the House of representatives and in the Senate, committee meetings are in general open to the public. There are, however, a limited number of exceptions to this principle.

**Lawmaking**

11.19 In Belgium, the federal legislator consists of three branches: the House of Representatives, the Senate and the King. For issues concerning the State's structure and its institutions, the House of Representatives and the Senate have identical competencies. For all other matters, the Senate's intervention is option, while the House of Representatives prevails if the two Chambers disagree.

11.20 However, many areas today are part of the jurisdiction of the Communities and of the Regions. In those areas, the Parliaments of the federated entities have legislative power.

**(i) Integral Bicameralism**

11.21 For basic federal acts, the House of Representatives and the Senate are on an equal footing. This means that draft bills and proposals can be passed only if the two Chambers agree on an identical text.

11.22 In short, integral bicameralism applies to the following areas:

- Fundamental institutional rules: the Constitution and special majority laws; laws concerning the federal State's structures and concerning Parliament's proceedings; acts concerning the Monarchy.
- Laws consenting to international treaties; laws transferring powers to international institutions; laws whereby the federal legislator temporarily substitutes Community and Regional institutions that did not comply with Belgium's international obligations.
- Laws approving co-operation agreements between the federal State, the Communities and the Regions.
- Laws concerning the *Conseil d'Etat* and the *Cour d'arbitrage*, as well as those organizing the judiciary.
- A special majority law can extend the list of integral bicameral matters.

**(ii) Restricted Bicameralism**

11.23 In most cases, the Senate has limited jurisdiction. Government bills are tabled in the House of Representatives. After the House of Representatives passes a bill, it is sent to the State. If 15 Senators so request within 15 days, the Senate reviews the bill. If not, the bill is published and becomes law. The Senate can amend the bill within 60 days and return it to the House of Representatives which considers it again. The number of "shuttles" between the two Chambers is limited. If both Chambers fail to agree on the same text, the opinion of the House of Representatives prevails.

11.24 Senators can also table private bills in those areas wherein the Senate has limited jurisdiction.

**(iii) Monocameralism**

11.25 In one area, legislative powers are held by the House of Representatives and the King, with the exclusion of the Senate. The House of Representatives has sole jurisdiction to determine rules concerning civil and criminal liability of federal Ministers. This is the consequence of the fact that the House authorizes criminal prosecutions against federal Ministers.

11.26 The Constitution lists other so-called mono-cameral acts of Parliament. They are primarily acts of the House which take the form of a law but which are bereft of any normative content, such as laws granting naturalization, approving State budgets and establishing conscription quotas for the army.

**(iv) Special Powers (Delegated Legislation)**

11.27 Parliament may grant special powers to the Government. When Parliament adopts an act granting the Government special powers, it delegates to the Government, for a given time and in specific areas, the power to adopt acts which, if necessary, can repeal, complement or amend existing acts of Parliament. Government decrees implementing such special powers have to be confirmed afterwards by Parliament.

**(v) Information**

11.28 As a corollary to their legislative work, both Chambers play an important role in gathering and distributing information. To do this, they set up special committees, hold hearings and organize seminars and conferences.

**(vi) Assessment of Legislation**

11.29 The Senate recently created a department to review the quality of legislation. It also set up a committee of civil servants to examine bills that fall under the restricted bicameral regime and that are sent or are to be sent to the Senate by the House of Representatives.

11.30 The House of Representatives supervises if acts of Parliament are duly executed. Each year, it publishes a report indicating for each bill if it has been adopted by the Senate and if and when it was signed by the King and published in the Official Journal.

**(vii) Adoption of Budget**

11.31 The second traditional function of Parliament is the adoption of the Budget. This function is held solely by the House of Representatives. The Senate only adopts its own operating budget.

**Parliamentary Questions**

11.32 Every Member of Parliament has the right to put oral or written questions to a particular member of the Government. Written questions and the Ministers' replies are published in the weekly Bulletin of Questions and Answers. Oral questions are asked in plenary assembly (or in committee in the House of Representatives) and must concern issues of general interest. In principle, the start of each Thursday afternoon session is devoted to question time.

**Parliamentary Interpellations**

11.33 Parliamentary interpellations are more extensive than questions. They give rise to a thorough debate in which all representatives are free to intervene. Motions can be tabled at the end of an interpellation. One distinguishes the following categories of motions: reasoned motions which contain a recommendation to the Government, without taking a position on whether the Government or a Minister still enjoys the confidence of the House; motions to go to the next item of the agenda (without taking a position on an issue in debate); motions of confidence or of non-confidence. When a majority of the Members of the House adopts a so-called constructive motion of no-confidence, the Government must resign. Since Ministers are not answerable to the Senate, the third category only exists in the House of Representatives.

**Media/ communications in Belgian Parliament**

11.34 During the visit of the Indian delegation to the Belgian Parliament on 28 March 2011, Director, RSTV had an exclusive interaction with Ms. Francoise Themelin, Counsellor in the Communication Service of the Senate. She informed that they are webcasting parliamentary proceedings and activities, catering to the information needs of various target groups. All legislative documents are also available on their website.

11.35 Broadcast-quality cameras are installed in the plenary rooms which are operated from the control room. The pictures are at the disposal of the TV Channels free of charge. There are

also three webcameras which automatically move towards the speaker. This makes it possible to follow the debates in plenary sessions directly from their website.

11.36 During the discussion, Ms. Themelin informed that a large number of school and college students visit the Belgian Parliament, and the Communication Service has a major role in getting this media visibility by having broader access to schools and colleges. There are guided tours for these young visitors during which they are told in detail about the history of the region and development of democracy through a constant process of evolution. The Service also organises debates on several issues of social and political concern between students of secondary schools and Senators of their region. In such debates, two-three Senators belonging to different political parties participate and face the questions posed by the students. These debates/ programmes are organised every month province-wise. Each province is covered once a year. These tours are conducted by the Protocol Unit and the registration for such tours is done through the website.

11.37 Every week the Communication Service organises a media briefing in which the media persons are informed about the work done by the members during the plenary sessions and also about their work and activities in the regions to which they belong.

11.38 Press releases are issued only when some unexpected development takes place. Press conferences are not organised by the Communication Service as Senators have their own press officers who take care of their publicity work.

## **CHAPTER XII**

### **OBSERVATIONS**

12.0 The delegation during the course of studying the systems obtaining in European Parliament and Belgian Parliament felt that some of the practices are worth mentioning.

12.1 In the European Parliament, the political groups, Committees and Delegations are allotted separate time for their business within the calendar of the Parliament. The Calendar of the Parliament is also drawn up one year before. We may perhaps look in to this aspect and work in this direction for an orderly management of the Parliament in our country.

12.2 The Delegations in the European Parliament are like the Friendship Groups in the Indian Parliament. In Indian Parliament, the Friendship Groups are very little known and their work and decisions are not known outside. In the European Parliament Delegations are treated at par with the Committees and are allotted separate time for their business. In India also, the Friendship groups should be allotted specific time for meetings.

12.3 In the European Parliament, we had noted that former Members are entitled to an old-age pension from the age of 63. The pension will be 3.5% of the salary for each full year's exercise of a mandate but not more than 70% in total. In India too, an age cap could be considered for enabling the former members to get pension.

12.4 Interpretation, translation and hansard are the three services which work as closely knit units with the support of IT. Our IT support base should be enlarged for these services. This is one area where the European Parliament can help increase and improve the system in the three services. One should not forget the fact that the audio/video proceedings of the parliament and committees there are interpreted simultaneously into 23 languages and transcribed debates are also available in all the languages. For this they make use of the IT support well. Our goal should be to achieve similar integration of IT with the three services. The officers of the interpretation service shared the problems and challenges they face in simultaneous interpretation in 23 languages and advised us to learn from their experiences and use their system as a template. The officers of the interpretation service also offered their help and cooperation in enhancing our interpretation service.

12.5 Watching the functioning of Europarl TV channel is a unique learning experience. It was enlightening to observe and understand different dimensions of outreach through an effective television channel, particularly in the context of setting up of the Rajya Sabha Television Channel. The officers of the Europarl TV expressed their willingness to share their experience in the setting up of RSTV and extended their full support and cooperation.

12.6 It would be interesting to mention here the Senate of Belgian Parliament recently created a department to review the quality of legislation. Similarly, the House of Representatives of the Belgian Parliament supervises if acts of Parliament are duly executed. These are good practices which can be emulated.

12.7 In the European Parliament, there is an Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy (OPPD) established in order to provide demand-driven parliamentary development support in new and emerging democracies (NED). The beneficiaries of the support of the OPPD are the parliamentary institutions of NED, their Members and their officials. Our Delegation's programme was also organised by the OPPD. India has now more than 60 years of experience of democracy and parliamentary system. India may explore the possibilities of collaboration with the OPPD of the European Parliament for an institutional arrangement in assisting emerging democracies.

12.8 There should be regular inter actions and discussions at the level of the MPs- MEPs for institutionalising the relations between Indian Parliament and European Parliament. Political level discussions could be followed up by the officials level inter actions like the exchange programmes.