

Editorial

A Seat, A Seat, My Kingdom For A Seat?

The Decision taken by common agreement¹ of the Governments of the Member States, meeting at Head of State and Government level, on the location of seats of certain bodies and departments of the European Communities² once again highlights the rank horse-trading and conflicting local interests which characterise the allocation of seats of the Community Institutions and other bodies. One remarkable feature of the new decision is that the actual place of the seat will in three cases be decided by the national government of the Member State concerned: The office for Veterinary and Plant-Health Inspection and Control will be in a town in Ireland to be determined by the Irish Government, and the Agency for Health and Safety at Work and of the Office of Harmonization in the Internal Market (trade marks, designs and models), including its Board of Appeal will be in Spain, in each case in a town to be determined by the Spanish Government. It cannot be satisfactory for the actual location of European bodies to be left to the vagaries of internal national political interests (something which is more

likely in Spain with the additional difficulty of having to please autonomous regional authorities). The major "prize" (it seems that the seat of a European body is regarded as a prize) of the European Monetary Institute and the future European Central Bank went, as expected, to Frankfurt, leaving London and The Netherlands with "consolation prizes" of the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products and Europol (with the Europol Drugs Unit) respectively, albeit that the latter will be placed in The Hague rather than in Amsterdam.

All this is very fine, but the major problem in the siting of the Community Institutions, the seat of the Parliament, is still a matter of not inconsiderable public ridicule and wasteful expenditure. The Edinburgh decision was that the Parliament's seat should be Strasbourg, where the twelve periods of monthly plenary sessions will be held. (The Parliament itself regards these as part-sessions which are adjourned.) The sessions dealing with the Budget are expressly included in these twelve sessions; they too are held in Strasbourg. Additional plenary sessions are held in Brussels, where Parliament's Committees also meet, whilst the General Secretariat of the Parliament and its departments

remain in Luxembourg. Simply from the point of view of effective working, the Parliament's home must be Brussels, or at the very least as a second choice Luxembourg (where the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance, the Court of Auditors and the EIB are already situated), rather than Strasbourg, the continued use of which is justified solely by national vanity. The chorus of European taxpayers, citizens of the Union, have the right to expect that their money is not wasted on the altar of national pride by the endless circus of moving which the split arrangements for Parliament entail. The doctrine of effectiveness is well recognized in the case-law of the Court of Justice, that such a doctrine is less well-developed among politicians is a matter for regret.

Laurence Gormley

¹Art 216 EC speaks of "common accord" but the Decision at Edinburgh of 12 December 1992 and this Decision are termed "Decisions by Common Agreement".

²Annex II to the Conclusions of the Presidency following the Brussels European Council of 29 October 1993.