EUROPEAN UNION

Committee of the Regions

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European Economic and Social Committee

COR-EESC ADMINISTRATIVE COOPERATION AGREEMENT

Mid-term evaluation

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary

The administrative cooperation between the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is unprecedented on the EU's institutional scene. By means of a cooperation agreement (CA) approved by the two Bureaus, the two Committees have not only fixed a large number of collaboration procedures between their (own) services but also established and organised what are known as Joint Services, where both human and financial resources from the two Committees are pooled together. The whole cooperation process, based on institutional equality, is overseen and managed by a governance structure involving the administrative as well as the political level.

The cooperation agreement in force runs for a seven-year period from 2008 to 2014, and provides for an evaluation due half way through the term. This report presents the results of that evaluation. It starts with an assessment of the working of the governance structure newly established for this agreement, which concludes that it is working well both at the daily administrative and at the political level. The report continues with an overview of the Joint Services (responsible for translation and of logistics) and explains some details of input and output. As they serve two consultative bodies, the EESC representing EU organised civil society, and the CoR, the political assembly of local and regional representatives, it should come as no surprise that the share of staff working in translation is substantial, accounting for about 40% of all staff of the two Committees. By pooling resources for translation and also through the joint management and use of meeting rooms, to quote just two examples, the evaluation argues that considerable savings, although difficult to quantify, are made. Thus, with regard to the European Parliament's request for budgetary neutrality of the new Cooperation Agreement, the evaluation shows that significant savings for the EU budget are achieved.

Given that about half of all staff of the Committees work in the Joint Services, and that these also manage about one fifth of the Committees' budgets, the CA establishes some harmonised rules with regard to managing staff and budget, and to establish a harmonised control environment and related auditing. Chapters 3 to 5 of the report explain and assess these rules, which, as is shown, by and large work very well.

Concerning staff policy (see ch. 3), it is noteworthy that interinstitutional cooperation and coordination do not prevent the administrations being effective and moving with the times, as is shown by the introduction of flexible working time and teleworking. In order to avoid unequal treatment between colleagues working together, the CA calls on the Committees to strive towards harmonisation of staff policy, with, however, no obligation to achieve identical results. The evaluation concludes that, in practice, the rules and procedures are adequate and that a high level of cooperation and coordination is achieved. Some areas for further improvement, such as working towards a more balanced distribution of middle managers in the Joint Services, are identified.

With regard to rules and procedures for financial management (see ch. 4), it is important to note that the funds managed by the Joint Services and serving e.g. to pay the jointly-used buildings and related costs come from two separate budgets, or, more precisely, two sections of the EU budget. This

requires intensive coordination in the budget planning process, and comparable rules for execution of the budget, verification of expenses and audits. It also calls for harmonisation of control environments and a substantial number of procedural arrangements. The key is to make sure that the Financial Regulation and the responsibilities of the two authorising officers by delegation are fully respected. The assessment concludes that, overall, the established procedures are working in a satisfactory way, and that approaches to the control environment are well coordinated. Audit services (see ch. 5) are cooperating in full with regard to audits touching on the Joint Services.

A number of rules and procedures have been established in what are known as mini-agreements governing cooperation between (autonomous) own services, and others concern the working of the so-called liaison functions which are designed to bridge the gap between own and Joint Services. Concerning cooperation between own services (see ch. 6) these were reviewed after a year in operation, and satisfactory progress was noted. A report was drafted and presented in summer 2009 to the Political Monitoring Group for the CA, and was also sent to the EP, at its request. The evaluation after three and a half years in operation confirms in general the positive assessment in all the six working areas concerned, with, however, some aspects identified for improvement. These concern, notably: the medical and welfare services, where in some areas improved coordination is desirable and in some others further initiatives are to be envisaged; and the internal services, where the existing cooperation mechanism needs to be improved.

The 2008 CA introduced liaison functions between own and Joint Services in three areas: IT, translation and infrastructure. They were designed to help bridge the gap between own and Joint Services in order to properly identify and communicate needs and priorities and to support adequate service provision. The evaluation (see ch. 7) shows that their establishment has indeed contributed to a better understanding of needs and to the establishment of clearer strategies and priorities (such as in IT), although in the day-to-day implementation there is still room for closer and more flexible cooperation (such as in translation and infrastructure). A closer look confirms that this is possible if the various mechanisms included in the agreement and its mini-agreements were exploited to the full.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that the cooperation agreement is working well and in the best interests of the Committees, their members and the administrations. Furthermore, it allows each Committee to develop its own profile and institutional identity. Thanks to prior consultation, the Committees also strengthen their position at inter-institutional cooperation forums. The fact should not be overlooked, however, that, in some regards, the procedures and mechanisms can still be improved. The various bodies in charge of managing cooperation are well aware of this, and through the established, functioning mechanisms are able to ensure that progress is made in the right direction. Thus, the evaluation concludes that there is no need at this point in time for changes to the agreement and its annexes.

1.   Background

As a historical reminder, it should be noted that the Maastricht Treaty established the Committee of the Regions (CoR) in 1994, but it was granted budgetary autonomy only in the year 2000. In the absence of this budgetary autonomy, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) had provided a number of services to the CoR. This arrangement was set in a new framework in the year 2000 by means of the first EESC-CoR Cooperation Agreement in force until 2007, which primarily regulated the so-called Joint Services (services common to both, in particular responsible for translation and logistics).

A new administrative cooperation agreement (CA) between the two Committees came into force on 1 January 2008, replacing the former agreement. As regards substance it is a compromise, the main features of which are:

- *introducing the principle of institutional equality;*
- *seeking to make savings based on interinstitutional cooperation while respecting institutional autonomy;*
- *maintaining a substantial number of joint services (such as Translation, IT, Infrastructure);*
- *decoupling some formerly joint services and integrating them into the own services; while*
- *formalising, beyond the Joint Services, a large number of cooperation arrangements between the two Committees' services.*

Technically, the 2008-2014 Cooperation Agreement is made up of three parts: the agreement itself, five annexes, and technical cooperation arrangements called "mini-agreements". The agreement as such primarily sets out the principles of cooperation, defines the services covered by it in their various forms, specifies the governance structure, and lays down some principles with regard to budget, buildings, audit etc. The agreement itself, together with its five annexes, was signed, upon the instructions of the two Bureaus, by the two Presidents and the two Secretaries-General on 17 December 2007.

The five annexes concern: the mission statement for the Joint Services, the organisation chart, the Joint Services establishment plan, detailed procedures with regard to budgetary matters, including drawing-up of the budget and its execution, and, finally, cooperation between the audit services. In addition, nine so-called "mini-agreements", which lay down practical procedures for cooperation between various services (including Joint Services) of the two Committees, had been adopted by the Political Monitoring Group (PMG) at its first meeting on 11 March 2008 in accordance with Article 17 of the CA.

According to Article 14(2) of the cooperation agreement, an assessment of the operation of the CA as a whole has to take place after half of its term has elapsed, i.e. by mid-2011. (According to the terms of the CA, a first evaluation of the nine "mini-agreements" took place in 2009 and was welcomed by the PMG at its meeting on 8 July 2009.)

The Secretaries-General are responsible for the practical organisation of administrative cooperation, and they each act as appointing authority for their staff (with a few exceptions related to senior posts) and as authorising officer by delegation for the respective budgets, Joint Services included. Exercising this authority, the Secretaries-General discussed the evaluation method and went on to decide that the evaluation should 1) deal with the areas covered by the cooperation agreement: the Joint Services; cooperation between own services in other areas (e.g. room management); cooperation in cross-cutting areas such as the budget; and the system of governance, and 2) that they will have overall responsibility for an internal evaluation which should be organised by the services responsible for each individual area, bilaterally or trilaterally.

This report on the status of administrative cooperation

- *was drawn up by the directors of the Committees' own services responsible for the different cooperation areas under review, in consultation with the directors of the Joint Services;*
- *was approved by the two Committees' Secretaries-General on 31 May 2011;*
- *and was endorsed by the CoR-EESC Political Monitoring Group at its meeting on 7 July 2011.*

2. **Functioning of the new governance and administrative structure: providing a framework for cooperation**

2.1   <u>The governance structure</u>

The 2008 Cooperation Agreement set up a new governance structure (Art. 6) different from the former structure. Its main components are:

−   application of the principle of institutional equality;
−   establishment of a Political Monitoring Group;
−   a new framework for meetings of the two Secretaries-General responsible for administrative cooperation;
−   establishment of a tripartite Cooperation Committee.

<u>Institutional equality</u>**:** the Joint Services (JS), formerly one directorate headed by an EESC director, are under the new agreement divided into two directorates, one for translation (with more than 500 posts) and one for logistics (with about 125 staff), with each of the Committees occupying one of the director posts (at the moment: CoR: translation, EESC: logistics). In addition, each Committee occupies the deputy director post supporting the director from the other Committee. This arrangement, including its staff-specific and budgetary aspects, has proven to function well.

Progress towards the goal of more balanced sharing between the Committees of middle management posts in the JS, as stipulated by section 6(6) of the CA, as well as of administrator and assistant posts within individual Joint Services units (Art. 9 (2)) is rather slow, given the legal situation of officials. Especially as regards middle management posts, SGs are following developments closely and will be acting notably with regard to additional enlargement posts.

<u>Political Monitoring Group</u>**:** the cooperation agreement reinforced the political supervision and guidance of administrative cooperation between the two Committees by creating a Political Monitoring Group (PMG), composed of six members each and operating according to a co-chairing model. With three meetings held in both 2008 and 2009 and two in 2010 and so far in 2011, the PMG operates in an efficient and collegial way and in accordance with the agreement. Attendance rates are very high, and members from both sides show a vested interest in the way administrative cooperation between the Committees is functioning and in the service provision of the Joint Services, such as in the buildings policy and the annual work programmes of the various services. They also monitor the functioning of administrative cooperation overall, for example examining the various reports prepared to this end and asking the responsible directors for their views.

Given that cooperation was functioning well and that there had been no severe disturbances thus far, the PMG concluded in 2010 that two regular meetings per year should be sufficient, of course provided that further meetings would be arranged where necessary.

<u>Secretaries-General</u>**:** according to the CA, the Secretaries-General (SG) are supposed to concentrate on the more strategic cooperation issues, as they have been freed from many day-to-day management issues of the Joint Services by the establishment, with the new CA, of the Cooperation Committee (CC). At the beginning of the new CA term their meetings were organised on an *ad hoc* basis, although since early 2009 the SGs have been meeting on a two-monthly basis, as provided for by the CA. Up to now, they have taken strategic decisions and asked the CC to organise and supervise implementation together with the services concerned. Only exceptionally have the SGs had to take a decision, acting in their role of arbitrator, on an issue referred back to them by the CC. This can be considered proof of the highly-effective operation of the CC over the last three and a half years. In support of the trust-based cooperation between the Committees, the SGs also meet regularly in a confidential setting.

<u>Cooperation Committee</u>**:** the setting-up of the newly created CC, composed of the two directors of administration, the two Joint Services directors and two additional directors, one from each Committee, depending on the agenda items, has considerably reinforced trust and cooperation at working level between own and Joint Services and between the Committees.

Since March 2008, the CC has met on a monthly basis, as stipulated by the CA, for a total of about 30 meetings, with rich agendas and a high participation rate. Its main task is to monitor the execution of the Joint Services' work programme (including measures to correct, where necessary, any deviations from objectives), to identify priorities for the work of the Joint Services and, in the interest of efficiency, to provide broad coordination between service providers and clients as well as to identify and solve any potential problems.

Conclusion concerning the governance structure: three and a half years into the new agreement, it is clear that the new governance structure has substantially improved administrative cooperation between the Committees and between own and Joint Services on the basis of equality, regular discussion and trust. Thus, in terms of the newly-established governance structure, no need for revision of the agreement at this point in time can be identified.

2.2   <u>Joint Services – a unique example of broad and deep interinstitutional cooperation</u>

Interinstitutional administrative cooperation between EU bodies[1] exists in various forms, but is generally i) cooperation between autonomous bodies, or, mostly, of parts thereof, such as by means of Service Level Agreements, and ii) focussed on specific time-limited actions; examples are participation in an interinstitutional call for tenders, or the use of a meeting room by another body. However, it can be said that administrative cooperation between the two Committees goes far beyond those examples. It takes place on two levels: first, close, day-to-day cooperation between "own" services, as stipulated by Article 5 of the CA , which are subject to a number of detailed technical arrangements (dealt with in chapters 6 and 7 of this report), and second, the existence of what are known as "Joint Services" (JS). This last term characterises a unique situation amongst the EU

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[1]   Leaving aside interinstitutional bodies such as OPOCE, EPSO and the EAS.

institutions[2], whereby there are two directorates, one for translation and one for logistics, where the two Committees pool both human and financial resources and where the services work for both Committees on an equal footing. In very practical terms, this means that, in a given unit, staff from both Committees work under one unit head and money spent is fuelled from the two (autonomous) budgets according to rules stipulated in the agreement (which respect the financial regulation and responsibilities). These rules are dealt with in chapters 3 to 5 of this evaluation report.

Apart from their historical origins (see the Introduction), the JS continue to exist because they represent financial savings for the EU taxpayer, although these are difficult to quantify. Here are just two examples. 1) The joint translation service: both Committees are advisory bodies working on the basis of a cyclical calendar (and in all official languages). By means of close cooperation in calendar planning (see the mini-agreement on this topic), it is largely possible to balance work load peaks, in the sense that, at least in an ideal scenario, peaks for one Committee are balanced by a "trough" for the other. This makes for a more stable workload overall and savings in avoiding either additional staff (if two translation services were to exist with each of them staffed to cover for peak situations), or substantial budgets for external services to cover the peaks. 2) Both Committees share all their buildings and the use of them. It constitutes good management to manage the buildings and related costs, such as for security, cleaning and maintenance, jointly, i.e. through joint logistical services.

The following tables and brief explanations give an overview on the resources put into the Joint Services by the two Committees, both in human and in financial terms, as well as some key indicators regarding the output and tasks of these services.

Table 1 Human resources in the Joint Services

	2008	**2009**	**2010**
Directorate for Logistics total	**124**	**121**	**123**
- AD	21	22	25
- AST	92	89	87
- contract staff	11	10	11
Directorate Translation total	**517***	**513***	**513**
- AD	383	381	381
- AST	134	132	132
- contract staff			
Total staff	**641**	**634**	**636**
- of which EESC in %	62%	62%	63%
- of which CoR in %	38%	38%	37%
Total as % of total staff of 2 Committees	53%	53%	52%

*Figure after redeployment; during the year 2008 (with four posts stretching into 2009), 27 translator and 25 assistant posts were re-deployed.

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2   Not similar, but partly comparable are joint resource directorates used in the Commission in recent years when dividing directorates-general (e.g. Transport and Energy).

The **Directorate for Logistics** is made up of four units and two other services: the Infrastructure unit (dealing with the buildings and all services related to their occupants); the IT and telecommunications unit (responsible for providing information systems, IT infrastructure and user support services); the Printing/Distribution unit (in charge of the production of meeting documents, the preparation and distribution and/or dispatch of meeting files and the quality printing of products such as brochures, leaflets and posters); the Programming/Financial and Contractual Management unit (in charge of financial management within the DL, steering contractual matters such as calls for tenders and planning and reporting for the directorate); the Security service (in charge of security and safety in the buildings); and the Restaurant service (administrative support in order to ensure the continuity and quality of catering services).

The operational importance of this directorate is explained by the joint budgets it manages:

Table 2 Joint logistics budgets* managed by the Joint Services (in €)

	2008	**2009**	**2010**
Buildings + associated costs (chapter 20)	29 037 950	30 979 367	32 661 527
IT and Telecom (Art. 210)	5 299 177	5 284 689	5 720 481
Furniture; technical equipment + installations (rest of chapter 21)	2 212 802	1 004 118	959 103
Administrative expenditure (Articles 230, 236, 238)	1 413 552	1 439 700	1 296 200
Total*	**37 963 481**	**38 707 874**	**40 637 311**
- of which EESC in %	59.4%	58.3%	58.1%
- of which CoR in %	40.6%	41.7%	41.9%
Total** as % of total budgets of 2 Committees	20.4%	20.1%	20.0%

* Excluding external translation and minor parts of line 2622.

**This figure does not include costs for the staff employed in the Joint Services.

Buildings: six buildings under joint use of which five under lease contract and one rented (from the EC). Associated costs: energy; cleaning; maintenance; fitting-out; security, insurances.

IT and Telecom: this expenditure covers both the purchase and maintenance of equipment and software for the whole IT infrastructure, which includes, for example, about 1350 work stations, and the cost for outside assistance for the operation, development and maintenance of software (outside staff working inside the premises, including helpdesk support), as well as covering the Telecom costs.

Shares of the Committees: under the cooperation agreement, the contribution of each committee towards the joint budgets for year N is set as being the equivalent of its share in the total staff (as measured by the establishment plans) of year N-1, thus reflecting staff evolution (see table 2).

Management of the joint budgets: Annex 4 of the agreement covers the rules for the management of joint budgets and is evaluated in chapter 4 of this report.

The **Directorate for Translation** is made up of 22 language units translating into all the official languages, plus management and a supporting planning and coordination unit. In 2008 an internal redeployment of posts took place, whereby the directorate lost 7% of its translators and 17% of its assistants (compared to its posts after full enlargement took effect; the 2008 figure in Table 1 is after redeployment).

Table 3 Key indicators for translation

	2008	**2009**	**2010**
Number of pages translated per year	452 068	407 606	379 896
Deadline compliance rate as %	98.0	98.2	99.6
Revision rate as %	65.5	63.5	69.0
External translation* as % of total pages	5.1	2.9	4.2

*the respective budgets represented EUR 708 500, EUR 566 000 and EUR 592 300 in commitments.

3. Cooperation in human resources policies

Main goals of the cooperation agreement:

The Joint Services are intended to be services providers for the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The cooperation agreement aims to modernise the administrative management of the Joint Services and increase efficiency and effectiveness in the use of the CoR's and EESC's financial resources, while preserving and affirming the autonomy and independence of each of the two institutions.

As regards personnel policy, the Committees undertake to pursue an equitable human resources policy, particularly with regard to officials and other staff employed in the Joint Services, and to ensure equal treatment of staff working in a Committee's own services and staff working for the Joint Services on behalf of the same Committee.

Under Article 9 of the cooperation agreement, the Committees are to work towards achieving more balanced distribution of posts in individual Joint Services units in the long term. To this end, they agree to coordinate their Joint Services human resources applications to the budget authority.

3.1 Assessment of the current situation

A. General comments

Section 4(7)(1) of the agreement states that the two institutions are to provide each other with information before taking any decision affecting staff.

The two institutions are to engage in regular consultation on any issue relating to human resources management which could affect Joint Services staff (recruitment, assessment, attestation or certification procedures, working conditions, etc.), which does not necessarily mean that it will always be possible to harmonise practices; some minor disparities do exist, such as, for example, in the assessment system or flexitime arrangements.

Moreover, it is observed that the different demographic and organisational structures of the two Committees mean that their concerns in the area of human resources are different.

This is completely understandable, as although the Joint Services are a structure providing a common services to the two institutions, the institutions operate completely independently and each have their own appointing authority and regulatory body. Furthermore, the cooperation agreement states that the institutions are not "being bound to an identical outcome".

B. Assessment of the current situation in terms of recruitment and career development

Examples of good administrative cooperation between the CoR and the EESC:

▪ in line with the cooperation agreement, the CoR has an additional head of unit post in the Translation Directorate (Hungarian translation unit, since 1 February 2008). Moreover, the coordination unit has recently been merged with the planning department, in order to optimise use of resources, improve the quality of the services provided and create new synergies with these two bodies. The new unit, translation management, is made up of four departments, each run by a head of department. In line with the cooperation agreement, a new administrator-head of department post has been created by the CoR, contributing to a *better balance in the number of CoR and EESC management posts* in the Joint Services;

▪ as regards *interinstitutional mobility*, since 1 January 2008, the date when the cooperation agreement came into force, 12 officials have been transferred from the CoR to the EESC and five officials have been transferred from the EESC to the CoR;

▪ as regards *selection of middle and/or senior management*, in the recent procedure appointing the assistant director in the Directorate for Logistics, the EESC was involved in the panel's work. Similarly, each Committee is invited to take part in the work of the selection panels for Joint Services heads of unit;

▪ moreover, *close cooperation* is established between the Committees, including as regards relations with EPSO, particularly in respect of management of reserve lists to meet the needs of the language departments. Other synergies have been established between the administrations, including in respect of introduction of SYSPER2, on which the Committees signed a cooperation agreement with the Commission (DG DIGIT). In general, the Committees regularly hold exchanges of views, sharing their expertise and best practices in the area of recruitment and career development.

C. Assessment of the current situation in the area of working conditions, rights and staff support

Overall, there is no structured mechanism in these domains. However, there are:

– *systematic ad hoc cooperation* to take into consideration the situation of staff assigned to the Joint Services;
– genuine synergies being developed as regards *mutual provision of information and sharing of expertise*;
– an ongoing endeavour from both sides to *streamline* work and share the workload on matters of common interest.

More specifically:

▪ in the area of *working conditions*, several issues (flexitime and teleworking, for example) are dealt with by the two Committees together or in close cooperation, in terms of both drafting (new) rules, holding the related social dialogue and implementing the rules;

- as regards *individual rights, privileges and immunities*, close cooperation and mutual provision of information have been implemented, in particular to address the situation of colleagues moving from one Committee to the other, with a view to cutting red tape and ensuring equal treatment (mutual recognition of rights acquired in areas such as annual travel expenses, establishment of place of origin, etc.);
- concerning *statutory obligations*, new, identical measures on disciplinary proceedings and administrative enquiries have been drawn up by the two Committees together, and include a cooperation agreement laying down procedures for cases where members of staff from the two Committees are involved. As regards combating harassment at work, endeavours to harmonise the measures to be implemented have not yet reached completion because of a difference in approach to the informal arrangements to be put in place, but decisions are very near. Procedures for dealing with perceived situations of harassment involving members of staff from both Committees remain to be established;
- In the area of *staff support* cooperation remains fairly limited, because of the disparity in (budgetary and human) resources allocated to this service and the differing nature of the activities carried out by the Committees. Joint or parallel initiatives are nevertheless implemented from time to time.

Despite close cooperation in these fields, the existence of two separate appointing authorities, along with legitimately different political concerns, result in certain cases in (often minor) differences in implementing rules and/or procedures. These differences in treatment can cause a feeling of inequality among staff, according to which Committee they belong to, and make management of teams a more complicated matter for Joint Services management staff.

When joint rules are adopted, it is on the basis of a compromise between a number of different representatives of the respective Committees, which at times leaves neither of the two parties wholly satisfied and considerably lengthens the time taken to process dossiers.

D. Assessment of the current situation in the area of training/professional reorientation

Although concern to achieve similar drafting and application of rules can occasionally lead to delays in processing applications, cooperation between the Committees' training departments can be described as excellent. It is marked by ongoing cooperation and consultation, mutual exchange of information and regular coordination on activities.

The following are good examples of administrative cooperation in these areas:

- the *rules* in force were drawn up consensually, are identical and are implemented in a spirit of ongoing mutual consultation and/or provision of information. Other *large-scale projects (SYSLOG)* are generally handled in a spirit of consensus;
- as a general rule, the *training courses organised by the respective Committees* are open to staff from the other Committee, thus expanding the range of training courses available to staff from both Committees;

▪ the *training rooms* managed by the two training departments are exchanged between the Committees according to need;

▪ as regards training needs identified for the *Joint Services*, the training departments agree each year on an appropriate division of the organisation and financing of the various courses requested.

3.2 <u>Suggestions for improvement</u>

A. General comments

Cooperation under the cooperation agreement between the CoR and the EESC can be evaluated as encouraging, although there is still room for improvement in the various areas specified above.

B. Suggestions for improvement in the area of recruitment and career development

In the Joint Services, gradual rebalancing of the number of posts belonging to the two institutions and of representation of the CoR/EESC in management posts could be improved.

C. Suggestions for improvement in the area of working conditions, rights and staff support

It would be desirable to work towards closer harmonisation in the practical implementation of provisions, particularly as regards working conditions and individual rights, since these have a limited impact on the identity, goals and particular role of each Committee. In this respect, the introduction of SYSPER2 with joint development for the two Committees could be a very good opportunity.

D. Suggestions for improvement in the area of training and professional reorientation

Even more systematic coordination of the courses run by the respective Committees could lead to further efficiency gains.

It would benefit the Committees to introduce a new IT application for managing training (SYSLOG).

As regards the Committees' professional reorientation policies, potential arrangements for facilitating more professional mobility between the Committees could be explored.

4.   Cooperation on budget and buildings

This chapter evaluates the procedures as defined in Articles 11 and 13 of the cooperation agreement and Annex 4 thereto.

4.1   Drafting of the budget and transfer of appropriations

The two Committees coordinate the preparations, presentation and timetable for introducing budget requests at the beginning of each budgetary cycle. The authorising officers by subdelegation of the two Committees submit their requests to the budget services of both Committees. The Cooperation Committee scrutinises all budget requests (core appropriations and joint appropriations) made by the authorising officers by subdelegation of the Joint Services, before submitting proposals to the authorising officers by delegation. The Political Monitoring Group is consulted on the amounts deemed necessary for establishing the estimates for joint expenditure. The weighting (or "sharing key") is set in accordance with the establishment plans of both institutions on 1 January of the previous financial year. It is applied to all budget lines and sub-lines, which are subject to the common sharing key. Once the budget has been adopted, the Committees sign their respective budget note (clearing), announcing the amounts for each budget line and sub-line.

Strengths and shortfalls

Cooperation between the CoR, the EESC and their Joint Services and the established mechanisms therefore have been developed over the years and are now working effectively and efficiently. Due to the different time schedules of the internal draft budget establishment procedures of the two Committees, the integration of the Joint Services' budget requests into the draft budgets of each Committee requires careful planning.

4.2   Booking of expenditure and inventory

Expenditure to be booked against joint appropriations is carried out by splitting the expenditure between the two Committees' budgets in line with the weighting, as defined in the cooperation agreement. A given item of expenditure is paid for in full by one Committee. As far as possible, expenditure is split between the budgets of the two Committees so as to come close, for each budget heading, over several budget commitments and over a financial year, to the proportion of expenditure for each Committee determined by the weighting.

For expenditure that exceeds the available budget of the Committee covering said expenditure (settling Committee), said Committee must receive sufficient funds from the other Committee before establishing the proposed legal commitment (invoicing between Committees).

When goods to be added to the inventory are ordered in a quantity that enables them to be split between the budgets of the two Committees in a proportion close to the weighting, each Committee

draws up, against its own budget, an order for its share. Where this is not possible, the order is placed against the budget of one of the Committees, while keeping an appropriate balance overall.

Strengths and shortfalls

The working mechanisms stipulated in the above-mentioned articles are well adhered to. They are integrated in the daily processes and implemented by means of cross-invoicing between the Committees by the financial actors concerned. Their functioning is reflected in good performance in terms of payment timeframes and budget execution.

4.3   Procurement procedures

The procurement procedure for framework contracts within the remit of the Joint Services is managed by the "lead" authorising officer by subdelegation of one Committee, typically the relevant head of unit. The authorising officer by subdelegation of the other Committee is involved in accordance with the terms of the guidelines on interinstitutional tenders and contracts (memo from the Commission dated 1.5.2007). The authorising officer by subdelegation of the "lead" Committee signs the legal commitment after having been authorised to do so in writing by the authorising officer by subdelegation of the other Committee.

Strengths and shortfalls

These procedures work well.

4.4   Verification and control environment

Verifiers are appointed in respect of the two Committees' appropriations. They are part of the verification unit of each Committee's own services. For a given budget heading, the verification unit of the "lead" Committee, as set out in an appended table to the cooperation agreement, verifies the files of both Committees.

The two Committees seek to harmonise, in accordance with best practice, their procedures, and forms relating to budgetary transactions, such as budgetary commitments, payment orders, recovery orders, transfers of appropriations, carry-overs of appropriations, estimates of receivables, the identification database, inventories, etc.

Strengths and shortfalls

The verification services of the Committees are in permanent contact with each others' verifying officers and the initiating officer. As an additional mechanism to provide reassurance to both Committees, *ex post* controls of transactions previously validated by the EESC's verifiers (*ex ante* control) are carried out annually by the CoR's verifiers and vice versa. The verification services of the two Committees also meet regularly for the purpose of exchanging best practices and discussing

recurrent issues. As far as verification is concerned the cooperation between the Committees works well and the information-sharing on administrative decisions by each Committee will be improved even further.

The two Committees have coordinated their respective approaches to the control environment for the Joint Services, in order for the latter to be able to operate properly. Further development could be achieved by synchronising the introduction of further improvements based upon best practices established in each Committee. The Cooperation Committee monitors activity and performance indicators for various key activities in the Joint Services on a monthly basis. Nearly all procedures and forms are very well harmonised to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

4.5   Dealing with buildings in budgets and accounts

At the moment, the Committees jointly use six buildings, of which five are under long term lease contracts and one is rented from the Commission. Funding for the buildings and related costs (energy, cleaning etc.) is provided through the two budgets by using the agreed sharing key. Leased buildings are integrated into the annual accounts on a shared basis and with due respect for the established rules. Building management works smoothly on a daily basis, in accordance with the policy documents and established plans.

Strengths and shortfalls

Whilst daily operations are efficient and effective, the Committees will strengthen even more strategic planning of their Joint Services, in particular in the area of buildings. To that end, further emphasis is placed on multi-annual project planning while ensuring sufficient appropriations for ongoing and new building projects. This is all the more important as the EU is expected to become owner of all of the 6 buildings currently occupied by the Committees, at the end of their lease contracts.

5.   Cooperation on audit issues

The cooperation agreement refers to internal audit matters in Article 4(3), Article 12 and Annex 5. It concerns cooperation regarding audits of the Joint Services.

As provided for, the internal auditors consult each other on issues such as planning, programming and conduct of audits, and follow all the required formal procedures. Furthermore, they keep in regular contact in many other audit-related areas as e.g. internal control standards, financial circuits and verification issues, and share their evaluation of internal procedures and risks.

The two audit services established arrangements for mutual assistance in audits on Joint Services and access to data and information in order to facilitate, streamline, and develop audit work. Regular exchange and coordination proved to be fruitful for both services, notwithstanding diverging opinions on individual matters.

The current cooperation agreement is a suitable and effective framework for audit cooperation. Possible developments, which should not, however, be imposed by a formal framework, might include joint audit work previews covering several years, or closer cooperation on individual audits.

6.   **Cooperation between own services**

6.1   Medical and welfare departments

A. Cooperation mechanisms in force

These mechanisms are defined in the March 2008 Technical arrangements for cooperation (or "mini-agreements"). They are based on the following eight rules:

> *"1. Securing the continuity of medical and welfare assistance; 2. Organising and guaranteeing a high-quality service in the event of an emergency; 3. Sharing essential medical equipment; 4. Applying interinstitutional rules and the common rules of medical ethics and welfare assistance; 5. Deciding on the procedure for consulting medical and welfare files; 6. Providing a report where assistance has been given to a member of staff from the other Committee; 7. Organising quarterly inter-service meetings; 8. Defining a harmonised policy on information, awareness and prevention."*

These rules have for the most part been adhered to, with the result that a generally satisfactory level of medical and welfare provision has been achieved.

B. Strengths and weaknesses of the current situation

      i) Assessment of quality – STRENGTHS and WEAKNESSES

- *Positive:* staff from the two Committees now have *two entire medical and welfare teams* potentially at their service. In this sense, establishing two independent medical departments has made it possible to *modernise some of the equipment and to renew certain stock and equipment* because of the need to duplicate or restock existing equipment. Moreover, splitting the medical services has not prevented synergies being preserved or developed between the two departments (backup to cover absences, exchanges of expertise, sharing work).

- *Negative:* certain synergies could be developed more, particularly in terms of *coordination between the two medical secretariats*, to avoid parallel, superfluous administrative work; in terms of *on-site medical assistance*, where it is clear that the times each day when a medical officer is present are too short; or in terms of devising and developing *new initiatives* to avoid duplication or overlap of work.

      ii) Assessment of quantity – INPUT and OUPUT

- *In terms of human resources*, it is useful to look at the *ratio of medical and welfare staff to total staff*, as a way of monitoring the relative difference in staff resources made available to the medical and welfare departments to carry out their duties before and after the entry into force of the cooperation agreement. *Before the cooperation agreement was implemented* (i.e. before 31 December 2007), this "welfare and medical assistance ratio" was 7.9:1 000 (with a joint medical service of ten

people to cope with the needs of 1 270 people working in the two Committees, without taking into account services for members. *Currently* (as at 1 January 2011), the welfare and medical assistance ratio is 9.1:1 000 in the CoR and 6.3:1 000 in the EESC, with each Committee's welfare and medical department continuing to be staffed by five people, while the number of staff working in the Committees has continued to grow (rising from 496 to 550 in the CoR and from 774 to 791 in the EESC), with services to members also rising.

- *In terms of budgetary resources*, it should be noted that most of the investments made after the departments were split would have become necessary anyway if the joint medical service had been preserved, in order to replace equipment which had become obsolete and/or to expand the services provided to staff. Splitting the medical department therefore seems to have had the *effect of speeding up this process*.

- *In terms of volume of work carried out*, although the figures collected for the two medical and welfare departments[3] are not homogeneous and therefore make the comparison less reliable, it is observed that work carried out *has risen by more than the simple arithmetic increase in staff* in the two Committees:

- as regards the EESC, the level of work calculated using the ratio "2009-2010 average" to "2008 figures" shows an average increase in medical and welfare work carried out of 19.5% over three years (whereas the number of working staff only increased by 2.2% in this period);
- as regards the CoR, against an increase in working staff of almost 11% between 2007 and 2011, the rise in welfare and medical work carried out over the same period, based on the same type of parameters as above, was 17.2%;
- it should be noted that, in order to cope with their average workload over the period in question, given that there had been no change in the medical staff since 2007, the two social and medical departments had systematically to make use of supply nurses, who in the EESC worked a total of 242 hours in 2008 and 451 hours on average each year in 2009 and 2010, and in the CoR 555 hours on average each year in 2008-2010.

C. Suggestions for change and improvement

a)   *As regards organisation*, it would be mutually beneficial to aim towards: greater flexibility in making staff available to the other Committee (in line with the busiest periods or periods of greatest need in one or other Committee); better on-site presence, through reassessing the timetables of the medical staff, particularly the medical officers (in terms of hours worked and time slots); balanced distribution of the administrative workload between the two departments when launching joint projects (such as medical examinations for the purposes of checks); streamlining of procedures in certain large-scale projects or new initiatives (drawing up framework contracts, calling in an external ergonomist or psychologist). Ideally, management which is geared to this kind of project should make

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[3]   These figures relate to the following activities: pre-employment medical examinations, annual check-ups, number of cases dealt with (invalidity, absence, special leave, sick leave, part-time on medical grounds, irregular absences, Rule 60, medical examinations for the purposes of checks, medical reports, ergonomics, cases dealt with by the welfare officer), blood tests, emergencies, vaccinations, medical standbys during plenary sessions or special events, etc…

it possible to ease the burden of stages consisting of duplicated consultation and approval in each Committee, maybe by introducing a system whereby each Committee sends a delegate to participate in the other Committee's process, or joint consultation.

b)   *As regards development of initiatives,* considerable progress still needs to be made on the last cooperation principle set out in the mini-agreement – establishing a harmonised policy on information, awareness and prevention. This includes the campaigns against alcoholism and other addictions, better identification of positions subject to an ergonomic or toxicological risk, etc., along with analysis of workstations, launch of a genuine risk assessment together with the safety department, development of a health and safety policy, and carrying out more frequent checks.

To achieve the desired results, this ambitious measure requires greater synergy between the two departments and ongoing endeavours to streamline working methods. However, it must also take into account the current human resources situation: the medical officers need to work more hours and an additional nurse needs to be employed in order for a more ambitious welfare and medical policy to be properly implemented, while the budget for supply staff must be considerably reduced.

6.2   Prepress

A. Working mechanisms

Organisation: the prepress cooperation agreement came into force on 1 July 2008. Its aim was to integrate prepress (graphic design) activities, up till then the responsibility of the joint Printshop/Distribution Unit, into the two Committees' services dealing with publications. Over the past three years the EESC's Visits and Publications (ViP) Unit and CoR's Administration, Budget, Editions Unit undertook the necessary organisational and procedural measures to integrate a team of four graphic designers each into their structures, thus assuming responsibility for the entire range of the publications and graphic products chain. The two Committees undertook the necessary practical/operational adjustments to ensure that their respective structures integrate the new tasks, workflow continues uninterrupted and inter-service cooperation operates optimally.

Monitoring workflow: the core cooperation mechanism for monitoring publications and graphic products workflow continues to be the weekly meetings between the two Committees' publication coordinators and the joint Printshop Unit. These meetings, involving EESC and CoR officials responsible for publications and officials from the Printshop/Distribution Unit, ensured planning of production and established printing priorities.

Relations between the joint Printshop/Distribution Unit and the two Committees' Publications Units have been efficient and cordial. Colleagues in the Printshop have always been ready to share know-how and spread best practices. This has made it possible to process publication requests optimally and ensure workflow continuity. Occasional meetings also take place with the joint IT Unit, whenever necessary. Informal contact between the EESC and CoR heads of unit and heads of the Joint Services is frequent and cordial.

Relations with requesting services: The two Committees' units have been particularly careful to inform internal services about new developments and familiarise them with them, in particular as regards graphic design. Information sessions were organised during joint meetings, for example in the context of EESC's Communication Team, and also with each internal service separately. Moreover, each of the Committees drew up a new "Guide" to explain the new procedures and provide all appropriate information to internal services for producing publications and/or graphic support products. The Printshop/Distribution Unit also drew up a new "Guide" reflecting its tasks and mode of operation.

Examples of best practices: The EESC ViP Unit developed and successfully tested in February 2011 a new computerised database for publications and graphic products. The Conferences/Interpretation Unit (CFI) and the Internal Services Unit (SEI) were also involved. The possibility of extending its use to the CoR and the joint Printshop Unit was envisaged during the development phase.

A training session for graphic designers was organised by the CoR. It was also open to EESC prepress staff, who were consulted and involved throughout the planning phase.

B. Personnel

EESC: Four graphic designers were integrated into the Visits and Publications Unit (ViP). As was agreed during the negotiation process, the CoR continued to pay a member of contract staff (function group I), who was placed at the disposal of the joint Printshop Unit responsible for carrying out graphic design work for the EESC. As a result of a reorganisation process within the EESC prepress team, the occupation of this post was re-examined and this staff member rejoined the CoR prepress team in December 2009. The EESC prepress team is currently composed of four EESC posts (three officials in place and one vacant post) Ideally, in the longer run the Prepress and ViP Unit should be located together with the rest of the unit, which is not the case at present.

CoR: The team of CoR graphic designers has been increased to five following the termination of the engagement undertaken with the EESC, as mentioned above. The team was integrated into the Communication, Press & Protocol Directorate, with no staff- or equipment-related problems. Since 26 May the graphic designers have moved into new offices in the TRE 006 building.

Joint Printshop Unit: As foreseen in the cooperation agreement and to guarantee the implementation of institutional equity[4], the EESC has placed the CTP (computer to plate) post, an AST official, at the disposal of the joint Printshop Unit to serve both Committees on equal terms. This working method has proved functional and the CTP official is now responsible for receiving and processing PDF files for both Committees.

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[4] Point 2.1 of the EESC/CoR agreement reads as follows: "… the EESC agrees that the CTP function and one EESC post shall remain at the joint Printshop/Distribution Unit as is the case at present. The CoR for its part agrees to make one of its graphic designer posts available to the EESC so as to arrive at a situation where the Committees would dispose of 4 posts of graphic designers each".

C. Technical equipment: managing the supply and maintenance contract

Under the terms of the cooperation agreement the joint IT Unit is responsible for managing the Framework Contract with the contractor Online Grafics as regards maintenance of technical equipment. This operation has not posed any particular problems. Since both Committees and the joint Printshop also use Online Grafics, a regular working relationship has been established between all services involved, both through informal contact and/or regular meetings. The IT Unit also organises regular user group meetings.

At operational level, the IT department intervened principally when the CoR graphic designers moved into their new offices in the TRE building. No problem occurred during the move. In the context of ongoing consultations the IT Unit confirmed its commitment to comply with the terms of the mini-agreement, in particular as regards the date of termination of the Framework Contract in 2011, the purchase of technical equipment and the launching of the new call for tender.

D. Overall evaluation

The evaluation of the cooperation agreement in the prepress area is considered satisfactory overall after almost three years of operation. Integrating graphic design into the respective Publications Units of the two Committees facilitated the political objective of furthering each Committee's graphic profile and brand image. Structural and operational adjustments were necessary to ensure that the new system functioned smoothly. In spite of some loss of synergy, the decentralisation of prepress activities to the two Committees' Publication Units has made it possible to focus on the particular needs of each Committee.

Both CoR and EESC graphic teams strongly recommend not replacing the MAC server with a PC environment since such a change would be detrimental in terms of quality and performance and would bring only minor financial savings. To improve synergies and be able to cope with exceptionally heavy workload periods, deepening cooperation between the two Committees' design teams could be envisaged, as provided for under point 2.4 of the cooperation agreement.

6.3   Internal services

Cooperation takes place in each sphere of activity of the Internal Services – more specifically, drivers, reception, floor ushers (sorting and distribution of mail), meeting ushers, maintenance of the audio-visual infrastructure and operational management of meeting rooms (Agora Application).

The technical arrangements for cooperation are based on five principles: the Committee of origin has priority, each service commits itself to maximum cooperation, resources made available by one Committee to the other are compensated for, the need for an operational interface between the two Committees and arbitration mechanism in case of conflicts of priorities.

The EESC leases three cars while the CoR leases four; each Committee has four <u>drivers</u>. Cooperation concerns common errands (post, blood bags, various deliveries for Joint Services, etc.). The availability of modern tools for management of drivers and cars would allow more effective reporting on the use of these resources.

Separate procedures have been put in place for processing incoming registered mail, and each Committee manages its own <u>reception</u> independently. Both units are committed to ensuring that the reception desks are manned constantly during lunchtime; this will require the availability of adequate staff from both Committees so to avoid the gap experienced in 2010.

<u>Sorting of mail</u> per Committee has not been implemented yet and <u>floor ushers</u> continue to deliver mail per floor so as to achieve the best synergies between the two teams. A project for reorganising distribution of mail on shared areas started in 2010. This could lead to better efficiency and effectiveness in the daily distribution of mail.

Concerning the <u>meeting services</u>, efficient cooperation is based on the use of common IT tools (Agora and Business Objects); procedures for exchange of meeting rooms could be further streamlined via Agora.

In the area of <u>maintenance of the audio-visual infrastructure</u>, cooperation between the two Committees is fairly efficient. Management of the OPS-room requires a very high degree of collaboration between the two teams as well as constant refinement of written procedures.

Recent figures show a gap in the availability of multimedia technicians made available by the CoR.

Conclusions and recommendations:

After two years, the result of cooperation between the internal services is fairly satisfactory.

In order to guarantee an effective evolution of the cooperation, the internal services have to be further modernised with very close cooperation between the two administrations, to maximise efficiency while respecting mutual independence. This requires consolidation of existing procedures in the field of mutual assistance as well as the deployment of modern tools (mainly IT, telecom and furniture tools) to allow a higher degree of flexibility in the daily assignment of resources. At the same time, compensation mechanisms will have to be defined and implemented.

6.4   <u>Library/information centre</u>

Organisation and cooperation mechanisms

The library cooperation agreement came into force on 1 July 2008. Its aim was to integrate the joint library service into the two Committees' services. The two libraries have been integrated respectively into the EESC Communication Department and the CoR Directorate for the Registry and Services to

Members. This transition has gone smoothly. Over the past three years the EESC's Communication Department (Directorate A for Consultative Works for six months in 2008) and the CoR's Registry and Services to the Members Directorate have undertaken the necessary organisational and procedural measures to integrate the team into their structures. From a budgetary point of view the Committees reallocated resources to own services, appointing new authorising and initiating officers for the relevant budget lines.

The EESC library has been renamed the "information centre", to link it with a new concept of proactive services for users. A development plan has been established to accompany this development. After the evaluation of an initial development plan for the CoR library and after approval of a new plan for modernising it, it has been proposed to change the name to "CoR documentation centre". This documentation centre should match current needs and challenges, make full use of potential offered by new technology, strengthen on-line services and enable all concerned to benefit from user-friendly services, including remote access.

The information centre and the CoR library have been cooperating in four fields, as required by the mini-agreement.

a.   *Preserving historical heritage*

All collections are available to the users in the common reading room. Each service ensures the preservation of its own historical works; they are registered in the common electronic catalogue which is networked with the catalogues of other EU institutions' libraries.

b.   *Establishing access to electronic periodicals and, as far as possible, to external resources specialising in the areas of interest shared by the two Committees*

The two services have jointly launched a call for tender in 2008 and finally purchased an on-line periodicals database. The cost of the platform for consulting the online periodicals is shared equally between the CoR and the EESC.

c.   *Providing access to the library reading room, on the basis of cooperation between the librarians, by means of joint rotation*

An agreement on the daily service in the reading room has also been established. Each library in turn provides the standby in the reading room to assist members and staff in their search for correct information.

d.   *Offering interinstitutional training for staff on the use of library computer tools*

The two services organise joint training sessions, notably regarding the Aleph electronic catalogue. As part of interinstitutional cooperation they are usually invited to training sessions organised by other EU bodies.

Further areas of cooperation

Over and above the tasks covered by the mini-agreement, as the services share the same spaces and the electronic catalogue, other cooperation activities have been put in place to achieve economies of scale as well as optimising staff allocation.

Acquisition policy

The two libraries agreed on the need to avoid duplicate purchases and subscriptions. This allows them to purchase more specialised collections and on-line periodicals.

Tendering procedures

Several framework contracts have been concluded, following cooperation in the tendering procedures. The fields in which those contracts were concluded are: library management system, acquisition of periodicals and e-periodicals, acquisition of journals and acquisition of books and e-books.

Rearranging the space

A *newspaper and wi-fi area* has been created in front of the reading room. Some 20 European newspapers are available for members and staff. Subscriptions are shared between both services.

In April 2011 the *reading room* was rearranged and refurbished, creating a more welcoming and multi-functional space for users, with a lounge area at the entrance of the library. *It is envisaged that the reading room will include in the near future an area which could be used for meetings and presentations by the two Committees. At some stage this area should be equipped with multimedia tools*. T*he* EESC *information centre and CoR* l*ibrary will jointly administer this common area.*

Interinstitutional cooperation

There has been particular focus on building closer relations with the libraries of the other EU institutions and bodies. This cooperation has allowed EESC information centre/CoR library users to benefit from the services of other EU institutions' libraries such as the EP and the Commission central libraries. The two services have for the first time hosted the interinstitutional EUROLIB meeting.

Cooperation in library management

The acquisition of the Aleph joint library management system is the result of interinstitutional cooperation between the Committees, the Commission and the Council. The cooperating institutions have mutual access to their catalogues.

Overall evaluation

The evaluation of the cooperation agreement in the area of the library is considered satisfactory overall after almost three years of operation. Organisation and operational adjustments were necessary to ensure that the new services functioned properly. Cooperation has made economies of scale possible in the sectors covered. The specialisation of most of the activities in the services requiring librarian and IT specialists has led to necessary reorientation of the existing staff to cope with new requirements and challenges. As new technologies are fundamental in the library management system to provide quality services to users, both the CoR library and EESC information centre strongly recommend looking for specialised IT and librarian profiles in future recruitment procedures within these services.

6.5   Scheduling – calendar

The CoR and the EESC plan their meetings schedules independently.

However, given, firstly, that the preparation, translation and production of meeting documents can lead to systematic work overloads for the departments concerned, and secondly, the coordinated use of meeting rooms in the Committees, the administrations of the two Committees are committed to sharing information so as to ensure that the drawing-up of calendars for plenary sessions and section/commission meetings is coordinated.

When the European Parliament draws up its calendar during the second quarter of each year, a key moment for planning the Committees' plenary sessions because they use the EP's debating chambers, the relevant departments of the two Committees responsible for drawing up the calendar liaise in order to coordinate the drawing-up of their preliminary draft calendars.

This coordination between the CoR and EESC administrations on drawing up their preliminary draft calendars takes place before political decisions are taken on the two calendars, and on the basis of each Committee's needs, while taking into account a number of internal and external parameters such as constraints imposed by political structure, for instance the renewal of the mandate, inaugural sessions and the adoption of the budget, etc.

To draw up the joint preliminary draft calendar, the administrations of the two Committees agree as a general rule to avoid holding plenary sessions simultaneously. Only in exceptional circumstances is it acceptable to organise section/commission meetings to coincide with the other Committee's plenary sessions or major events.

The preliminary draft calendars drawn up by the administrations of the two Committees are submitted to the two Committee Bureaus, which decide independently on the definitive annual calendars for the CoR and the EESC.

As a rule, each Committee Bureau decides on the definitive calendar for their institution at their respective meetings at the end of the first half of each year.

Conclusion:

No outstanding issue has been reported, which is evidence of effective cooperation between the two institutions.

The major challenge for the coming years will be keeping the number of plenary sessions held each year consistent (six CoR plenary sessions and nine EESC plenary sessions), especially in the current situation where appropriate infrastructure (rooms, interpreting booths, equipment, etc.) is hard to find in Brussels

6.6   Management of meeting rooms

For all aspects related to management and exchange of meeting rooms, the current provisions of the cooperation agreement provide a sufficient basis for fruitful daily cooperation.

The CoR and the EESC have their own internal procedures in place for daily management of meeting rooms under their responsibility. Single contact points are established to deal with daily management and allocation of rooms.

All meeting rooms are listed and classified in categories with clearly indicated priority user status. The current allocation of rooms/spaces to priority users, in particular as regards the meeting rooms with interpreting facilities used for Bureau and commission/section meetings on the 5th (CoR) and 6th (EESC) floors of the JDE building, corresponds to the actual needs of the Committees.

A system for exchange of rooms, in particular for plenary weeks, between the Committees has been put in place by the cooperation agreement, with some specific deadlines to be respected. For practical reasons, these exchanges are now carried out via a separate module in the Agora software for requesting and authorising room reservations. This module could be further developed to simplify the daily workflow while keeping the final decision at the appropriate political level.

Provisions applicable to plenary sessions are generally well respected, with no particular conflicts of interest reported between the two Committees.

7. **Coordination/liaison functions between own and Joint Services**

7.1 <u>IT</u>

<u>*A. Overview of cooperation mechanisms*</u>

The mini-agreement sets out some guidelines for the development of the cooperation/governance structure:

The IT and Telecommunications Unit is part of the Joint Services and the two Committees shall work together very closely in the coordination of the interlinking role of the IT Unit.

IT coordination and liaison officers are appointed in each Committee in order to coordinate the priority-setting process of their respective Committees, as well as to assist the IT Unit in the preparation and implementation of its annual working plan based on the priorities of the two Committees.

Each Committee sets up a body to structure interactions with the user community; the IT coordination and liaison officer can be asked to coordinate the work of this body in his/her respective Committee.

The mini-agreement also sets out some guidelines for the process of priority-setting which have proved ineffective and lengthy. Accordingly, they have been replaced by a simplified mechanism, whereby for the CESE the priorities are collected by the IT coordination officer and then approved by the ICT steering committee, which is an ITC-dedicated directors' meeting. The CoR priorities of each directorate are set and discussed internally in the ICT steering committee and then approved by the directors' meeting.

During this process, the priorities are discussed bilaterally by the IT coordination officers of the two Committees, before being presented in a coordinated way to the IT Unit. The IT Unit is then able to come up with a timely proposal as regards their annual work plan.

<u>*B. Improvements proposed*</u>

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is proposed to use the same name for the IT coordination committee in both Committees: *ICT steering committee*. Although the set-up and role of the ICT steering committee is different in both Committees, the final result (setting priorities and coordinating these with the other Committee) has been satisfactory.

It is proposed that adoption of the annual priorities by the respective ICT steering committees be formalised in application of the cooperation agreement. Each steering committee is responsible for evaluation and follow-up to the ensuing work plan as regards its own priorities.

Now that the main shortcoming has been resolved, it has become apparent over time that there are other aspects to coordinate in addition to IT priorities. As stated earlier in the mini-agreement, "The priority-setting process is mainly concerned with priorities for Information Systems", but the IT liaison function can be and often is involved in other coordination activities. In the framework of the cooperation agreement, each Committee has and should have its own approach as regards the specific mandate and role of the IT coordination and liaison officer. An internal redefinition of this mandate based on the experience of the previous years might prove useful. The same applies to the mandate of the respective ICT steering committees.

7.2   Translation

A. Introduction

Under point 4 of the 2007 Cooperation Agreement between CoR and EESC, *"the two Committees shall each establish a contact point responsible for managing the programming of translations in the respective Committees' own services. The contact point shall act as a filter and a decision-making body for translation requests from its own Committee. The contact points shall also perform a liaison function between the Committees and with the Joint Services and ensure a transparent flow of information between the two Committees"*.

As a first step towards the implementation of the translation mini-agreement, a translation coordination and liaison function (contact point for translation) was thus created in 2008 within the Registry of each Committee, and a number of cooperation mechanisms were set up.

B. Cooperation mechanisms

So far, cooperation between the two Committees and the Joint Services' Directorate for Translation (DT) mainly has been pursued at four levels:

(a)   Directorate meetings involving both the EESC Directorate for General Affaires/CoR Registry and the DT, convened on an *ad hoc* basis, concerning general cooperation issues;
(b)   Regular tripartite meetings between the EESC and CoR contact points and the senior management staff of the DT;
(c)   Working groups on particular issues: translation of press releases, IT-related issues, etc.;
(d)   Inclusion, on a voluntary basis, of the contact points in DT working meetings.

Regular communication on individual translation requests takes place on a permanent basis between the two contact points and the DT Planning service, thus ensuring solutions are found as quickly as possible to problems arising in the management of the translation workflow.

C. Cooperation instruments

In addition, a number of instruments have been progressively set up in order to facilitate the management of translation requests and, in general, cooperation between the two Committees in this field:

(a) Rationalisation and updating of document categories (translation requests);

(b) creation and implementation (2009) of a filtering system at contact point level, for non-priority documents, as an instrument for maintaining an overview of the flow of translation requests and helping to manage the everyday translation workload;

(c) Prioritisation of translation requests (by document categories);

(d) Drafting and adoption (May 2010) of a code of conduct for translation, as provided for by the translation mini-agreement. The objective of the code of conduct, which entered into force on 1 July 2010, is to give priority treatment (shorter deadlines, highest quality) to the most important documents of the two Committees, while respecting the political and institutional character of their work, as well as their language policy (EU multilingualism). It also encourages rationalisation: the drafting of shorter documents in exchange for shorter translation deadlines.

In this context it is important to underline that all the procedures set up in the framework of the cooperation agreement have consistently been accompanied by human intervention based on the principle of flexibility, especially when the risk of workload peaks was higher. In particular, the two Committees have often jointly undertaken to face specific crisis situations (for instance, contiguity of EESC and CoR plenary sessions), by sending fewer non-priority translation requests to DT over a given period or, exceptionally, accepting reduced linguistic coverage for some documents.

D. Conclusion and further areas of improvement

All the steps taken so far have been aimed at streamlining the translation request workflow, as provided for by the cooperation agreement. In particular, the establishment of the new governance (creation of a Directorate for Translation with an own director and deputy director and creation of a translation contact point for each Committee), along with the new rationalization measures, have produced tangible results, especially in facilitating the management of translation requests and workflow alike.

An important step forward has been the creation of an electronic filtering system of translation requests, along with the possibility for contact points to authorise or amend requested deadlines for urgent, priority and non-priority documents, based on political or operational criteria.

The recent code of conduct for translation, inspired by similar arrangements in other EU institutions, was negotiated over a lengthy period of time with all the relevant EESC and CoR stakeholders, and entered into force on 1 July 2010 with the possibility for revision after one year. The code of conduct has proven so far an integrated framework for progressive streamlining of the translation activity.

An evaluation of the code is foreseen one year after its entry into force, which shall also take into account the evolution in demand for translation. This will provide the possibility to assess and discuss whether and to what extent some of the new procedures could be further improved and simplified.

Further rationalisation of the code of conduct and ensuring the flexibility of current procedures, also taking into account the current trend in the translation workload as well as the changing needs of both Committees and the growing budgetary constraints, will be among the main new challenges in the field of translation cooperation for the coming years.

7.3   Infrastructure

A. Cooperation on Infrastructure between the Committees

As far as cooperation between the two Committees is concerned, in the past few years both the EESC and the CoR have provided the flexibility and motivation to make the agreement work. Projects involving the Committees are dealt with in an efficient way and a consensus is reached within reasonable deadlines. The case in point is the visitors' room project for which solutions satisfying both Committees have been found at the appropriate level. In addition, when the new organisation chart was introduced at the EESC and some functional changes made in the CoR, the Committees collaborated smoothly on office space reorganisation.

However, the Committees have observed some areas where cooperation could be further improved.

B. Cooperation with the Infrastructure Unit

When it comes to the cooperation between own services and the joint infrastructure service, it can be said that it works smoothly as far as the operational part and day-to day activities are concerned. Removals are performed efficiently and on time and communication in the process is appropriate. The policy on standard furniture has been applied since the beginning of 2009. Non-standard requests are coordinated with the liaison officers.

C. Functioning of the existing governance structure

Each Committee has appointed a liaison officer for the Infrastructures Unit. The composition, functioning and scope of their responsibilities are provided for in the cooperation agreement and the appended mini-agreement on infrastructure. However, the functioning of this governance structure could be fine-tuned by using more often flexible intermediate cooperation mechanisms as provided for by Art. 6(4) last bullet point of the CA (e.g. steering committees and ad hoc procedures), in order to better steer the projects and assess internal priorities.

D. Conclusion

The cooperation agreement and the related mini-agreement set out the framework for cooperation, which is proving to be working efficiently up to now. It also provides for the necessary flexibility if some changes need to be considered in order to keep pace with the development of the two Committees and the new situations in the area of infrastructure, as mentioned above.

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