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## **SINGLE EU PARLIAMENT SEAT SHOULD BE IN STRASBOURG, SAYS OFFICIAL**

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In an interview with EURACTIV France, the president of Strasbourgs city council and task force lead defending the European Parliaments Alsace HQ, spoke about the so-called single seat issue. Frédéric Bierry highlighted the economic benefits for Germany, as well as the preference of MEPs and European officials to live in the city.

Frédéric Bierry of the right-wing party Les Républicains is the president of the Bas-Rhin County Council that is seated in Strasbourg. He is currently leading a task force defending the European Parliaments headquarters in Strasbourg, which surveyed MEPs and EU officials about their stay in the city.

You have commissioned a survey that asked MEPs and European officials who come to Strasbourg what they think of the city. What are the conclusions of this study?

We wanted to know the main criticisms of elected officials who come to Strasbourg for the parliamentary session. We wanted to know what they are actually experiencing. We had 521 detailed responses.

The criticisms are clear: they mainly concern the price of hotels during parliamentary sessions and the problem of airport accessibility. These are not insurmountable problems, but they are issues that need to be addressed.

How can we prevent hotels from increasing their prices?

The European Parliament means 28,000 jobs for Strasbourg. If we were to lose that, it would be a huge loss for all local economic activity.

We need to strike a balance. Hotels can raise their prices slightly during the parliamentary session but not in aberrant proportions.

67% of the respondents of the survey come to Strasbourg by train. They are asking for a direct Brussels-Strasbourg line...

That is one of the requests: a regular direct train.

We will also reflect on the issue of developing business aviation, which offers attractive fares between Brussels and Strasbourg.

I want to save time for those who travel, that is what is important.

EU citizens insist jet fuel must be taxed

Airplane fuels tax-free status could soon be grounded after the European Commission agreed on Tuesday (30 April) to register an official petition that calls for an end to kerosenes exemption.

The Parliament seat was never questioned so directly, notably by CDU party leader Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. Could this study be the answer?

Yes, of course. However, since these statements opposed a seat in Strasbourg, we have been in contact, particularly with local German authorities.

It is rather in Germanys interest to keep Strasbourg as a European capital, as it is for us.

The benefits are felt on both sides of the border. Rebuilding the Franco-German couple can be achieved by embodying it through the city of Strasbourg, the seat of European democracy.

However, we are currently seeing greater criticism rather than enthusiasm for Strasbourg?

There is a window of opportunity with the refurbishing works that will start on the Caprice des Dieux building in Brussels.

Now that the elections are behind us, we need greater transparency. There were talks of these works ranging between €500 million to €1.5 billion but it would be nice if we knew more.

In the meantime, we welcome a European Parliament that operates in Strasbourg full-time with open arms, and this is a good opportunity for us to consider the issue of a seat.

I am in favour of one seat but in Strasbourg!

Other European institutions such as the Commission and the Council of the EU are in Brussels. Is it not a little complicated for MEPs to be in Strasbourg?

In Strasbourg, we also have the Council of Europe. And the elections have just clearly demonstrated the desire of citizens to see a more democratic Europe.

In France, only one in two voters voted, of which one third voted for anti-European parties.

To reconnect with citizens, it would be a good thing to distinguish Brussels, which is considered to be the city of Eurocrats, from Strasbourg, which would be the city of democracy.

So you want MEPs to live in Strasbourg?

Yes, we have the infrastructure to accommodate them!

The problem is that they come temporarily and stay in hotels. The Brussels sessions are currently longer, so MEPs are choosing to have an apartment in Brussels.

If we were to rebalance the sessions, it would be different: they would live here and would only go to Brussels exceptionally. We can also imagine that the Commission travels to Strasbourg more often as there are fewer Commissioners than MEPs.

Our survey shows that the politicians who come to Strasbourg appreciate the living environment, including the availability of restaurants and local transport.

What programme has the task force set up with the city to defend the Strasbourg headquarters?

We will continue our efforts and survey new MEPs so that we can have precise information on their needs. We need to treat them better!

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