RESOLUTION (EU) 2021/1545 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 29 April 2021

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2019, Section I – European Parliament

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

— having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2019, Section I – European Parliament,

— having regard to Rule 100 and Rule 104(3) of, and Annex V to, its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0044/2021),

A. whereas, in his certification of the final accounts, the European Parliament's (the 'Parliament') accounting officer stated his reasonable assurance that the accounts, in all material aspects, present fairly the financial position, the results of the operations and the cash-flow of Parliament;

B. whereas, in accordance with the usual procedure, 192 questions were sent to Parliament's administration and written replies were received and discussed publicly by Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, in the presence of the vice-president responsible for the budget, the Secretary-General, the director of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (the 'Authority') and the internal auditor;

C. whereas there is always scope for improvement in terms of quality, efficiency and effectiveness in the management of public finances, scrutiny is necessary to ensure that political leadership and Parliament's administration are held accountable to Union citizens.

Parliament's budgetary and financial management

1. Notes that Parliament's final appropriations for 2019 totalled EUR 1 996 978 262, or 18,5 % of heading V of the Multiannual Financial Framework ([1]) set aside for the 2019 administrative expenditure of the Union institutions as a whole, representing a 2,4 % increase over the 2018 budget (EUR 1 950 687 373);

2. Notes that total revenue entered in the accounts as at 31 December 2019 was EUR 207 521 070 (compared to EUR 193 998 910 in 2018), including EUR 36 566 236 in assigned revenue (compared to EUR 30 783 590 in 2018);

3. Emphasises that four chapters accounted for 67,8 % of total commitments: Chapter 10 (Members of the institution), Chapter 12 (Officials and temporary staff), Chapter 20 (Buildings and associated costs) and Chapter 42 (Expenditure relating to parliamentary assistance), indicating a high level of rigidity for the major part of Parliament's expenditure;

4. Notes the figures on the basis of which Parliament's accounts for the financial year 2019 were closed, namely:

(a) **Available appropriations (EUR)**	
appropriations for 2019:	1 996 978 262
non-automatic carry-overs from financial year 2018:	—
automatic carry-overs from financial year 2018:	299 095 028
appropriations corresponding to assigned revenue for 2019:	36 566 236
carry-overs corresponding to assigned revenue from 2018:	49 010 988
Total:	2 381 650 514

([1]) Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1311/2013 of 2 December 2013 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020 (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 884).

(b) **Utilisation of appropriations in the financial year 2019 (EUR)**	
commitments:	2 332 411 812
payments made:	2 035 068 314
appropriations carried forward automatically including those arising from assigned revenue:	306 712 540
appropriations carried forward non-automatically:	—
appropriations cancelled:	38 744 124
(c) **Budgetary receipts (EUR)**	
received in 2019:	207 521 070
(d) **Total balance sheet at 31 December 2019 (EUR)**	1 685 376 397

5. Points out that 98,8 % of the appropriations entered in Parliament's budget, amounting to EUR 1 973 232 524, were committed, with a cancellation rate of 1,2 %; notes with satisfaction that, as in previous years, a very high level of budget implementation was achieved; notes that payments totalled EUR 1 698 971 864, resulting in a payment appropriations execution rate of 86,1 %;

6. Underlines the fact that the cancelled appropriations for the year 2019, amounting to EUR 23 745 738, mainly related to expenditure related to buildings, as well as to remuneration and other entitlements;

7. Notes that eighteen transfers were approved, in accordance with Articles 31 and 49 of the Financial Regulation, in the financial year 2019, amounting to EUR 76 028 316 or 3,8 % of final appropriations; observes that 45,3 % of the funds transferred related to Parliament's buildings policy and mostly, in particular, to help fund the annual payments for the Adenauer building project; notes that transfers linked to postponements in relation to the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union amounted to 25 %;

The Court of Auditor's opinions on the reliability of the 2019 accounts and on the legality and regularity of the transactions underlying those accounts

8. Recalls that the Court of Auditors (the 'Court') performs a specific assessment of administrative and other expenditure as a single policy group for all Union institutions; points out that administrative and related expenditure comprises expenditure on human resources (salaries, allowances and pensions), accounting for 60 % of the total, and on buildings, equipment, energy, communications and information technology;

9. Notes that the overall audit evidence indicates that spending on administration is not affected by a material level of error; also notes that, on the basis of the three quantified errors, the estimated level of error present in heading V of the Multiannual Financial Framework on administration is below the materiality threshold;

10. Notes the specific finding, concerning Parliament, contained in the Court's annual report on the implementation of the budget concerning the financial year 2019 (the 'Court's report'); notes with concern that the Court found errors in one payment to one of the European political parties, which concerned non-compliance with expenditure eligibility rules, specifically, no written contractual documents and no supporting evidence for costs actually incurred were provided; regrets the fact that the Court had reported similar shortcomings in transactions relating to political groups and to a European party in its annual reports in 2014, 2015 and 2016; calls for greater transparency in the exchange of information in order to prevent any repeat of these shortcomings in the future; notes, however, that although there remains scope for improvement there has been a lot of positive development over recent years;

11. Notes the response given by Parliament in the adversarial procedure with the Court, which re-examined and addressed the individual cases highlighted as a result of the Court's findings; recalls that, while Parliament's administration is the authorising service for the payment of the grant towards the European political parties, it is not responsible for their actual expenditure, and that the European political parties are themselves responsible for the legality and regularity of their transactions; notes that Parliament provided European political parties with comprehensive information and guidance on topics in respect of which problems have been identified; calls on the Court to check the European political parties' spending on a regular basis;

The internal auditor's annual report

12. Notes that, at the meeting of the committee responsible with the internal auditor held on 16 November 2020, the internal auditor presented his annual report and described the assurance audits he performed and reported on, which in 2019 covered the following topics:

— audit of procurement and contract implementation in the catering sector (Directorate-General for Infrastructure and Logistics (DG INLO);

— audit of visitors' groups (Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM));

— audit of the parliamentary assistance allowance regarding local assistants (Directorate-General for Finance (DG FINS));

— first report on information systems audit: identity and access management;

— audit of financing of European political parties and European political foundations (DG FINS);

— preliminary review of Parliament's data protection framework;

— follow-up of open actions from internal audit reports - phases 1 and 2 of 2019.

13. Welcomes and supports the following actions that the internal auditor has agreed, or is in the process of agreeing, with the directorates-general responsible, as a result of the assurance assignments:

— with regard to the audit of procurement and contract implementation in the catering sector (DG INLO), achieving the internal control objectives through, notably, allowing longer time-limits for procurement that are proportionate to the complexity of the specifications; ensuring clearer, more relevant and accurate tender specifications; ensuring a transparent evaluation of tenders that is based on the published criteria and is properly documented; validating ad hoc contracts on concessions with the legal service; the critical importance of managing amendments to concession contracts in line with the rules; improved management monitoring and reporting (Parliament recalls that the aforementioned actions are essential for ensuring that public procurement procedures attract more offers, thereby resulting in better competition and improved services over a certain time period; underlines the importance of taking criteria for environmental sustainability and social factors into account);

— with regard to the audit of visitors' groups, increasing the assurance of the regularity of payments and efficiency of implementation of the rules on financial contributions, including better definitions of eligible costs and of the eligibility period; improving the adequacy and effectiveness of *ex ante* and *ex post* controls over reimbursements; ensuring full compliance with the applicable rules in relation to the defrayal of visitors' groups; measures to ensure the full realisation of the visitors' groups programme;

— concerning the first report on information systems audit: identity and access management, reducing to an absolute minimum the provision of privileged access rights to UNIX/LINUX infrastructures of so-called super-users; strengthening access controls at central level over the sampled critical applications; establishing security procedures on privileged accounts in order to define access control rules;

— with regard to the audit of the parliamentary assistance allowance (DG FINS), the focus on the regulatory compliance and sound financial management of processes for the defrayal of local parliamentary assistance expenses, notably the scope for action in the area of paying agents' professional and contractual obligations, and the annual regularisation of their accounts;

— with regard to the first phase of the audit of financing of European political parties and European political foundations (DG FINS), the focus on the process of registration of the European political parties and foundations and the monitoring of their eligibility, on functional cooperation between the Authority and Parliament's authorising officer, and on practical aspects of implementing the main legislation;

— with regard to the preliminary review of Parliament's data protection framework, which will be adopted under the 2020 internal audit work programme, the focus on ensuring compliance of Parliament's data protection framework with Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 [2], on ensuring there is a sustainable governance structure providing assurance on compliance with obligations concerning the management of personal data, together with measures to secure those data; on reliable and consistent reporting on the institution's management of its personal data;

[2] Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC (OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39).

14. Notes that the 2019 follow-up process resulted in the closure of 36 of the 93 open actions; notes with concern that in addition to these validated actions, there was a total of 124 open actions from audit reports, including those not yet due for implementation, and that 62 of this total number of actions address significant risk; expects an effort to be made by different directorates-generals to ensure that the overdue actions are closed and that the agreed actions will be implemented in accordance with the set due dates; calls on the Secretary-General to report back to the discharge authority on the closure of the remaining actions in the course of his hearings in Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control in October and November 2021;

Follow-up to the 2018 discharge resolution

15. Takes note of the written answers to the 2018 discharge resolution provided to Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control on 21 September 2020, and of the Secretary-General's presentation addressing the various questions and requests raised in Parliament's resolution on discharge for 2018 and the exchange of views with Members that followed;

16. Regrets that not all necessary actions have been taken in response to some of their recommendations in Parliament's resolution on discharge for 2018, and that the discharge follow-up document does not provide any justification for this; asks the Secretary-General to forward to the Bureau all requests for action included in the annual discharge resolutions, to establish an action plan to address and follow up on the recommendations, and to include the results of this exercise in the annual activity reports; stresses that the Secretary-General and the Vice-President responsible for Budget should have regular discussions with Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control on issues concerning Parliament's budget and its implementation; considers that these should take place throughout the year and not only during the discharge procedure; reiterates its call on the Bureau to improve the transparency of its decision-making procedure, particularly with regard to the timely publication of relevant documents and information on its website;

17. Acknowledges the steps taken to ease the transition to the new provider of services for Parliament's Crèche; calls on the relevant services to continuously monitor the performance of the new team, guaranteeing that the level of services remains satisfactory, and between others, making sure that a sufficient ratio of care-taking personal to children is respected;

18. Regrets that no further steps have been taken regarding the voluntary pension fund due to a number of members of the pension fund challenging the Bureau decision of 10 December 2018 before the European Court of Justice (the 'Court of Justice'); calls on the Secretary-General to inform Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control immediately on the Court of Justice's ruling;

19. Welcomes the fact that the use of cash payments has decreased significantly, and that Members have used the possibility offered by the revised rules to assign the financial responsibility of sponsored visits to professionals, i.e. paying agents or travel agencies instead of accredited parliamentary assistants ('APAs'); notes with concern, however, that the Secretary-General has not yet released an assessment of the new rules and calls for the preparaton of such an assessment; emphasises that the internal auditor should be consulted on existing procedures when preparing such an assessment;

20. Regrets the lack of gender balance among the management in Parliament's administration; recognises however the positive developments in this regard and acknowledges the new targets; recognises the need for continuous monitoring on the topic;

21. Recalls the 2018 discharge resolution requesting the Bureau to increase the number of people with disabilities working in Parliament's administration;

22. Reiterates its call on the Secretary-General to insist on the need for genuine geographical balance in terms of the proportional representation of all Member States at all levels of staff, including top management; notes the difficulties Parliament encountered in recruiting some nationalities; stresses the importance of increasing the attractiveness of Parliament as an employer throughout all Member States;

23. Welcomes the Secretary-General's note on Disability Management in the administration of the European Parliament, highlights that the ten commitments made in the note remain to be pursued during the current legislative period in the fields of digital and physical accessibility, requests that the discharge authority be kept informed on the progress made;

24. Recalls that Rule 11of the Rules of Procedure has introduced an obligation for rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and committee chairs to publish information on meetings held with representatives of interests in the course of their reports; notes with satisfaction that, since the start of the new legislature, the necessary infrastructure has been available on Parliament's website to enable Members to publicise scheduled meetings with representatives of interests in order to improve transparency; notes that 324 out of the 705 of current Members had publicised at least one meeting with an representative of an interest or interests by 1 December 2020 on Parliament's website; encourages, however, further improvements to the accessibility and usability of the tool including by alerting rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and committee chairs about the obligation of publishing such information in order to fulfil its function to make Parliament more open, transparent, and accountable to citizens;

25. Reiterates that Parliament's President has instructed Parliament's services to implement a number of changes to the tool to improve its user-friendliness, first and foremost by linking it to the Transparency Register and to the Legislative Observatory; calls on Parliament to put in place these changes without any further delay;

General context

26. Notes the exchange of views between the vice-president responsible for the budget, the Secretary-General and Members of Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control in the presence of the internal auditor and the director of the Authority, on 16 November 2020, in the context of the 2019 Parliament discharge;

27. Points out that the European elections in May 2019 resulted in a split in two halves for Parliament in 2019, the first focused on adopting legislation and the second on starting a new parliamentary term;

28. Observes that the 9th legislature of Parliament was constituted with 61 % of new Members, a substantial increase on past terms and the projected 50 % on the basis of which Parliament's 2019 budget had been established;

29. Recalls that the postponement of the date for the UK's withdrawal from the Union at three occasions during 2019 had an important impact on Parliament's 2019 budget; points out that salaries and allowances of British Members and their assistants were paid for a longer period than initially foreseen, which led to a substantially higher number and overall cost of necessary budgetary transfers within Parliament's budget; welcomes the flexibility of the management of the employment contracts of British Members' APAs by the Directorate-General for Personnel (DG PERS);

30. Notes with satisfaction the consolidation of the APAs front office as a one-stop shop to manage the end-to-end recruitment of APAs, as well as the role of DG PERS in facilitating the induction and integration of new Members and APAs after the election and the successful management of the change of parliamentary term through DG PERS's dedicated task force for the elections in 2019, which ensured that for the first part-session of the 9th Parliamentary term, 1 292 APAs' recruitment contracts had been concluded (i.e. for 93 % of the Members), with 2 017 contracts concluded by year-end;

31. Regrets the difficulties experienced by Members in recruiting swiftly their assistants at the beginning of the term due to DG PERS' increased activity; calls for Parliament's administration teams responsible for the recruitment of APAs to be reinforced at the beginning of each new mandate, for the length of time necessary to enable Members to recruit their assistants and to provide them with comprehensive training beforehand and until such time as the heavy workload has been completed;

32. Reaffirms the need to implement the provisions of the Staff Regulation concerning the deadline for applying for the resettlement allowance on an equal footing for all categories of staff; calls on DG PERS to look in particular into the cases of former APAs where the statutory deadline was not applied correctly at the end of the parliamentary term in July 2019;

33. Commends the taking over of the new tasks for the human resources management of Members' trainees following the Bureau decision to strengthen the framework for their recruitment on 2 July 2019;

34. Welcomes the successful completion, in 2019, of new working environments for Members in Brussels and Strasbourg; commends the fact that the refurbishment of all Members' offices in Brussels (1 personal office per Member + 2 staff offices) and in Strasbourg (1 personal office + 1 staff office) was carried out in record time and ahead of schedule, as well as coming in under the works budget amount allocated to it, and that new furniture equipment, including integrated IT solutions has been installed at a lower cost than originally foreseen; notes that the revised office allocation plan for Members and political groups was based on the most efficient use of available office space; regrets that this principle has led to some political groups to have their Members scattered in different buildings and floors with no logical connection, breaking the unity of political groups; also regrets that the distribution of offices to political groups has pushed some to relocate to external buildings no longer connected to the main Parliament activities, thus creating a structural separation of staff from Members; takes note that Trèves 1 building is deficient in services and priority should be given to find solutions to connect it to the main buildings;

35. Notes that teleworking and videoconferencing arrangements as well as remote voting are now part of Parliament's working arrangements for Members; calls on the Bureau to explore ways and costs to continue facilitating these arrangements for all Members if they wish to do so and explore using the arrangements also in the future, so as to allow Members to both hold meetings in their constituencies as well as with their colleagues in Brussels in what could be so-called hybrid weeks; however, notes that the physical presence in Parliament's premises cannot be fully replaced by remote working;

36. Regrets the fact that there is no system in place to ensure that Members who are temporarily absent for a justified reason, such as maternity leave, parental leave, long-term sick leave or carer's leave, can continue to carry out their core duties, first and foremost to speak in debates and to vote; is of the opinion that this is at odds with core values of the Union because it implies that a vote on a female candidate may lead to temporary non-representation; calls on the Bureau to examine the possibilities for facilitating continuation of remote participation and for providing for the substitution of a Member - whether female or male - while on parental leave and in the above mentioned cases; calls for the amendment of Article 6 of the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage (European Electoral Act) in order to remedy the situation concerning parental leave; calls on the Bureau to amend the rules;

37. Notes that European Union laissez-passer should be accorded to members, officials and other servants of the Union, on the basis of the conditions laid down in the Regulation (EU) No 1417/2013 ([3]); recalls that Rule 5(3) of the Rules of Procedure sets out the right for all Members of to request a laissez-passer of the Union 'allowing a Member to circulate freely in the Member States and in other countries which recognise it as a valid travel document', since the laissez-passer is to be recognised as a valid travel document by the authorities of the Member States; regrets reports from some Members that the laissez-passer is not fully recognised as a travel document in some Members States; requests Parliament to inquire into these situations and to liaise with relevant authorities to ensure that Members are not restricted and limited in their free movement while going to or returning from Parliament's meetings;

38. Acknowledges that the agreement between Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions has brought financial and administrative benefits which contribute to the sound financial management of the institutions concerned; reiterates, however, that in the Committees' opinion this agreement is unbalanced and hasn't been respected by Parliament in its entirety; believes that an extension or revision of the current agreement must settle all the outstanding issues; asks the institutions concerned to jointly report to Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control on this agreement and its ongoing revision;

Communication and elections

39. Expresses its support for the way in which Parliament has increased the visibility of the European elections by building, animating and engaging with a wide network of media, partners and volunteers who acted as opinion multipliers within their own networks; notes with concern, however, that the turnout of the 2019 European elections remained too low in certain countries; considers that a campaign to ensure visibility of the European elections and the role of Parliament in the legislative process should be permanent, with a particular focus on those countries;

([3]) Council Regulation (EU) No 1417/2013 of 17 December 2013 laying down the form of the laissez-passer issued by the European Union (OJ L 353, 28.12.2013, p. 26).

40. Welcomes the fact that more than 50 % of Union citizens eligible to vote took part in the elections, and notes with satisfaction that it was the first time since the first direct elections in 1979 that turnout has increased; regrets, however, that the Spitzenkandidaten system for the appointment of the President of the European Commission was not followed, unlike after the 2014 elections; observes that the system adds to transparency and to the accountability of the Commission to Parliament; notes that the President of the European Commission acknowledges the need for improvement in this area in the Political Guidelines; stresses that, as stated in the Political Guidelines, a review of the way the leaders of the institutions are appointed and elected is needed;

41. Emphasises the need to make the European electoral process more accessible to people with disabilities;

42. Notes that it was necessary to hold European elections also in the United Kingdom, and that Parliament extended its communication campaign to the United Kingdom;

43. Recalls that in 2019 DG COMM had 813 members of staff and managed 5,3 % of Parliament's overall budget;

44. Considers that communicating the political nature of Parliament and the work carried out by its Members to Union citizens is now more important than ever before; encourages all the efforts by Parliament and its DG COMM towards raising awareness of Parliament, its powers, its decisions, and its activities among media, stakeholders and the general public; asks DG COMM to continue its efforts to make Parliament's website more accessible, intuitive, coherent and user-friendly as it is instrumental in bringing the institution closer to citizens;

45. Notes that the Bureau assigned to DG COMM the task of increasing awareness among citizens across the Union about the upcoming elections, with the aim of increasing democratic participation; welcomes the contribution of Parliament's 2019 election and information campaign to the highest-recorded voter turnout in 20 years; expresses its support for Parliament's innovative institutional communication strategy for the 2019 European elections, aimed at raising awareness about the elections and encouraging people to vote; observes that the strategy was based on reinforcing and strengthening relations with media and the development of a robust network of partners; considers it is of great importance for Parliament to continuously engage with Union citizens through various communication channels not only during the electoral year but throughout the entire term of the legislature; stresses the importance of establishing synergies with existing channels and enhancing cooperation with European Parliament Liaison Offices to avoid duplication and effectively use taxpayers' money;

46. Is deeply concerned about the website EP Today and its misleading use of Parliament's name and Union symbology; notes with alarm that EUvsDesinfo found out that 99 % of the articles that appeared on EP Today were actually syndicated from other websites such as Voice of America or Russia Today; is alarmed that the follow-up investigation by EU DisinfoLab has discovered that a massive 15-year influence operation successfully targeted the Union with more than 750 fake local media and more than 10 'zombie-NGOs'; is concerned that this operation successfully reached and involved Members before it was identified and investigated; calls on Parliament's DG COMM to coordinate with the European External Action Service and the Commission in taking action on this matter;

47. Notes that ahead of and during the elections, all relevant Parliament's stakeholders were kept up-to-date on disinformation and threats against Parliament from entities and actors seeking to undermine unity and European democracy; urges Parliament to take robust action to counter disinformation via regular information and warnings and that appropriate training and awareness-raising activities are organised for Members, staff and visitors; calls on Parliament to further strengthen the external communication of its activities;

48. Recalls, in the context of the decentralised election campaign, the role for the European Parliament Liaison Offices which boosted engagement with citizens and media through reinforced press teams and partnered with stakeholders and multipliers in order to reach out to new audiences, especially the young generation; calls for the continuation of the active role of the liaison offices in the Member States throughout the term of the legislature;

49. Expresses its concerns regarding the European Data Protection Supervisor's (EDPS) investigation into Parliament's use of a political campaigning company based in the United States of America to process personal data as part of its activities relating to the 2019 European election; notes that the investigation into Parliament's use of Nation-Builder resulted in the first ever EDPS reprimand issued to an Union institution due to a breach of Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 and which involved the selection and approval of sub-processors used by Nation-Builder; notes, furthermore, that a second reprimand was subsequently issued by the EDPS, after Parliament failed to publish a compliant privacy policy for the "thistimeimvoting" website within the deadline set by the EDPS; notes with satisfaction that in both instances, Parliament acted in line with EDPS recommendations; echoes the EDPS's statements about the threat posed by online manipulation and how strong data protection rules are essential for democracy, especially in the digital age;

50. Takes note of different items of expenditure for 2019, broken down as follows:

Item of expenditure	2019 expenditure
Staff cost	EUR 24 293 036
Buildings cost	EUR 11 051 311
Security cost	EUR 1 586 598
Communication cost	EUR 11 906 438
Total	EUR 49 137 382

51. Notes that, at its meeting of 11 February 2019, the Bureau confirmed the continuation of Parliament's office in London; notes that on 5 October 2020, the Bureau acknowledged the closure of the Edinburgh antenna office at the end of 2020; acknowledges that the European Parliament Liaison Office in the United Kingdom as well as the European Union Delegation to the United Kingdom will continue to play a crucial role for Parliament in providing services to Members on delegations to the United Kingdom and in order to further engage with citizens, civil society, government, the parliamentary environment and media in that country; notes in this regard that the liaison office in the United Kingdom cooperates with the European Union Delegation in accordance with the respective competences of Parliament and the European Union External Action Service; recalls that the status and autonomy of Parliament's staff in the United Kingdom should be guaranteed in line with the established model of the Washington office, which is successfully operating; regrets therefore the refusal of the United Kingdom government to recognise the full diplomatic status of the European Union ambassador to the United Kingdom; calls on the Bureau and European Union External Action Service to find a practical solution with the British authorities to grant diplomatic status to the Parliament staff working at the liaison office in London;

52. Recalls the concern already expressed last year about the Bureau decision of 11 February 2019 regarding parliamentary support to the European Union Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, the European Union delegation to the African Union in Addis Ababa and the European Union Delegation to the United Nations in New York; stresses that any new decision taken, must be based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis and reiterates that given the specific nature of this parliamentary support, Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control should be provided with pertinent detailed information; regrets that measurable indicators to assess annual performance under the framework of Parliament's strategic planning, monitoring and reporting cycle have not yet been created; asks the Secretary-General to urgently perform this assessment and present it to both Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control as it becomes available;

53. Stresses the need for the revival of the debating culture in Parliament; welcomes the decision to require Members to give speeches from the lectern facing the plenary; believes that the debating culture can also be improved by allowing sufficient time for the exchange of arguments and counter-arguments, for instance by extending the blue card procedure;

Sponsored visitors' groups

54. Welcomes the fact that Parliament invests considerable efforts in expanding and improving the services it offers to visitors; applauds the impressive figure of over 1,5 million visitors that were received in 2019 in all Parliament's premises, with an increase of 26 % of young people compared to 2018;

55. Notes with satisfaction that, following the entry into force in January 2017 of the new rules from the Bureau governing the reception of visitors' groups, an audit on visitors' groups was carried out throughout 2019, and that in December 2019 action plans were proposed to DG COMM for enhancing the management and control framework and the regulatory framework applicable to reimbursements to visitors' groups; highlights, however, that the objective of the visitors' groups should not be neglected, namely bringing citizens closer to Parliament, its duties and its interaction with the other Union institutions, and to the functioning of the Union and to its environment, which includes the hosting cities;

56. Notes that the revised rules governing the payment of financial contributions for sponsored visitors' groups entered into force on 1 January 2017; recalls that, in accordance with the principle of non-profit enshrined in these rules, heads of groups have an obligation to return any unused financial contribution after verification by Parliament's services of a financial declaration; seeks greater assurance that the management of sponsored visitors' groups is strictly in accordance with the applicable rules, including the reimbursement process of costs related to visitors with disabilities; reiterates its call to remove the possibility of appointing APAs as head of group in order to make the financial responsibility of sponsored visitors' groups fall exclusively to a member of the group or to professionals, i.e. paying agents or travel agencies;

57. Recalls that in 2019 Parliament's internal auditor started an audit on the implementation of the new rules, and that in his findings, finalised in 2020, the internal auditor highlighted that financial contributions for visitors' groups should be further aligned with the real costs incurred by the groups, that *ex ante* controls should be reinforced when the first contribution is paid out, and that the existing system of *ex post* controls should be reinforced; reiterates that the findings of the internal auditor should be taken into account when evaluating existing procedures and developing tighter *ex ante* controls in order to avoid possibilities for accumulating money beyond the capacity of controls; demands further assessing the current level of *ex post* controls;

58. Points out that receiving sponsored visitor groups of persons with disabilities may incur additional expenses and require higher financial contributions, therefore recommends to the Bureau that the possibility of higher allocations to cover all eligible expenditure of such groups be studied;

59. Supports the activities of the Parlamentarium in Brussels which welcomed 307 105 visitors in 2019, a substantial increase in numbers from 2018, and the House of European History, which welcomed 199 256 visitors in 2019, increasing by 21 % since 2018; commends the success of the Europa Experience centres in Berlin, Ljubljana, Strasbourg, Helsinki, Copenhagen and Tallinn; notes that Parliament's services defined a joint work programme, which aims at the completion of the implementation of Europa Experiences in all Member States by 2024;

Buildings

60. Recalls that in 2019, DG INLO had 609 members of staff and managed 12,6 % of Parliament's overall budget;

61. Is aware that on 11 March 2019, the Bureau endorsed a new approach to future property market propositions for European Parliament Liaison Offices and Europa Experience spaces in several Member States;

62. Is aware of the importance of the building policy, in particular the completion of final installation works at the Montoyer 63 building in Brussels, which was put into use in 2019, and the Adenauer project in Luxembourg, which is scheduled to be completed by end of June 2023; understands that, in 2019, Parliament's Committee on Budgets authorised a mopping-up transfer, amounting to EUR 31 million, for the pre-financing of the project, which excludes project management costs, financial costs, certified bodies, etc.; regrets the increased costs due to the constructions delays and notes that transactions with the construction companies (linked to the delay with the project) have been necessary to avoid further delays and costs (between 5 % and 15 % of the contract amount);

63. Notes that a new building strategy 'Beyond 2019', adopted by the Bureau in April 2018, focused on needs not yet sufficiently addressed, including adapting facilities to the evolution of meeting patterns (conception of meeting rooms specifically adapted to legislative trilogues), getting local and closer to citizens through the mainstreaming of the 'Europa Experience' in the European Parliament Liaison Offices, continuing the enhancement of security for Parliament's buildings and their renovation, closing the gap in the interconnection of central buildings of Parliament by favouring purchase of buildings over renting;

64. Expresses concern over the overdue actions agreed with the internal auditor in 2018 addressing significant residual risks regarding building maintenance, refurbishment and operation; calls on the Bureau to adopt a comprehensive maintenance policy and report back to the discharge authority; welcomes the gradual phasing out of contracts regarding externalised management functions and the savings this generates;

65. Notes that the largest building project of Parliament - the enlargement of the Konrad Adenauer building in Luxembourg - is at the point of completion of its first phase, the East Wing; underlines that the Tower has been occupied by Parliament's staff since autumn 2019, and that the remaining part of the East Wing is expected to be occupied gradually as of November 2020; notes that the construction of the West Wing of the building is to start at the end of 2020 and is planned to be finished by 2023;

66. Takes note of Parliament's significant infrastructure, which can be broken down as follows:

Brussels buildings	Luxembourg buildings	Strasbourg buildings
11 owned	2 owned	5 owned
4 rented	3 rented	
659 092 m^2	343 879 m^2	344 283 m^2

EP Liaison Offices and antenna	
Total	37
Owned	12
Rented	25
Surface	28 383 m^2

67. Recalls that in 2020 Parliament launched an international architectural competition with two options, a comprehensive environmental renovation or reconstruction of the Spaak building; underlines that the renovation/reconstruction should take into account cost-effectiveness and energy efficiency as leading criteria; expects as soon as possible a detailed and public evaluation of the cost and energy efficiency of the selected proposal to be carried out in view of the fact that the summary pre-project, which is to be developed by the winning architect in the course of 2021, is to be presented to Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control; demands that the renovation/reconstruction take into account Parliament's current needs as described in the updated building strategy 'Beyond 2019'; stresses that the renovation/reconstruction should take also into account current needs of Members and staff in relation to recent restrictions as well as the new health and security required adjustment;

68. Notes the Bureau's decision of 25 November 2019 to set up a Europa Experience visitors' facilities in all Member States by the end of the current legislature (2024) and the current rate of implementation of this decision; calls on the Secretary-General to regularly inform Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control on the state of implementation;

69. Welcomes the idea that Parliament is committed to undertaking the necessary adaptation and renovation of its buildings in order to create an environment accessible to all users in line with Union standards and national legal frameworks; stresses that works to improve the accessibility for persons with disabilities and those with reduced mobility has already started in Strasbourg and that the projects will continue in both Brussels and Strasbourg, but also in six European Parliament Liaison Offices; insists that such renovations be continued in all other buildings of Parliament by committing to the functional accessibility requirements for the built environment laid down in Annex III to the Directive (EU) 2019/882 ([4]), and by referring to relevant international and European standards in relation to fulfilling those requirements in procurement procedures so that Members, staff and visitors with disabilities and those with reduced mobility can access the buildings and make use of its facilities on an equal basis with others in line with the obligations set by the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; underlines that funds should be made available to efficiently cover these measures/expenses;

70. Expresses concern that since 2017, a closure of the warm-water circuit in Members' offices both in Brussels and in Strasbourg has been introduced and is still in place; notes that the decision to discontinue the distribution of warm water in Members' offices in Brussels and Strasbourg was taken by the Questors on 24 October 2017 in connection with the health risk posed by the presence of harmful legionella bacteria within the ageing and deteriorating hydraulic systems of the buildings; observes that the main challenge of reinstating warm water production in Parliament's buildings lays in the fact that a thorough cleanliness of all the obsolete pipework which includes several dead-end pipes, would require its complete decommissioning and that such a project of a considerable scale requires an in-depth feasibility study taking into account the impact of moves, relocations, dust and noise on the legislative work of Members; urges DG INLO to continue to put in place compensatory measures;

71. Notes that a first call for tender was launched in 2019 in order to conclude contracts for new banking facilities and ended with only one bank choosing to submit an offer for the same space the bank previously occupied; notes that a second call for tender was organised in 2020 aiming to occupy the other two banking areas and no offers were received; regrets that the ING agency remained open only for the two first months of the current parliamentary term, time to open accounts for many of the new elected Members and contracted APAs, and then closed; notes that the supermarket has also decided not to extend its concession but welcomes the fact that there will be a future food market concession located on the ground floor of the Spinelli building; asks the administration to review and make more attractive the conditions of the exploitation of commercial concessions in order to attract quality services providers;

72. Expresses concerns on the Trèves 1 building for its lack of services; invites Parliament to explore as a priority solution to ensure this building has an effective connection with Parliament's main buildings, where most parliamentary activity take place;

73. Highlights recent media reports that the thermal cameras in use in Parliament's premises for measuring the temperature of all persons entering Parliament are produced by Hikvision, a company importing from China and producing cameras for Xinjiang province in China ([5]); recalls that Hikvision has been accused of providing surveillance equipment to internment camps in this province ([6]); notes that there is an unacceptable risk that Hikvision, through its operations in Xinjiang, is contributing to serious human rights abuses; recalls that Parliament awarded the 2019 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Ilham Tohti for his efforts to protect the rights of the Uyghur population in China; considers the use of thermal cameras of this provider in Parliament's premises therefore to be unacceptable; calls on the Secretary-General to terminate the contract with Hikvision and remove all of Hikvision's thermal cameras from Parliament's premises; stresses the need for the administration to be more prudent in the selection of equipment providers in the future;

Security and safety

74. Recalls that, in 2019, the Directorate-General for Security and Safety (DG SAFE) had 770 members of staff and managed 1,5 % of Parliament's overall budget;

([4]) Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services (OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 70).
([5]) https://www.dw.com/en/exclusive-eu-taps-chinese-technology-linked-to-muslim-internment-camps-in-xinjiang/a-55362125
([6]) https://www.npr.org/2019/10/08/768150426/u-s-blacklists-chinese-tech-firms-over-treatment-of-uighurs?t=1611915285989

75. Welcomes the fact that no major security incident has taken place inside Parliament's premises since 2015; however, is concerned by the total number of Members, secretariats of political groups and the APAs reported as victims of thefts within Parliament's premises; notes that the estimated global value of items, which amounts to approximatively EUR 60 000 per year, has been stable for the last three years; expects continuous strengthening at the security level;

76. Takes note of the immediate actions, approved by the Bureau at its meeting of 22 July 2020, which included an awareness campaign, protection of valuable IT equipment, prior notification of maintenance works, and provisions of separate master keys for each floor and strict limitation of their distribution; expresses, however, its disagreement with the specific messages and general tone of the awareness campaign against the burglaries in Parliament buildings because it seems to blame Members and staff rather than disseminating practical security recommendations; expects Parliament to consider long-term measures to prevent thefts including, among those proposed, the introduction of different levels of access rights within Parliament's premises, increased CCTV coverage, and further actions relating to keys' management policy, including the possibility of installing electronic door locks taking due account of the necessary proportionality between the investments needed and the actual value of stolen items, as well as the preservation of privacy;

77. Urges that an internal escape strategy be implemented for people with reduced mobility or disabilities in case of emergency;

78. Welcomes the measures taken to upgrade Parliament's buildings security, in particular security screening of external service providers' personnel, and the internalisation of general security services in Luxembourg, approved by the Bureau in 2012, but which was impacted by the construction work of the new Adenauer II building; underlines that incidents of violent protesters entering public institutions in Member States and threatening staff and members is an issue of concern and therefore encourages DG SAFE to assess the current safety measures and make recommendations for further improvement;

79. Supports interinstitutional security cooperation including the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding related to the screening of personnel of external service providers working in Union institutions in Belgium, the establishment of an interinstitutional working group in charge of harmonising security measures applied in Parliament Liaison Offices and Commission representations in Member States, the ongoing joint analysis by Union institutions' security services to identify and map the most appropriate areas for enhanced cooperation as well as the extent of this possible cooperation, including the possibility of sharing some services, and progress towards the establishment of an interinstitutional access badge;

80. Notes with satisfaction the launch of market procedures for the introduction of an automatic vehicle recognition system at all car park entrances and exits, as well as the move to the Adenauer II building;

81. Recalls, however, that openness to the public is a hallmark of Parliament and an adequate balance with the necessary level of security must be maintained;

Cybersecurity and ICT security

82. Recalls that, in 2019, the Directorate-General for Innovation and Technological Support (DG ITEC) had 480 members of staff and managed 6 % of Parliament's overall budget;

83. Recalls the consulting assignment carried out by the internal audit service on the serious IT incident that occurred in 2017 and the resulting impact on business continuity, which contained three recommendations on further protecting Parliament's ICT infrastructure, complementing the list of critical and core information systems with a clearer mission-to-asset mapping and documenting dependencies' assets, as well as addressing the need for a higher-tier certification of the rented premises housing Parliament's computer room in Brussels;

84. Understands the importance of privileged access rights in maintenance and development work; calls on DG ITEC to establish clear access control rules regarding these privileged accounts and to review the provision of 'superuser' rights;

85. Approves the launch of a new data centre project to replace the outdated tier II Huizingen data centre with a tier IV needed to improve ICT security, resilience and continuity;

86. Supports Parliament's efforts in 2019 to mitigate cybersecurity risks including the definition and publication of a Parliament cybersecurity framework, a systematic cybersecurity risk assessment for sensitive new applications and a yearly penetration test exercise from the Internet; requests that risks be further identified and minimised and that risk based management be implemented; calls on DG ITEC to improve the recovery capabilities and to implement a cybersecurity incidence response plan;

87. Underlines Parliament's obligation to manage directly or at least have direct control over the management of its critical infrastructures and sensitive, confidential data; instructs its administration to implement that obligation;

88. Recalls the added-value of free and open source software in improving security since they make it possible for Parliament to identify and fix weaknesses, keep control over the data by hosting in its servers and designing solutions according to its own specifications, while being able to avoid vendor lock-in effects;

89. Recalls its preference for free and open source software solutions as against proprietary ones when considering new internal applications; asks for situations to be reported to the ICT governing bodies when open source solutions are not chosen;

90. Recognises the inherent risks to information security and privacy when Members and staff use third-party-dependent solutions for sharing sensitive data without Parliament being able to control how the data is handled; in compliance with the cybersecurity strategic orientations approved by the Bureau and in order to remedy that situation, requests Parliament to consider hosting in its servers its own, open source-based and secure solutions for virtual meetings and instant messaging, as it is now the case in core institutions among Member States such as the French central administration and the German Bundeswehr;

91. Commends DG ITEC's efforts to pool part of its cybersecurity expertise and resources through a Computer Emergency Response Team for the Union Institutions (CERT-EU);

Technology, digitalisation and innovation

92. Welcomes the successful completion in 2019 of Parliament's financial management system, which went live for the financial year 2020; expresses concern over obsolete hardware and calls for the continuation of IT modernisation with the renewal of obsolete hardware and further developments of strategic projects in the areas of e-Parliament, mobile environment for Members and staff;

93. Points out that updates in Parliament's staff paygrades are not automated and have to be manually inserted in the IT human resources systems; expresses concerns in relation to the risks of undue payments based on incorrect information resulting from non-automatisation of pay; urges Parliament's services to develop a sustainable IT system for staff paygrades in cooperation with other Union institutions;

94. Approves of significant efforts for ongoing investment in the digitisation of financial processes, including the smooth and successful deployment and use of the new financial management and accounting system (SAP) since November 2019 for all transactions related to the budget execution, the adoption of the 'Blue-Chip hubs for administrative services' strategy, with a view to enhancing client service, administrative efficiency, and the Bureau decision of 17 June 2019 to launch the automation of the central attendance register, as well as the extension of the functions of the e-Portal, as the single digital entry point for Members to manage their financial and social entitlements;

95. Calls for improvements in the current setup of tracking and tracing of IT-related issues between operating units of Parliament's services in order to increase efficiency and transparency; stresses that on-site support for Members and their offices often solves IT-related issues more quickly and more efficiently than telephone support;

96. Requests that it be ensured that appropriate security measures are taken regarding the implementation of cloud solutions for Parliament including those enabling its institutional sovereignty; insists that the latter should be obtained by ensuring data ownership, data localisation on Union territory, no vendor lock-in effects and a multi-vendor approach allowing workloads and data to be migrated seamlessly between the different layers of the hybrid cloud (on premises, private and public cloud) as well as between cloud service providers as needs change, and not only during the cloud services exit phase, in order to achieve greater agility and more data deployment options, as agreed by the ICT Innovation Strategy Working Group and confirmed at the Bureau last year;

97. Recalls that these politically significant requirements of the cloud policy, i.e. on the decision at the highest level on which categories of data may go to the cloud or not, on the definition of sovereign cloud or on the choice of providers, have been expressed by Parliament's Vice-Presidents, and need to be taken into account in the adoption process of the cloud policy by the Bureau, before any contract with a cloud service provider is signed;

98. Requests that the right of Members and assistants to use free and open source office software be ensured;

99. Recalls the need to have a more user-friendly, systematic and coordinated approach for creating and converting data of public interest in open, machine-readable format, which is easily accessible and re-usable for users; reiterates the importance for Parliament of having its own open data policy; asks the relevant services to submit to the Bureau a draft for approval;

100. Recalls that the overarching principle of the cloud strategy is to secure information and protect data, which requires a specific categorisation of data based on data protection and security assessments; asks the Bureau to approve, after consideration of the risk analysis prepared by the relevant services, the data categories and applications which may go to the cloud and which should be retained in Parliament only;

101. Reminds the need to ensure no cloud vendor lock-in effects and achieve higher security by using open source software and open standards wherever possible;

102. Asks its administration to create a space on Parliament's website where the plenary voting record of each Member would be available and the repartition of votes per political groups and nationality of Members visible and comparable; invites the relevant services to study the feasibility and test the visualisation of the most recent signed amendments in committees and plenary of volunteering Members on their personal Parliament website page;

103. Welcomes the Digital Workplace4MEP strategy which delivers solution for mobility and efficiency; considers that the deployment of high-quality hybrid devices shall contribute to achieving the environmental management target of reducing paper consumption by 50 % by 2024; expects that deployment will lead to significant cost savings due to the phasing out of other types of devices;

104. Draws attention to four important investigations conducted by the EDPS involving Parliament, namely using NationBuilder to process personal data as part of its activities relating to the 2019 European election, failing to publish a compliant privacy policy for the 'thistimeimvoting' website within the deadline set by the EDPS, and the body temperature checks as well as the test-booking website in the context of the COVID-19 crisis; notes that in the two first cases Parliament acted in line with the EDPS's recommendations; recalls the aforementioned preliminary review of Parliament's data protection framework; calls on the relevant services of Parliament's administration to draw lessons from the mentioned investigations for the future;

105. Notes that the wi-fi provided at Parliament's premises in Brussels is frequently unstable and does not provide for undisturbed meetings during virtual video calls; asks Parliament to upgrade the current system to the level of performance needed for the full remote working operation of Parliament;

106. Welcomes the two European projects, Red Flags and Digiwhist, which use big data for reducing corruption and encourages the use of emerging technologies as part of the digitalisation;

Access to tenders

107. Welcomes the improved user access to tenders in Parliament; endeavours to further strengthen its digitisation process by providing a general Frequently Asked Questions regarding the tender procedures and guarantee a user-friendly access;

108. Notes the current e-tendering instrument TED as part of the digital transformation process of the public procurement, while emphasising the need for a multilingual questions and answers section while ensuring their timely update;

Emerging technologies in public procurement

109. Reiterates Parliament's commitment to maintaining the digital transformation of the public procurement, with a view to facilitate access to public procurement and to promote digital technical innovation; notes that the adoption by DG ITEC of a cloud model demonstrates the importance of beginning to explore the potential of emerging technologies in public procurement;

110. Notes that public purchases of goods and services was estimated to be worth EUR 2 trillion or 13,3 % of GDP ([7]); notes that a study updated in 2020 showed how the use of new technologies such as blockchain, big data, AI, IoT, 3D printing are used to achieve different things: AI& ML can predict future demand, categorise procurement spend, and Chatbot scan help with user questions; notes also that block chain is used to provide transparency into different stages of the public procurement and to ensure a digital record of every agreement, every process, every payment and a shared single source of data; notes, finally, that 3D printing ensures direct production of various parts ([8]); draws attention to the fact that applying emerging technologies to public tendering eventually enhances the much-needed digital transformation of the public procurement process;

Transparency

111. Notes with grave concern that according to the Transparency Register's Annual Reports in past years, around half of all entries in the Register are incorrect; fears that the Register cannot fulfil its purpose of providing greater transparency on the activities of interest representatives if half of its entries provide incomplete or incorrect information; urges Parliament and the Commission to address the high rate of incorrect entries by increasing, at least temporarily, the Joint Transparency Register's Secretariat's Staff, to systematically scan all entries for correctness and completeness, and to ensure that only correct entries find their way onto the register;

112. Recalls that Article 4 of the Code of Conduct provides, with respect to financial interests and conflicts of interests, that the Members' declarations of financial interests shall be provided in a precise manner; regrets some cases with insufficient detail in the declarations on paid or unpaid outside activities, which puts in question whether such an activity can be checked for a potential conflict of interest with their parliamentary activity; notes that in cases where there is reason to believe that the information provided is out of date, the President may, where appropriate, request the Member to correct the declaration within 10 days; calls on the Bureau to review the format of the declarations; encourages consultations in this regard with relevant Member State authorities in order to exchange best practices;

Recruitment

113. Recalls that in 2019 DG PERS had 459 members of staff and managed 48 % of Parliament's overall budget;

114. Notes that as an outcome of the 2019 elections, the proportion of new Members in the 9th Legislature reached a high of 61 %; highlights that in the context of the increasing number of former Members, the Secretary-General and the Bureau should establish strong rules to regulate revolving doors, requiring former Members to inform Parliament of their post-mandate activities and employment over a period that extends at least over the time former Members receive the end of term transitional allowance; calls for an independent assessment on whether such activities create conflicts of interests;

([7]) https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/accessing-markets/public-procurement/
([8]) https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/news/2020-06/D.01.06_Final_report_v3.00.pdf

115. Is convinced that the attractiveness of Parliament as an employer is a key component of its success; is deeply concerned by the difficulties encountered in recruiting some nationalities and bringing certain job profiles in-house; regrets Parliament's over-dependence on external expertise; notes that DG PERS is currently running the project 'Attracting and retaining top talent' that aims at improving Parliament's policies to attract and retain talent and at contributing to the development of Parliament's long-term strategic vision on the jobs of the future; calls on the Secretary-General to do his utmost in order to improve the diversity and geographical balance of Parliament's staff, in terms of proportional representation per Member State, including in relation to the numbers in management positions and to explore all available options in order to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of Parliament as an employer;

116. Is concerned by the lack of diversity among Parliament's staff; calls on the Secretary-General to make increasing diversity a priority; takes note of the difficulty of recruiting IT and financial specialists and staff at lower grades in Luxembourg, especially in the AST-SC category; stresses that the introduction of a correction coefficient that takes account of the higher living costs in this place of work together with recruitment at higher grades is necessary to solve this structural problem and reiterates, in this regard, its request to the Commission in the frame of the 2018 discharge procedure; stresses that a preliminary factual analysis that the Court addressed to the Secretary-General in this context shows that the selection process organised by the European Personnel Selection Office is not adapted to small-scale, targeted competitions, which are those most suited to the current recruitment needs of Union institutions; notes with satisfaction Parliament's active involvement in an inter-institutional effort in reviewing the way competitions are currently run by European Personnel Selection Office; calls for a new selection framework to be developed for specialist competitions and the introduction of a mechanism for regularly reviewing its selection process; calls on the Secretary-General to organise specialist competitions in-house when appropriate;

117. Voices great concern, furthermore, at the fact that it is very difficult for DG ITEC to recruit sufficient highly qualified experts with very specific profiles, knowledge and experience; calls on Parliament to ensure that this request is properly transmitted to the European Personnel Selection Office to better respond to such specific needs of Union institutions, in particular related to Parliament's ICT expertise in the area of cybersecurity, cloud computing and artificial intelligence; deplores Parliament's over-reliance on external consultants and stresses the importance for DG ITEC to further develop its strategy 'From external consultants to contract staff' in order to minimise the security risks for Parliament;

118. Recalls the importance of achieving a fair geographical balance among Parliament's staff; observes that, on the basis of the ratio of the number of the staff to the number of Members from that same Member State, there is no division between older and newer Member States in terms of over or underrepresentation; notes that the five highest ratios concern members of staff from Belgium, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia and Malta, while the five lowest those from Poland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Cyprus; highlights that currently Slovenia and Lithuania count among the seven Member States with the highest ratio of managers to Members; calls on Parliament to ensure that staff at all levels are hired and promoted based on ability, efficiency and integrity, without any discrimination based on nationality; requests further efforts to ensure that employment at Parliament is equally attractive to all Union nationalities;

119. Welcomes the fact that promoting equal opportunities is a key component of Parliament's human resource policy; facilitating the employment and strengthening the integration of disabled persons; expresses its satisfaction as regards the fact that the gender equality roadmap continues to be implemented through concrete actions and that on 13 January 2020, the Bureau approved a set of targets for gender balance in senior and middle management posts in Parliament's Secretariat to be achieved by 2024: 50 % female heads of units and directors, 40 % female directors-general; stresses the need for the Bureau to further strengthen its commitment to gender equality by committing to more ambitious targets to be achieved by 2022: 50 % female heads of units and directors, 50 % female directors-general; calls on the Bureau to also formulate ambitious targets for lower management posts;

120. Reiterates that it is essential that staff representatives are heard when the Bureau discusses general matters affecting its staff policy, and asks again the Secretary-General to take the appropriate measures to implement this key approach; reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to take further steps to ensure transparency and fairness during senior management appointment procedures; asks for the full implementation of the measures recommended in Parliament's resolution of 18 April 2018, notably that officials from staff representative bodies sit on Parliament's senior management selection panels; calls, furthermore, for consistency to be ensured when it comes to external publications of senior management posts and diligence in the publication of these posts as and when they fall vacant;

121. Recalls the findings and recommendations of the European Ombudsman in joint cases 488/2018/KR and 514/2018/K, and invites the Secretary-General to further improve the procedures of appointment of high ranking official towards more transparency and equality; calls on Parliament's administration to report annually on the appointment of high ranking officials;

Staff, Accredited Parliamentary Assistants and Local Assistants

122. Draws attention to the 6 % staff reduction target which in 2019 required Parliament to eliminate 59 posts from its administration establishment plan; acknowledges the simultaneous increase in the number of contractual agents; warns of the serious consequences that any budgetary cut in administration or any staff reduction may have in the future of the European civil service and the implementation of the Union's policies; is concerned, in particular, in relation to the negative effects of this significant reduction on Parliament's performance resulting from the 2014 staff reform, both in the short and long term, while also mindful of the need to ensure responsible budgetary management and undertaking savings where appropriate; notes that the work and responsibility of certain parliamentary committees have increased as they are now responsible for the scrutiny of the EU Recovery Plan Next Generation EU funds of EUR 750 billion, which amounts together with the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (MFF) to EUR 1,8 trillion; is concerned about deficiencies in administrative staff capacities in the relevant secretariats; calls for the reassessment of the staffing situation;

123. Notes that the Court has found that the Union institutions have reduced the number of posts for officials (i.e. permanent and temporary staff), while gradually increasing the number of contract staff (which increased by 121 % between 2012 and 2018, with a similar trend in 2019) resulting in a substantial increase of the proportion of contract staff in the total workforce; profoundly regrets the lack of career prospects for contract staff in the case of Parliament's administration; invites the Secretary-General to assess the risks related to employing growing numbers of contract staff, including the danger of creating a two-tier staffing structure within Parliament; insists that core permanent positions and tasks should be performed by permanent staff; notes that the Court's report on the implementation of the Union budget for 2019 did not examine whether these replacements have resulted from transfers of employees based in Strasbourg or Luxembourg to Brussels; calls on Parliament's human resources unit to share information on staff relocation at Parliament's three places of work since 2012, either as part of the annual discharge procedure or by sharing relevant information with the Court for inclusion in the next annual reports on budget implementation;

124. Highlights the fact that current rules on the termination of contract for APAs do not foresee the possibility of a termination by 'mutual consent', which would be a way to recognise the special political relation between Members and assistants, where both parties can acknowledge the mutual trust no longer exists, and can benefit from a common solution without undermining APAs' social rights; notes that this issue has been highlighted in several Parliament discharge reports and expects action to be taken as soon as possible;

125. Notes that members of staff who work in the Union institutions for less than 10 years cannot claim an Union pension and that they must transfer their contributions to another fund which meets Parliament's rules regarding the type of fund and the age at which funds can be drawn; notes that many British APAs have not been able to transfer to certain United Kingdom pension funds which Parliament considers do not meet requirements; asks the Secretary-General to urgently look into this matter to ensure all members of staff can access their contributions;

126. Recalls that Parliament has called for Union legislation that grants workers the right to digitally disconnect from work without facing negative repercussions; asks Parliament to promote and apply this principle to itself too;

127. Is deeply concerned about the number of members of staff on long-term sick leave, some of those cases may relate to exhaustion and disturbed work-life balance; calls on the administration and on the leaderships of political groups to be proactive in relaton to the members of staff concerned, to carefully evaluate the workload of members of staff and to ensure a balanced distribution of tasks; stresses, in that regard, the importance of a reasonable working schedule and avoiding meetings outside office hours which prevent Members and staff from maintaining a work-life balance while taking into consideration the framework of the parliamentary calendar; welcomes the 'Mind Matters' campaign launch in 2018 by DG PERS to raise awareness and combat stigma related to mental health; urges Parliament's administration and the leaderships of political groups to conduct a psychological risk assessment to detect psychological risks in the work environment and to develop targeted action plans to either eliminate them, or mitigate their negative impact; calls for reassessment of the applicable rules to enable quicker hiring of substitutes in cases of long-term sick leave;

128. Stresses the pressing necessity for a revision of the Bureau decision establishing the categories of committees on the basis of their legislative workload in order to add consideration of their budget related work; notes that the current situation has a particularly negative impact on Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, which already suffers from a chronic staff shortage, and which deals with a huge workload due to the discharge procedure but has a low legislative workload; asks Parliament's administration once again to find urgent solutions to improve the situation;

129. Asks the Secretary-General to find a solution for the fact that APAs' salaries must exclusively be lodged to Belgian bank accounts which runs counter to the idea of a single monetary and payments union;

130. Welcomes the development of measures that contribute to a better balancing of professional and private life including the implementation of extended teleworking possibilities for Parliament's staff and of measures promoting well-being at work; however, highlights the value of physical presence in Parliament; highlights the contribution of teleworking arrangements and remote voting to the further reduction of Parliament's carbon footprint; stresses the need for Parliament's staff and Members to be provided the opportunity to continue the conduct of so-called hybrid meetings as well as remote voting; calls on the Bureau to continue providing mechanisms to facilitate these arrangements in future;

131. Supports the continuation of the implementation of the activities of the Action Plan on Equality and Diversity 2014-2019; insists on the importance of better gender balance at all levels, including Directors-General level; supports the measures in the report on 'Diversities other than gender in the Parliament's Secretariat - state of play and roadmap' adopted by the Bureau on 3 April 2019; celebrates in particular the creation in 2020 of two contact points within Parliament, one on LGBTI+ issues and one on racial discrimination issues, both managed by the DG PERS' Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Unit;

132. Recalls the findings and recommendations of the European Ombudsman ([9]); deplores the current Parliament policy on leave, which resulted in granting only 10 days of special leave to a father of two twins because of lack of a maternal link between him and his children; finds striking the contrast to the leave given to his husband in the Commission, who received 20 weeks of ad hoc special leave; takes note of the written answer of Parliament's administration where it is stated that Parliament's services are working on new rules; calls for Parliament's administration to align its special leave policy with the Commission's, which is in line with the best interest of the child;

133. Welcomes Parliament's two positive action schemes to recruit 12 contract agents and two trainees with disabilities over the last two years;

([9]) The 'Strategic Initiative on the leave rights of certain staff members and the best interests of the child' (SI/1/2019/AMF).

134. Supports the launch of an awareness raising campaign in 2019 to promote a zero-tolerance policy on harassment in the workplace; recognises Parliament's zero tolerance policy towards harassment at any and all levels including Members, staff and APAs; notes that following the 2019 elections, all Members were required to sign a declaration confirming their commitment to complying with the code of appropriate behaviour incorporated in Parliament's Rules of Procedure in January 2019; however, regrets that 10 new harassment cases were opened in 2019 out of which 4 cases concerned sexual harassment; welcomes the fact that the parliament provides voluntary trainings on dignity and respect at work for Members in order to lead by example; deeply regrets in this context that the Bureau has refused to implement the will of the plenary expressed on several occasions ([10]) to institute anti-harassment trainings for all staff and Members on a compulsory basis; urges the Bureau to implement this request without further delay;

135. Is of the opinion that Parliament should provide basic accommodation for breastfeeding mothers at work, particularly including time and a private space other than a bathroom;

136. Regrets the 38 cases involving Parliament pending with European Anti-Fraud Office in 2019 ranging from the proper use of parliamentary allowances and staff conduct to the financing of European political structures; points out the fact that 14 cases were closed in 2019; expresses its strong concern for the high number of cases; asks the parliamentary services to conduct an in-depth analysis of the existing financial, legal, ethical and integrity risks which gave rise to these cases and to propose preventive measures so as to ensure these are not repeated;

137. Takes note of the fact that there were no cases of whistleblowing recorded by Parliament in 2019; calls on Parliament to fully adapt its own internal rules in the Staff Regulations to the recently adopted Directive (EU) 2019/1937 ([11]), including comprehensive rules and safe procedures by setting up secure channels for reporting; is of the opinion that the protection of whistleblowers is an integral element of democracy and it is crucial in preventing and deterring unlawful activities and wrongdoings; recalls that, among others, APAs are in a vulnerable position due to their contracts of employment; further notes that whistleblowers deserve proper protection, similar to that of victims of harassment and that this should include also the establishment of an advisory committee dealing with the protection of whistleblowers; calls on the Secretary-General to ensure that the protection provided by Parliament for APAs acting as whistleblowers is equivalent to that provided for APAs who are victims of harassment; requests Parliament to raise awareness, where possible, among parliamentary staff on their whistleblower protections and their duty under the Staff Regulations to report illegal activities or maladministration and calls on Parliament to consider mandatory training in this respect; repeats its request for information campaigns in this regard;

138. Reiterates its call on Parliament's administration, as early as possible in the next parliamentary term, to provide new APAs with mandatory training courses or publications including, in particular, financial and administrative matters (mission orders, medical examinations, accreditation, parking stickers, groups of visitors, exhibitions, etc.) in order to avoid systemic errors hindering the smooth running of administrative procedures that affect them; highlights, in this regard, the necessity of technical training on the work of the parliamentary committees as well as the possibility of attending language courses outside of office hours;

139. Expresses strong concern for the working conditions of two of the external concessions contracted by Parliament, namely the cleaning and the catering services; is concerned about the increasing use of temporary and interim staff and its impact on both their working conditions and the quality of the services provided; reiterates its call on DG INLO from previous years to carry out an independent satisfaction survey about the working conditions of the concerned staff; calls on the administration to assess Parliament's public procurement policy in order to secure transparent and predictable working conditions for the subcontracted staff; asks the Secretary-General to quickly launch a study into the advantages that the internalisation of these services could have both for the institution and for the workers' labour rights and to present it to both Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control when it becomes available;

([10]) Resolution (EU) 2020/1880 of the European Parliament of 14 May 2020 with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2018, Section I — European Parliament (paragraph 115) (OJ L 417, 11.12.2020, p. 122); European Parliament resolution of 26 October 2017 on combating sexual harassment and abuse in the European Union (paragraph 17) (OJ C 346, 27.9.2018, p. 192).

([11]) Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law (OJ L 305, 26.11.2019, p. 17).

140. Welcomes the introduction of a wider and more sustainable food choice, including the introduction of a greater variety of vegetarian and vegan products, in Parliament's self-service canteen; notes the launch of an independent client satisfaction survey via the Happy or Not terminals setup in the main outlets in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg aiming at identifying the outlets where changes and improvements are necessary; observes that the Happy or Not terminal has shown a constant and solid improvement rating in respect of the catering services in the Kohl and Martens buildings, while the satisfaction rate is lower in the Spinelli and Paul-Henri Spaak buildings; calls for the necessary changes to adapt to clients' needs; notes that non-vegetarian meals often cost more than vegetarian meals; requests that all canteens sufficiently display allergy menus next to the counter and offer one gluten-free meal per day;

141. Highlights that the COVID-19 crisis has called for decisions with a direct impact on the staff of Parliament, including subcontracted and freelance employees; points in this regard inter alia to the decision to close the European House of History, the Europa Experience sites and the European Union Liaison Offices and to the altered circumstances for freelance interpreters and the cleaning and restoration staff; acknowledges that, in the current circumstances related to the spread of COVID-19, the institutions, including Parliament, must take decisions in a fast and unbureaucratic manner to prevent a further spread of the virus and to keep its staff safe; calls, however, on Parliament to honour its social responsibilities in each decision, to avoid, or to compensate for, any changes in income, and to avoid coronavirus-related dismissals of people working on Parliament's premises by all means necessary;

142. Deplores the decision by the COMPASS Group to dismiss 80 staff members of the catering service by January 2021; welcomes the negotiation undertaken with the COMPASS group which reduced the total number of lay-offs to 49, but expresses strong dissatisfaction with the fact that personnel will still be dismissed; notes that the dismissed members of staff were informed shortly before Christmas 2020 and in the middle of a pandemic; stresses that some of the dismissed staff had worked on Parliament's premises for decades; recalls Parliament's repeated calls on companies across the Union to retain their members of staff during the pandemic; invites Parliament's relevant authorities to investigate all possible alternative solutions which would safeguard the employment of all canteen workers and asks Parliament's administration to find solutions within the frame of the social dialogue; invites the Bureau to reconsider Parliament's externalisation policy; urges the Secretary-General to respond without delay to a letter sent about the dismissal signed by 355 Members; calls for an evaluation of Parliament's public procurement policy in light of improving transparent and predictable working conditions for all subcontracted services; calls on Parliament to report to the discharge authority on the results of such evaluation;

143. Emphasises that the daily solidarity meals and other solidarity measures by Parliament, as decided by the Bureau, have reduced the financial, economic and social impact on its caterers and their employees; notes that Parliament is seeking to save as many jobs as possible that are reasonable from an employment point of view but also justifiable for the use of Parliament's budget;

144. Takes note of the solutions found for APAs who had worked for two consecutive parliamentary terms without interruption but who were lacking up to 2 months to complete the ten years of service needed to be entitled to a pension under the pension rights scheme of the Union institutions; criticises the fact that a solution was put forward too late, despite the numerous and continuous warnings during the previous parliamentary term; criticises, furthermore, the fact that the only solution found depended solely on the goodwill of certain Members who were aware of the situation and were in solidarity with these APAs; criticises, also, the fact that the administration did not inform Members elected for the new parliamentary term of this matter and of the fact that they could issue contracts of less than six months in these instances, as a result of which many of these APAs had great difficulties finding a Member willing to employ them on a contract without interruption for a short period of time, and some did not even manage to do so;

145. Reiterates its concern about the alleged practice of Members obliging APAs to undertake missions, particularly to Strasbourg, without mission orders and without the reimbursement of their mission and travel spending; is of opinion that such a practice leaves room for abuse as when APAs travel without a mission order they not only have to pay for the costs out of their own means, they are also not covered by workplace insurance; reiterates its calls on the Secretary-General to investigate this;

146. Reiterates its demand for APAs to receive the same subsistence allowance as the statutory personnel for their missions to attend the part-sessions in Strasbourg; takes note of the follow-up answer provided by the Secretary-General about the different rules concerning the reimbursement of duty travel between Parliament's three places of work that apply to Parliament's secretariat and APAs; insists on its demand for a subsequent change of the relevant rules mentioned by the Secretary-General;

147. Reiterates its call on the Conference of Presidents and the Bureau to reconsider the possibility for APAs, under certain conditions to be determined, to accompany Members on official Parliament delegations and missions, as already requested by several Members; takes note of the estimated financial impact explained by the Secretary-General on his follow-up to the 2018 discharge but nevertheless insists on a the limited application of this possibility; suggests a new discussion at the level of the Bureau and the Conference of Presidents;

148. Highlights the need to revisit Parliament's HR policy in order to allow the institution to make use of expertise acquired by all Parliament staff; believes that it is therefore necessary to change the rules to enable all categories of staff, including APAs, to participate in internal competitions and to establish HR development schemes that will allow Parliament to keep the expertise of these categories of staff at the service of the institution;

Geographic dispersion of Parliament - Single Seat

149. Notes that the Court estimated that moving from Strasbourg to Brussels could generate annual savings of EUR 114 million plus a one-off saving of EUR 616 million if the Strasbourg buildings are successfully divested, or a one-off cost of EUR 40 million if they are not; notes that a single Seat can only be achieved by a unanimous Treaty change; recalls that a vast majority of Members of Parliament expressed, in various resolutions, support for a single Seat to ensure efficient spending of Union taxpayers' money; urges the Council to take note of Parliament's position;

150. Recalls that additional expenditure caused by travel to Strasbourg goes against the principle of sound financial management;

151. Points to a recent study submitted to Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety ([12]); highlights the study's conclusion that 'in a carbon neutrality pathway, it is evident that Parliament needs to consider operation in one site'; recalls that Parliament has committed to reducing its carbon footprint in its resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency ([13]); recalls that in the same resolution Parliament declared a climate and environment emergency; notes that Brussels is Parliament's largest centre of activity, that it hosts the Council and the Commission but also other stakeholders, NGOs, civil society organisations and Member State representations; considers therefore that retaining Strasbourg as its Seat is unsustainable and indefensible;

152. Reiterates that the COVID-19 crisis constitutes a force majeure situation which has forced Parliament to scrap a substantial amount of the 12 Strasbourg sessions from the 2020 parliamentary calendar; upholds that costs and health consequences caused by the COVID-19 crisis should not be compounded by costly moves to Strasbourg; strongly urges the Member States, by way of derogation from the Treaty, to refrain from insisting on compensatory sessions in Strasbourg;

Voluntary Pension Fund

153. Recalls Article 27(1) and (2) of the Statute for Members of Parliament which states that 'the voluntary pension fund set up by Parliament shall be maintained after the entry into force of this Statute for Members or former Members who have already acquired rights or future entitlements in that fund' and that 'acquired rights and future entitlements shall be maintained in full';

([12]) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/ENVI/DV/2020/11-16/IPOL_STU2020652735_EN.pdf

([13]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2019)0078.

154. Further notes that, at the end of 2019, the amount of net assets to be taken into account and the actuarial commitment amounted to EUR 111 million and EUR 439,6 million, respectively, leading to an estimated actuarial deficit of EUR 328,6 million; is extremely concerned about the possible exhaustion of the voluntary pension fund; stresses the fact that the current situation of the fund is such that it cannot meet its future commitments; is convinced of the need to further explain the legal consequences of the rules and/or to modify the rules; invites the Court to present a new opinion on the voluntary pension fund, investigating all possible options to limit its deficit; notes that Parliament will await the Court's decision and swiftly implement it;

155. Recalls paragraph 118 of the 2017 Parliament discharge resolution which called for an investigation of the legal foundations of the voluntary pension fund and in particular, whether Parliament has a legal obligation to guarantee that future entitlements shall be maintained in full and to fill the potential deficits of the fund or put fresh money in to the fund, given that the voluntary pension fund is a SICAV investment fund under Luxembourg law rather than a regular pension fund, which would imply that there is in principle no such obligation; regrets that the Secretary-General has not yet come forward with any findings in response to the investigation called for;

156. Recalls that these projected future liabilities are spread over several decades but is deeply concerned that while the total amount paid by the voluntary pension fund in 2019 amounts to around EUR 18 million, and this figure is expected to rise to around EUR 20 million in 2025;

157. Recalls that, at its meeting of 10 December 2018, the Bureau decided to modify the rules applicable to the pension scheme by increasing the retirement age from 63 to 65 years and introducing a levy of 5 % to pension payments for future pensioners with a view to improve its sustainability; welcomes that the immediate effects of the rules change were savings in the 2019 pensions payments amounting to approximately EUR 325 000, that of these, EUR 306 000 stem from the increase in pension age and EUR 19 000 stem from the introduction of a 5 % levy to all pensions established after 1 January 2019; asks that the Bureau evaluate all possible options as soon as the Court of Justice has made its decisions regarding the current measures in order to find a fair solution to the voluntary pension scheme and fund while keeping Parliament's liability to a minimum as Union taxpayers' money is involved;

158. Calls upon the Secretary-General and the Bureau to fully respect the Statute for Members and to establish with the pension fund a clear plan for Parliament assuming and taking over its obligations and responsibilities for its Members' voluntary pension scheme; supports the request from the Bureau to the Secretary-General that ways to ensure a sustainable financing of the voluntary pension fund in accordance with the provisions of the Statute for Members be investigated while ensuring full transparency; appeals to the Bureau and the members of the voluntary pension fund to support measures aiming at limiting the deficit of the voluntary pension fund;

Ecological and sustainability aspect of Parliament's operations

159. Supports the use of the Community eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS), which is a management instrument of the Union for private and public organisations to evaluate and improve their environmental performance in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1221/2009 ([14]); acknowledges that Parliament is the first Union institution to become carbon neutral in 2016 due to offsetting 100 % of its irreducible emissions; supports measures taken to reduce Parliament's emissions even further including increasing teleworking targets in the different directorates-general, limiting and optimising travel time for missions and encouraging the use of sustainable transport modes, e.g. by increasing the number of parking spots for bikes;

160. Welcomes the fact that 100 % of all A4 paper used in Parliament's offices is recycled and welcomes the significant decrease in paper purchase in 2019 compared to 2018; welcomes Parliament's efforts to increase the number of paperless meetings and calls for more training to be offered to all Members, staff and APAs in relation to the paperless tools which have been created to enable less documents to be printed, and for further communication campaigns;

([14]) Regulation (EC) No 1221/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2009 on the voluntary participation by organisations in a Community eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS), repealing Regulation (EC) No 761/2001 and Commission Decisions 2001/681/EC and 2006/193/EC (OJ L 342, 22.12.2009, p. 1).

161. Calls for further ambitious actions to be undertaken swiftly and believes that the ultimate goal should be a Parliament free of single-use plastic;

162. Notes that the percentage of renewable energy supplied to Parliament in 2019 remained at 67 %, the majority of this figure coming from the purchase of green electricity; calls on Parliament to further increase the percentage of renewable energy supplied to Parliament with a view to achieving a 100 % renewable energy supply as soon as possible, including by using Parliament's roof to produce its own solar power;

163. Recalls that Directive 2012/27/EU ([15]) on energy efficiency states that, each year, 3 % of the total floor area of our buildings must be renovated in order to meet the minimum energy performance requirements; recommends that the annual budget planning take into account regular renovations of all buildings and that an amount corresponding to 3 % of the total surface area of all buildings be allocated for that purpose, as already reflected in the building strategy 'Beyond 2019' adopted by the Bureau on 16 April 2018; considers that such allocation is part of a regular and anticipatory building policy which should also focus on deep-retrofitting and should ensure that Parliament strives for a maximum improvement in energy efficiency and hence savings in the energy consumption and cost of Parliament's facilities;

164. Welcomes the successful internalisation of the car service and gradual shift to zero-emission vehicles with a view to having a carbon-neutral service fleet by 2024 at the latest; acknowledges the large number of daily operations and commends the work of the service, which has achieved a high satisfaction rate amongst Members; calls on the Secretary-General to introduce a user-friendly on-line booking system and examine possibilities to increase usage, which was only 3 % in 2019, and widen the user group for booking cars for the route between Brussels and Strasbourg to reduce the environmental impact of Parliament; requests that improved communication be circulated on this possibility so as to make sure that cars do not travel empty to Strasbourg and back;

165. Welcomes the adoption by the Bureau, on 16 December 2019, of new ambitious key performance indicators targets for Parliament's environmental management system, including a 40 % carbon emission reduction target, with a date of 2024 for the new legislative term; calls for the efficient implementation of the necessary actions in order to achieve the target on time and for regular reporting to the discharge authority on the progress made; further calls on Parliament to re-evaluate its EMAS target in light of the emissions reductions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;

166. Commends Parliament's commitment to green public procurement; notes that Parliament's objective is to increase the value-weighted percentage of contracts among certain priority products classified as 'Green', 'Very Green' or 'Green by Nature'; commends the fact that 89,1 % of contracts by value in priority-product categories were classified as 'Green' or 'Very Green', or 'Green by Nature' in 2019; welcomes the adoption by the Bureau, on 16 December 2019, of a new ambitious key performance indicators target for green public procurement, meaning that on average 90 % of contracts in priority-product categories should be classified as 'Green', or 'Green by Nature' over the 2020-2024 period; underlines the need to develop further green public procurement by setting ambitious targets for greening contracts in the medium term;

167. Welcomes Parliament's intention to introduce sustainability reporting, which will include social aspects of procurement, calls on Parliament to monitor developments in the field of social and sustainable public procurement, such as the OECD work on Public Procurement and Responsible Business Conduct and upcoming Union legislation on corporate due diligence; believes that by incorporating responsible business standards into its procurement and purchasing policies, Parliament can lead by example, safeguard the public interest and ensure the accountability of public spending;

168. Welcomes the new parking policy developed in Parliament's car parks aimed at promoting the use of electric vehicles, namely bicycles, cargo-bikes, scooters and cars, through the installation of electric charging stations; calls for that policy to be extended to all Parliament car parks;

([15]) Directive 2012/27/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on energy efficiency, amending Directives 2009/125/EC and 2010/30/EU and repealing Directives 2004/8/EC and 2006/32/EC (OJ L 315, 14.11.2012, p. 1).

169. Stresses that Parliament has to honour its commitments regarding the fight against climate change, and must consequently take appropriate steps in all its buildings to make sufficient bicycle internal and external parks, where bicycles are protected against theft, vandalism and the elements, available to all staff, and at the very least offer the same arrangements currently available in staff car parks; a system whereby vignettes are used as a means of identification could also be very worthwhile in this regard;

170. Welcomes the significant increase of use of bicycles in Brussels in 2019 compared to 2018;

171. Notes the environmental impact of Parliament's recurrent relocation to Strasbourg;

Interpretation and translation

172. Recalls that, in 2019, the Directorate-General for Logistics and Interpretation for Conferences had 530 members of staff and managed 2,6 % of Parliament's overall budget;

173. Commends the 'One-Stop Conference Organisation (OSCO)' project, concluded in 2019, which considerably streamlined work processes related to conference organisation and allowed the Directorate-General for Logistics and Interpretation for Conferences to become the single interface for a range of high-quality conference services for meeting, conference and event organisers at Parliament;

174. Observes that the revised Code of Conduct for Multilingualism, adopted by the Bureau in July 2019, gave an updated framework in which to operate and ensured that high-quality interpretation could be provided in a resource-efficient way, adapted to the needs of its users; deplores that the revised Code of Conduct for Multilingualism still assimilates Union primary law-based budgetary and discharge exercise to non-legislative work, which obliges Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control, each year, to request authorisation from the Bureau to exceed its annual reserve of 45 pages for texts submitted for translation; calls on Parliament to ensure that the Code of Conduct for Multilingualism is applied in a way that allows Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control to exercise Parliament's core budgetary and discharge functions without having to request such an annual derogation;

175. Notes with appreciation the social dialogue held between the management and the representatives of the staff interpreters resulting in the new working conditions of 8 September 2018; supports the continuous efforts by both representatives of the administration and of interpreters to guarantee resource efficient full multilingualism;

176. Notes that many communications and documents are only available in English; also notes that working meetings are held without the possibility of interpretation; requests that Parliament respects the principles, rights and obligations laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Regulation No 1/1958, as well as in internal guidelines and decisions, such as the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour; consequently, calls on Parliament to provide the necessary human resources to ensure that multilingualism is respected, by increasing the number of staff responsible for translation and interpretation;

177. Recalls that in 2019, the Directorate-General for Translation had 1 117 members of staff and managed 0,5 % of Parliament's overall budget;

178. Commends the implementation of a system for the accreditation of external translators in order to bring about an increase in the quality of outsourced translations, with a focus on using 'accredited' translators who have been tested on their translation ability, enhancing the quality control of outsourced translations by the language units and reinforcing contractual consequences in the event of sub-standard quality;

179. Calls on the Secretary-General to examine the feasibility of the introduction of international sign language interpretation for all plenary debates, in line with the requests adopted by the Plenary, and to implement this decision in respect of the principle of equal access to all citizens;

Finance and Administration

180. Recalls that in 2019, DG FINS had 222 members of staff and managed 22,7 % of the Parliament's overall budget;

181. Condemns the large backlogs regarding reimbursements of travel expenses in 2019; calls for the ensuring and maintaining of sufficient resources for DG FINS and for those resources to be allocated in a way that avoids the accumulation of backlogs;

182. Notes that Parliament's new travel agency started operating on 1 January 2019; notes that Members experienced difficulties reaching the travel agency's call centre during and outside working hours; calls for an improvement in availability; observes that, for Members, the travel agency follows the directives of the Members' Travel and Subsistence Unit, according to which the flights offered should always be based on the most direct route between departure and destination point and on the cheapest fares whenever there are several airlines proposing the same connection; notes that any revenue received by the travel agency as a result of the turnover made on the services delivered to Parliament must be reimbursed to Parliament; notes that compared to the previous year, the yearly number of complaints remained stable with 63 complaints registered in 2019, representing 0,043 % of the total 144 913 transactions that year, and that the majority of registered complaints concerned the quality of services rendered by the new travel agency, resulting from the transition and the commencement of its operations, including late cancellations and travel delays;

183. Strongly questions paragraph 40 of Parliament resolution of 14 May 2020 ([16]) on Parliament's estimates of revenue and expenditure for the financial year 2021 (2019/2214(BUD)) asking the Bureau to revise the Implementing Measures of the Statute for Members of Parliament so that Members are reimbursed for flexible economy airline tickets when travelling within the Union, with exceptions accepted for flights longer than four hours of duration or flights with a stopover; calls for the continuation of equal treatment of Members in terms of tickets offered; also recalls Parliament's goals of further reducing its emissions and underlines that the least polluting methods of necessary air travel are direct flights and flexible airline tickets;

General Expenditure Allowance

184. Recalls the decision that all Members should have a separate bank account for the purpose of receiving the general expenditure allowance; welcomes Parliament's strict implementation of this obligation which resulted in a 100 % compliance rate;

185. Recalls Rule 11(4) of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, as adopted by the Bureau on 11 March 2019, which provides that 'The Bureau shall provide the necessary infrastructure on Members' online page on Parliament's website for those Members who wish to publish a voluntary audit or confirmation, as provided for under the applicable rules of the Statute for Members and its implementing rules, that their use of the General Expenditure Allowance complies with the applicable rules of the Statute for Members and its implementing measures'; notes that such publications are made individually and optionally under the Members' own responsibility and that Parliament's administration is not responsible for compiling the information provided; calls on Parliament's services to send a yearly reminder to Members in relation to this possibility; calls on Parliament to regularly inform the discharge authority of how many Members follow these recommendations in order for the spending of Union taxpayers' money to become more transparent and accountable;

186. Recalls that Members exercise their mandate freely and independently as stated in Rule 2 of the Rules of Procedure; stresses that any body tasked with elaborating ethic rules and standards should be limited to its assigned tasks and must ensure that its recommendations do not limit or hamper the free mandate of Members;

187. Stresses that the general expenditure allowance is a lump-sum allowance and underlines the necessity of independence of the free mandate as stated in the Rules of Procedure; welcomes the decision of the Bureau to task a working group with the evaluation of the operation of general expenditure allowance during the last years and with finding feasible methods to manage the general expenditure allowance; invites the Bureau to take a decision until the end of 2021; stresses that the management of the general expenditure allowance should not lead to increased level of bureaucracy for members offices and Parliament's administration;

([16]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0123.

188. Highlights the fact that the 2018 Bureau decision on the general expenditure allowance stipulates that the Bureau will maintain this decision until the end of 2022 and will evaluate it on the basis of the experience gained during the 9th parliamentary term; regrets that the bureau continues to ignore the plenary's will expressed on numerous occasions ([17]) to further reform the general expenditure allowance, thereby actively preventing Members' expenses of Union taxpayers' money from becoming more transparent and accountable; urges the Bureau to immediately implement the Plenary's decisions from the 2017 and 2018 Parliament's discharge reports introducing changes to the rules governing the general expenditure allowance; stresses that any new voluntary and/or optional measures for greater transparency and financial accountability should not create unnecessary bureaucracy for Members and their offices;

189. Underlines that good governance is based on sound financial management and proportionality; invites the Bureau to take into account the cost-effectiveness and proportionality of any further investments and the benefits achieved through further expenditure of tax payers money and increased bureaucracy;

Annual report on contracts awarded

190. Recalls that the Financial Regulation lays down the information to be provided to the budgetary authority and to the public concerning the award of contracts by the institution; notes that the Financial Regulation requires publication of the contracts awarded with a value greater than EUR 15 000, a value that corresponds to the threshold above which a competitive tendering procedure becomes compulsory;

191. Notes that, of a total of 225 contracts awarded in 2019, 83 were based on open or restricted procedures, with a value of EUR 597,3 million, and 141 were based on negotiated procedures, with a value of EUR 208,5 million; notes that the total number of contracts awarded by negotiated procedures increased in terms of value as a percentage of the total value of contracts awarded from 6 % in 2018 to 26 % in 2019, as well as in terms of volume from EUR 35,86 million in 2018 to EUR 208,53 million in 2019;

192. Notes the following breakdown of contracts by type awarded in 2019 and 2018, including building contracts:

Type of contract	2019		2018	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Services	177	78 %	199	79 %
Supply	33	15 %	37	15 %
Works	13	6 %	12	5 %
Building	2	1 %	3	1 %
Total	225	100 %	251	100 %

Type of contract	2019		2018	
	Value (EUR)	Percentage	Value (EUR)	Percentage
Services	581 610 182	72 %	256 374 627	42 %
Supply	85 741 237	10 %	210 526 209	35 %
Works	135 211 526	17 %	133 431 628	22 %
Building	4 260 000	1 %	5 039 824	1 %
Total	806 822 945	100 %	605 372 288	100 %

(Annual report on the contracts awarded by the European Parliament, 2019, p. 5)

([17]) Discharge 2017: General budget of the EU - European Parliament, 26 March 2019; Discharge 2018: General budget of the EU - European Parliament, 14 May 2020.

193. Notes the following breakdown of contracts awarded in 2019 and 2018 by type of procedure used, in terms of number and value:

Type of procedure	2019		2018	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Open	82	36,44 %	89	35,46 %
Restricted	1	0,44 %	5	1,99 %
Negotiated	141	62,68 %	155	61,75 %
CEI list	—	—	1	0,40 %
Exceptional	1	0,44 %	1	0,40 %
Total	225	100 %	251	100 %

Type of procedure	2019		2018	
	Value (EUR)	Percentage	Value (EUR)	Percentage
Open	595 584 380	486 039 380	74	80
Restricted	1 735 269	0	83 433 046	14
Negotiated	208 533 296	26	35 859 040	6
CEI list	—	—	24 221	0
Exception	970 000	0	16 600	0
Total	806 822 945	100 %	605 372 288	100 %

(Annual report on the contracts awarded by the European Parliament, 2019, p. 7)

194. Regrets the fact that there have been 1 369 single bidder tenders among all public tenders for contracts for the purchase of goods and services by Parliament; notes that single bidder tenders carry a significant threat to the proper spending of public money; calls on Parliament to investigate the reasons for the apparent lack of competition and to take the necessary measures to prevent single bidder tenders in future procedures;

Political groups (budget item 4 0 0)

195. Notes that, in 2019, the appropriations entered under budget item 4 0 0, attributed to the political groups and non-attached Members were used as follows ([18]):

([18]) All amounts in thousands of EUR.

Group	2019 (1)					2018				
	Annual appropriations	Own resources and carried-over appropriations	Expenditure	Rate of use of annual appropriations	Amounts carried-over to next period	Annual appropriations	Own resources and carried-over appropriations	Expenditure	Rate of use of annual appropriations	Amounts carried-over to next period
European People's Party (EPP)	17 139	4 253	16 993	99,15	4 399	18 282	6 690	20 820	113,88	4 152
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)	14 611	4 807	13 705	93,80	5 710	15 792	5 863	16 888	106,94	4 767
Renew Europe (former Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe (ALDE))	7 721	1 627	5 510	71,37	3 838	5 823	1 824	6 033	103,61	1 614
The Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	5 573	1 388	4 585	82,27	2 376	4 478	1 579	4 669	104,27	1 388
Identity and Democracy (ID) (3)	3 244	0	1 629	50,22	1 615					
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	6 053	1 946	5 730	94,66	2 270	6 182	2 962	7 200	116,47	1 944
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	4 156	1 110	3 731	89,77	1 535	4 443	1 257	4 590	103,31	1 110
Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) (2)	1 851	1 915	1 508	81,45	0	3 829	1 828	2 725	71,17	1 915
Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) (2)	1 620	653	1 609	99,34	0	3 238	1 094	3 612	111,55	720
Non-attached Members	2 019	367	481	23,84	738	1 153	314	537	46,57	442
Total	63 987	18 067	55 481	86,71	22 482	63 220	23 412	67 073	106,09	18 052

Notes to the above table:

(1) 2019 was an electoral year and political groups submitted their accounts in two parts for each of the two semesters. For political groups that continued their activity after the 2019 European elections, the figures for annual appropriations and expenditures refer to the sum of both semesters.

(2) For political groups dissolved after the 2019 European elections, figures are for the first semester only.

(3) For political groups that did not exist before the 2019 European elections, figures are for the second semester only.

196. Welcomes the fact that independent external auditors for the political groups issued only unqualified opinions for the financial year 2019;

European political parties and European political foundations

197. Notes that the Authority was created in 2016 with the task of assessing registration requests, registering new Union parties and foundations, monitoring their funding and imposing sanctions in cases of failure to respect their obligations; acknowledges that it became fully operational in 2017;

198. Notes that 2018 was the first year of implementation of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 ([19]) in all its parts, especially with regard to the role of the Authority; observes that, pursuant to that Regulation, the Authority reviewed in 2019 for the first time, the accounts of European political parties and foundations relating to the financial year 2018;

199. Notes that in the framework of the 2019 European elections, the Authority, together with DG FINS, developed a set of principles to render operational the right of European political parties to campaign in European elections, while at the same time setting out its limits; acknowledges the practical difficulties created by the nature of the regulation and emphasizes the need for its revision; observes the automatic nature of sanctions and points out the need for enhanced proportionality and flexibility;

200. Welcomes the move from the Authority towards more transparency, which included the publication, for the first time in 2020, of its Annual Activity Report for 2019 without restriction on its release and the participation of its director in the annual hearing for the Parliament discharge held on 16 November 2020;

201. Calls on the Authority to ensure that information covering the registration and financial situation of European political parties and foundations, to the greatest extent possible, be made publicly available in a user-friendly, complete and updated manner;

202. Notes that, in 2019, the appropriations entered under budget item 4 0 2 were used as follows ([20]):

Party (2019)	Abbreviation	Own resources	EP final contribution ([1])	Total revenue	EP contribution as % of reimbursable expenditure (max. 90 %)	Revenue surplus (transfer to reserve or loss)
European People's Party	EPP	1 751 449	13 433 000	15 184 449	90 %	116 515
Party of European Socialists	PES	1 091 101	8 405 284	9 496 385	90 %	115 131
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	ALDE	851 728	4 848 119	5 699 847	90 %	801 704
European Green Party	EGP	539 667	3 471 165	4 010 832	90 %	603 669

([19]) Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (OJ L 317, 4.11.2014, p. 1).
([20]) All amounts in thousands of EUR.

Party (2019)	Abbreviation	Own resources	EP final contribution ([1])	Total revenue	EP contribution as % of reimbursable expenditure (max. 90 %)	Revenue surplus (transfer to reserve or loss)
Party of the European Left	EL	312 832	1 772 817	2 085 649	90 %	—
European Democratic Party	PDE	100 944	671 170	772 114	90 %	49 246
European Free Alliance	EFA	200 053	1 219 623	1 419 676	90 %	55 400
European Conservatives and Reformists Party	ECR Party	607 157	3 493 333	4 100 490	90 %	158 166
European Christian Political Movement	ECPM	140 512	1 000 214	1 140 726	83 %	—
Identity and Democracy party	ID Party	114 250	615 067	729 317	90 %	—
TOTAL		5 709 693	38 929 792	44 639 485		1 899 831

Notes:

Note ([1]): Composed of second part of 2018 final funding and first part of 2019 final funding according to the Bureau Decision of 18 January 2021.

203. Notes that, in 2019, the appropriations entered under budget item 4 0 3 were used as follows ([21]):

Foundation (2019)	Abbreviation	Affiliated to party	Own resources	EP final grant	Total revenue	EP grant as % of eligible costs (max. 95 %)	Revenue surplus (transfer to reserve or loss)
Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies	WMCES	EPP	622 669	5 971 543	7 433 520	95 %	255 171
Foundation for European Progressive Studies	FEPS	PES	662 446	5 142 293	5 906 538	92 %	—
European Liberal Forum	ELF	ALDE	202 565	1 798 601	2 114 273	95 %	90 914
Green European Foundation	GEF	EGP	79 513	1 368 333	1 484 738	95 %	—
Transform Europe	TE	EL	110 698	1 096 144	1 217 889	92 %	7 401

([21]) All amounts in thousands of EUR.

Foundation (2019)	Abbreviation	Affiliated to party	Own resources	EP final grant	Total revenue	EP grant as % of eligible costs (max. 95 %)	Revenue surplus (transfer to reserve or loss)
Institute of European Democrats	IED	PDE	23 261	421 786	472 185	95 %	—
Coppieters Foundation	Coppieters	EFA	84 666	534 179	618 845	95 %	38 624
New Direction - Foundation for European Reform	ND	ECR Party	253 558	1 636 452	1 995 962	95 %	—
Sallux	SALLUX	ECPM	23 537	365 590	448 654	95 %	3 282
Association pour l'Identite et Democratie Fondation	ID Foundation	ID Party	23 000	436 999	978 653	95 %	—
TOTAL			2 085 913	18 771 920	22 671 257		395 392

204. Welcomes the Commission's intention to review Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/673 ([22]) at the end of 2021, with a view to going beyond the current objective of addressing financing and transparency rules and easing the registration conditions under Article 3 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 and opening membership to all Union citizens to provide for a more inclusive representation of political parties active at the European level;

205. Notes with concern that several existing trans-national political parties active in European politics and represented in Parliament are not permitted to register officially as European political parties due to requirements listed in Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/673, consequently hindering the democratic representation of smaller political parties at the European level; suggests that in this view the Commission should make an ambitious reform proposal by the end of 2021.

([22]) Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/673 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 May 2018 amending Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (OJ L 114 I, 4.5.2018, p. 1).