

Brussels, March 2011

To whom it may concern,

My calls for modernisation of the Staff Regulations have caused considerable discussion and were commented on by many members of the Parliament's and the Commission's administration. I have compiled extracts of those mails and released them on my homepage in order to document - and continue the public debate.

As you will notice, there has been constructive criticism as well as ill remarks. I have taken note of these and take the opportunity to reply briefly to the most important points.

1. The results of the latest reform of the Staff regulations in 2004

I agree (and had pointed this out in my note!), that since 2004 'new arrivals' have to bear the entire load of the then reform. And I also agree that lowering the salaries at entry level endangers the competitiveness of the Union as an employer in certain areas. The protection of vested claims, which the last reform arrived at in consensus with the trade unions, took precedence over the question of a future-oriented design for the European Union. Yet, the last 'concours' counted 51,639 applications throughout the Member States, proving that the EU-institutions still count as an attractive work-place for many citizens.

2. Flexitime

I do not criticise flexible working hours as such, yet the additional leave linked to these, since this is in breach of Article 56 of the Staff Regulations. The Staff Regulations clearly provide that "overtime worked by officials in function group AD, and in function group AST 5 to 11 shall carry no right to compensation or remuneration". Further to that, it is rather doubtful, questionable and virtually impossible to put across to the general public that even top-paid officials are being granted additional leave.

3. Privileges granted in compensation of specific circumstances

Some respondents have justified the high salaries as well as privileges by referring to the specific circumstances which the officials have to face, e.g. their children's schooling problems. The corresponding advantages remained, however, without mentioning: Multilingualism and financial support throughout the EU-school as well as university studies. In comparison, expense per pupil p.a. at a European school is almost twice as high (at 11,414 EUR) as the respective expense e.g. at German schools (EUR 5,600). In addition, studying children of EU-officials are supported at 496 EUR per month and child. Again in comparison: In Germany, students with a low-income background (only) are being granted a maximum 670 EUR public students' loan one half of which is to be repaid upon completion of their studies.

4. 'Travel days' as mandatory compensation for difficult return connections to the country of origin

Itineraries quoted for Finland, Greece and Cyprus do not require a car. These countries are just as easily and comfortably accessible by plane.

5. Expatriation allowance in compensation of high cost of living

I have received a lot of feedback from Luxemburg-based staff indicating the very high cost of living. But, the expatriation allowance is not being paid for the higher cost of living at the place of employment alone, it is being paid in return of living abroad, for the working life. Were the expatriation allowance to compensate for the high cost of living, the residents should also be entitled. The compensation of living expenses thus results from the application of the "coefficient correcteur".

6. "Make a good example" and "abolish the MEP's privileges"

The MEP's remuneration compares to AD 9 of the EU staff remuneration grid. Many MEP's are not subject to the much lower EU tax but to the far keener national tax regimes - like their electorate. German MEPs are subject to national tax. In my case the amounts were 91,000 EUR in remuneration and in excess of 30,000 EUR due for income and church tax as well as solidarity surcharge.

The office allowance is used to pay for inter alia postage and other office cost in Brussels and Strasbourg, rent and related cost for an office in the constituency, communication and telephone cost and car-travel within the constituency.

Trips to and from the places of work and cost incurred for other missions are reimbursed at actual cost, and the daily subsistence allowance covers all expenditure at the places of work not related to the office. Every MEP is running on a 'five year contract' and has to report to his electorate as well as be re-elected.

Further to this, you will certainly have gathered that MEP's are pursuing their work until late on numerous occasions as well as on week-ends (since our electorate is only available in their free-time). And for all these long evenings as well as the various week-end appointments there is neither 'flexitime' nor - as goes without saying - overtime compensation.

7. The increase of the 'parliamentary assistance allowance' does not match the picture

I have strongly supported the increase of the budget for employing assistants in the MEPs' offices, to allow for creating a regular third posting there. Since it is my aim to perform my parliamentary work adequately and this is rightly demanded by the electorate, I need staff to assist me in fulfilling the tasks for which I have been elected. Thus, these funds go into the delivery of a service which may be of immediate effect vis-à-vis the citizens.

Being a Member of the European Parliament, I favour a strong and effectively working European public service. You have the right to decent pay. You also have to face change - a 37,5 hours working week for well paid EU-personnel, an annual return journey to the country of origin comprising leave to allow for more leave no longer stands the reality check.

Kind regards and once more thanks for your comments and feed-back which I will always receive in a most open manner.

Yours,

Dr. Inge Gräßle