



Brussels, 9 June 2016  
(OR. en)

10016/16

FIN 351  
INST 257

#### 'I/A' ITEM NOTE

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From: Budget Committee  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 7/2016: The European External Action Service's management of its buildings around the world  
- Draft Council conclusions

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1. On 11 May 2016, the Permanent Representatives Committee instructed the Budget Committee to examine the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 7/2016 entitled "The European External Action Service's management of its buildings around the world"<sup>1</sup> and to draw the relevant conclusions<sup>2</sup>.
2. On 9 June 2016, the Budget Committee reached an agreement on the draft Council conclusions annexed hereto, on the basis of a proposal presented by the Presidency.
3. It is suggested that the Permanent Representatives Committee advise the Council to adopt the draft Council conclusions in the Annex as an "A" item on the agenda of a forthcoming meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 155, 30.4.2016, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Doc. 8623/16 FIN 284 INST 193.

**DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS**

**on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 7/2016: The European External Action Service's management of its buildings around the world**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

1. WELCOMES the European Court of Auditors' special report on the assessment of policies and procedures for the management of EU delegation buildings by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and UNDERLINES that those buildings, according to the European Court of Auditors, generally meet the need of Delegations.
2. TAKES NOTE that the EEAS real estate portfolio in delegations was taken over from the European Commission.
3. ACKNOWLEDGES that the real estate constraints strongly depend on local markets and their specific legal systems, and that the fact of being present in more than 140 countries leads to a complex management of a heterogeneous building stock.
4. NOTES with concern that, in some cases, EEAS buildings do not provide best value for money due to allocation of surfaces per user in excess of the 2013 norm, to ownership of unoccupied buildings or to underrecovery of co-location costs.

5. REGRETS that, according to the European Court of Auditors, the space in most office buildings of EEAS delegations exceeds the building policy ceiling of 35 m<sup>2</sup> per person established in 2013, although ACKNOWLEDGES the progress made by the EEAS to reduce the average office space per person.
6. Recognising the difficulties in disposing of owned buildings no longer needed, URGES the EEAS to pursue efforts to sell or to rent out the unoccupied owned buildings in order to avoid the maintenance or security costs related to these buildings and CALLS ON the EEAS to report back to Council on progress of reducing the number of unoccupied buildings across the entire network.
7. WELCOMES the fact that the EEAS considers co-location as a strategic priority, and ENCOURAGES the EEAS to keep investigating possibilities for co-locations, including by creating space for synergy with Member State delegations when deciding on buildings and their facilities. In case of co-locations, CONSIDERS that the EEAS has to establish a consistent method for calculating the charges to EU Member States, EU institutions or bodies and organisations hosted in delegation office buildings and CALLS ON the EEAS to report back to Council on progress in this area.
8. URGES the EEAS to reinforce expertise in real-estate management at the EEAS headquarters and through enhanced inter-institutional cooperation, both for staff and information systems, while respecting the overall 5 % staff reduction target over five years<sup>1</sup>, to reflect the weight of the real estate expenses in the EEAS annual budget and the fact that the EEAS has arranged terms for borrowing up to EUR 200 million to buy real estate.
9. CALLS ON the EEAS, in line with the recommendation of the European Court of Auditors, to further develop a more strategic and rationalised approach and improve the planning in regard to its building policy that ensures efficient use of resources across the network.

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<sup>1</sup> As agreed in Point 27 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2 December 2013 on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management.

10. LOOKS FORWARD TO EEAS proposals to mitigate the impact of the exchange rate fluctuations on its infrastructure spending, bearing in mind that these solutions could be extended to other areas of expenditure denominated in different currencies.
  11. WELCOMES the fact that the EEAS has accepted most of the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors and CALLS ON the EEAS to consider the establishment of rolling medium-term plans for its delegations buildings to ensure appropriate alignment of office space with business planning.
  12. INVITES the EEAS to adequately follow up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in this special report and INVITES the European Court of Auditors to report on the progress achieved by the EEAS in the area of the management of EU delegation buildings.
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