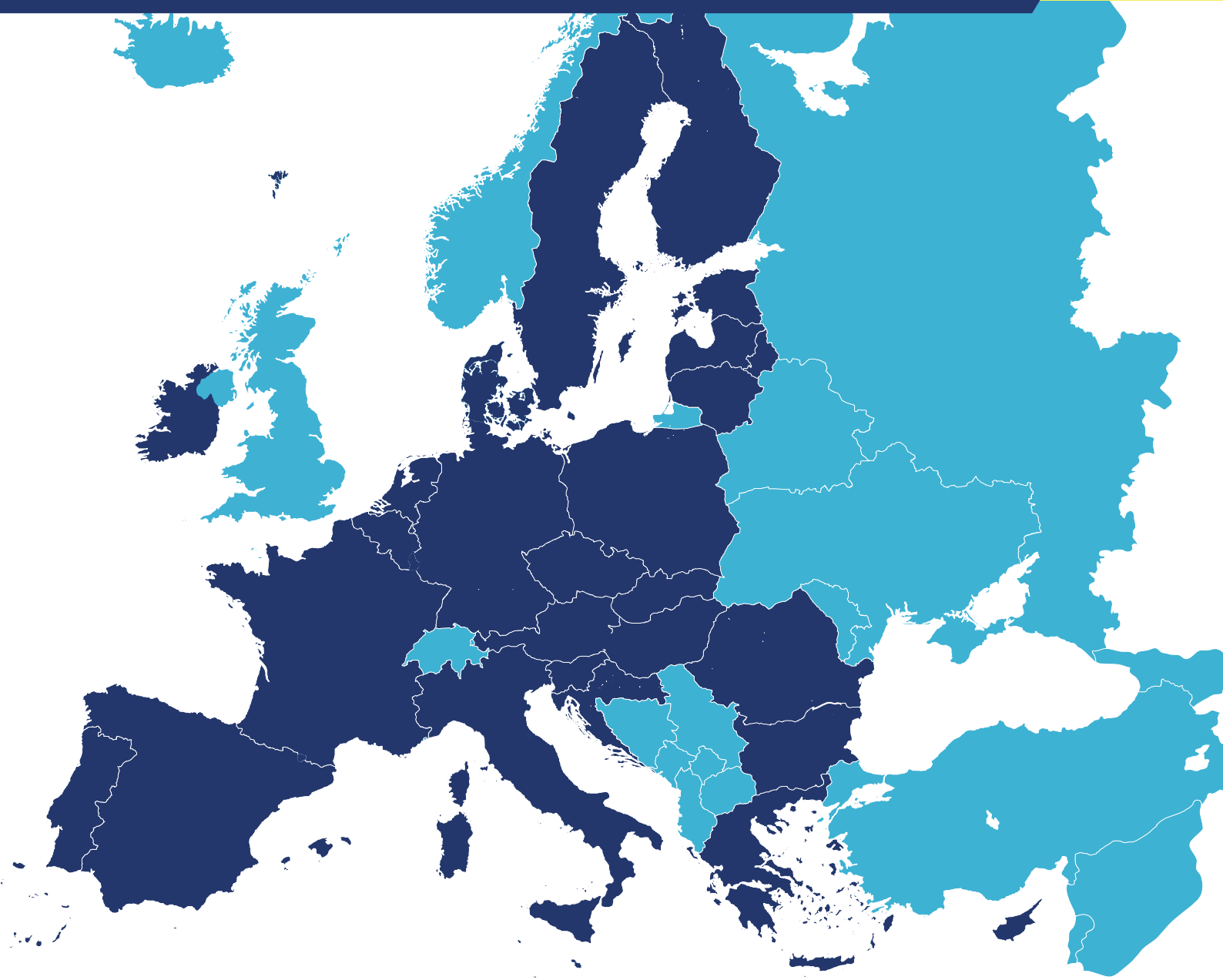# VOTE U4U LIST

THESES ON TELEWORKING IN THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

From 23 November, Local Staff Committee Elections, BXL

U4U, THE ONE TRADE UNION FOR ALL
THE STAFF OF ALL THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

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Union for Unity - Union pour l'Unité
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Preamble: *definitions and aims*

"Telework: Professional activity carried out at a distance from the employer thanks to the use of telecommunications": By extension, professional activity not linked by definition to a particular workplace.

Teleworking is not just about working from home. Teleworking can be done at home, in decentralized offices, in central offices, which can be either individual, collective and collaborative, or temporary (for visitors), or even abroad (in a limited way, e.g. for 3 weeks per year).

The aim of teleworking should not be first and foremost to make budgetary savings (even if that might be the ultimate effect); rather, it should be to enable staff to better accomplish their missions tasks and to achieve a better work life balance.

Telecommuting is also implemented to improve work efficiency. This implementation should not weaken the necessary cohesion within the European civil service, nor jeopardize the welcoming, integration, assimilation and training of new staff.

For U4U, teleworking is:

Voluntary / Reversible / Variable / Structured / Flexible / Supported / Controlled / Negotiated

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Voluntary: Essential point of all agreements between social partners at European level and in the Member States. Neither obligation nor constraint (save in exceptional circumstances such as a pandemic).

Reversible: a corollary of its voluntary character. One can choose to go back to face-to-face working practices.

Variable: More generally, teleworking can be chosen in a variable way: alternating weeks, mornings or afternoons...

Within a Structured Framework: a 40-hour week, "core time", time slots from 7 am to 7 pm, night work excluded (art. 56 of the Staff Regulations); particular attention to the possible porous boundaires between private and professional life, hyperconnectivity, and the risks of "overload" digital and otherwise.

Note: Arrangements to be put in place to allow teleworking abroad for longer periods in the event of grave personal necessity.

Flexible: Flexible implementation: differentiated needs, identified within sectors/units to meet the reality of businesses, sites, projects, teams, deadlines or crises.

Supported: The working conditions of civil servants comply with health and safety standards (article 1 sexies par. 2 of the Staff Regulations). Guarantee provide a specific place to work at home (ergonomics, lighting, furniture, etc.). Ensure that the cost incurred for the worker is covered.

Attention: Guarantee a sufficient supply of social services such as nurseries and daycare centers, or collective catering (work-life balance, mental health, work efficiency, cohesion, conviviality, etc.)

Provide training in new forms of leadership and in new ways of managing teams in order better to adapt to more autonomous and flexible ways of working by objectives.

Controlled/ Mastery: like any work organization, teleworking presents certain risks, which must be recognized in order to better control and/or support them:

- ► On a technical level:

  Study the emergence of a new culture of relationships at work within the continuum of hyperconnectivity. Evaluate its effects to correct any negative impacts (fragmentation of teams, overwork, overstrain, and isolation, etc.). Prepare and support the implementation with new training for staff and management, including training to avoid "digital overload".

- ► On a personal level:

  Particular attention to the overlapping of private and professional life. Balancing the two also depends on:

  (i) the establishment or maintenance of services to colleagues that meet their needs and

  (ii) the promotion of regular work rhythms that respect well-being.

  Ensuring flexibility in the workplace. Teleworking restricted purely to the home hinders essential human development needs, and even results in degraded working (and living) conditions.

- ► On an organizational level:

  Understand the fundamental importance of meaningful face-to-face work to ensure the training and cohesion of multicultural and multidisciplinary work teams in the European public service.

  Avoid the loss of learning/apprenticeship opportunities. These opportunities are also provided just by watching others perform their work. Prevent delay or even failure in integrating newcomers.

- ► Regarding motivation:

  Ensure that teleworking is not a form of flight from work at the Institutions, which would lead to isolation, and to losing a sense of well clearly defined and important indications can be lost. It is only by integrating the individual within a collective work context that we can give them the opportunity to thrive.

Negotiated: with social partners, staff representatives, and with the staff itself.

Learn from the experience gained. Teleworking offers an option rich in potential for the future. To be successful in its implementation, reason dictates that it should be considered on the basis of an objective evaluation of observed effects while also allowing the necessary time for reflexion. Its full success also depends on the ability and willingness of the Institutions to gain the support of all.

Context and challenges

The implementation of teleworking must result from the social dialogue between the social partners: this dialogue must first address this topic, and then the other themes related to it: real estate policy, catering in the workplace, systems of nurseries and day-care centers for children, travel to and from different workplaces, financial compensation for costs incurred in teleworking, respect for staff health and well-being in all workplaces, etc.

This social dialogue must be preceded by a discussion which is based on the provision of complete information. Consultative methods without discussion or prior information should be avoided at this stage.

It is important to understand from the outset the importance of meaningful face-to-face work to ensure the integration, training and cohesion of multicultural and multidisciplinary work teams in the European public service.

Indeed, the implementation of teleworking in the European context must take account of the cultural and linguistic diversity. It must not hinder the training of work teams, internal professional relations necessary for the treatment of files, nor exclude common workplaces for teams. On the contrary, it must allow for this and promote it by regularly organizing face-to-face work experience.

The challenge is also to avoid a decline in those learning opportunities that occur when staff can observe others at work. Another challenge is to avoid delays or failures in integrating newcomers.

All those who work in the European public service must be allowed to continue to support the European project and to ensure quality public policies. It is difficult to be working together, to feel equally committed, when working under two kinds of imposed working conditions: the double inconvenience of an ill-prepared system of hot desking combined with that of a home office isolated from the world and its diversity.

While teleworking offers rich potential for the future, it should only reasonably be considered after an objective assessment of the effects observed followed by sufficient time for reflection. Its full success depends on the ability and willingness of the Institution to gain the support of all. However much in favour of teleworking one might be, we cannot ignore those who have not expressed their grievances or are off our radar due to depression and/or their inability to adapt to the new working environments

Reactions to teleworking reveals a nuanced and complex picture in which work autonomy competes with inconvenient working conditions. Teleworking cannot be a quick fix or miracle cure. Badly implemented, it can even promote the feeling of isolation, fragmentation and loss of social bonds, or even the impossibility of creating such bonds. And all of this will inevitably have an effect on the quality of our work both individual and collective

Teleworking does not first and foremost aim at saving budgetary resources, even if this might be the subsequent result. Rather, it aims to enable staff to better accomplish their missions and, if possible, to better reconcile private and professional life. The savings should result from a specific discussion on this subject, as requested by the staff representation.

For us, the real estate policy is a consequence of the implementation of teleworking and not the reverse. For us also, teleworking is voluntary, reversible, variable, flexibly implemented, and decided at a decentralized level. Therefore, for us, the choice of workplace must make it possible to combine these places: at home, in decentralized offices, in central offices, which can be both individual, collective and collaborative, or temporary.

It should also be possible, within the same team, to operate in a hybrid fashion: some staff members working at home, others while on assignment in other workplaces, still others in central offices.

In short, the integration of teleworking into our work practices still needs to be thought without any preconceptions. The establishment of a new work culture requires taking into account different dimensions: spatial organization, but also temporal, managerial, relational… This is the goal of the 21 theses below which aim to consider its widesdpread use within the context of the European civil service with its specific population of expat staff.

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21 Theses

1. Teleworking is voluntary: It is an essential point of all agreements between social partners at European level and in the Member States. Those who do not wish to use it must not be forced to do so (apart from the situation of a pandemic) either openly or insidiously, by a real estate policy, for example.

2. As a result, teleworking is reversible. They can therefore return to working face-toface full-time.

3. Its implementation, within a defined framework, is carried out in the interest of the service, so as to allow staff to be more efficient in carrying out their tasks.

4. There is no longer any need to distinguish between occasional and 'fixed- timetable' teleworking nor even to consider its minimum duration.

5. The point of reference remains the 40-hour week per week. The adoption of flexitime must continue to allow staff to record (and recover) overtime worked.

6. Teleworking is variable and can be chosen in a variable way, for example, alternate weeks or mornings/afternoons.

7. Teleworking is flexible: Teleworking needs are expressed within sectors/units and take into account the specific nature of the professions and sites, the projects that are developed, the balance in the teams, the number of people interested, deadlines, or situations of crisis, and always in the interest of the service. Thus, specific exceptions must be made for certain professions. For example, in the case of interpretation, teleworking from home is not possible. Similarly, auditing procedures cannot be done purely via teleworking. In this case, we would envisage a long mission involving face to face auditing procedures followed by a report-writing period done via teleworking from home.

8. The practice of teleworking should not only be implemented from the staff member's home. This is because teleworking systematically at home hinders essential needs for human development, and even results in worse working conditions.

9. Teleworking should also be encouraged outside the home and even abroad, including in decentralized offices. At the same time, personal office space could be provided in the workplace.

10. However, let us not forget that serving officials benefit from working conditions which meet appropriate health and safety standards, at least equivalent to the minimum requirements applicable by virtue of the measures adopted in these areas in application of the Treaties (Article 1 sexies paragraph 2 of the Statute). It is also important to assure a specific workplace at home where good working conditions are possible (ergonomics, lighting, furniture, etc.) and checked.

11. The increases costs generated by working at home (transfer of the workload to staff) and maintenance costs are matters that need to be considered. The employer must address these concerns.

12. Time slots could extend from 7 am in the morning until 7 pm in the evening, with respect to the current "core-time". Night work must remain excluded except for occupations in which it is specifically required and are compensated for this (art. 56 of the Staff Regulations).

13. The implementation of teleworking must neither reduce nor remove social services offered such as crèches and day care centers, or canteen or cafeteria facilities.

14. In principle, teleworking abroad could be allowed in increments of a maximum of 15 working days (i.e. 3 weeks) per year. The implementation of this measure is subordinate to the interests of the service.

15. Arrangements should be in place to allow teleworking abroad for longer periods in the event of exceptional personal circumstances.

16. Teleworking leads to more autonomous and flexible working practices managed by objective. This could prompt a change in the management of teams and the forms of leadership.

17. Its implementation must be preceded and accompanied by new training for staff and management, including training to avoid "digital overload".

18. It is important to avoid the incursion of professional life into private life and vice versa. Achieving proper work life balance on the one hand depends on the establishment of social services for colleagues which meet their needs; and on the other hand, on the implementation of regular work rhythms which respect personal well-being.

19. The new culture of hyperconnectivity in the work context must be studied and its effects scrupulously evaluated in order to correct any negative impacts (e.g. fragmentation of teams, work overload, isolation, reduced ability to maintain concentration on extended work tasks etc.).

20. Teleworking, especially where done from abroad, must not become a means of avoiding the workplace and the experience of working in teams, which would lead to isolation, a loss of the sense of purpose in the tasks assigned and a loss of connection with the Institutions. The work assigned to staff becomes less welldefined when you have no contact with colleagues other than through your screen. Whereas individual work can only be effective when it is part of a collective team effort.

21. The real estate policy is the consequence of the implementation of teleworking and not the reverse. Let us specify at this stage a framework which reflects this vision. If teleworking is to be voluntary, reversible, and variable, then its implementation must be flexible and decided at a decentralized level. In addition, the choice of workplace must allow for hybrid solutions according to the needs and priorities of the service: at home, in in central or decentralized offices, individual, open-space, or hot-desking, or for temporary or occasional use. It should also be possible, within the same team, to operate in a hybrid fashion: for some at home; for others on assignment in other workplaces; for others still, in central offices.

    Finally, proper evaluation of the experience of the first open workspaces in, for example, OIB, PMO, DIGIT and DG SANTE (in Grange), and its effects on absenteeism and staff motivation is crucial, before the practice is continued and made more widespread.