

UNION SYNDICALE - FFPE

March 2021

A SOCIAL, INCLUSIVE AND GREENER COUNCIL

Canteens



Green(er), more social canteens selling quality food at affordable prices

Our canteens have undergone important renovation and revamping in recent years, and we acknowledge and welcome all the improvements made so far. Good new products have been included at the canteen counters and in the GSC vending machines.

The ongoing COVID-19 situation may have temporarily halted other projects aiming to improve the quality of canteen catering and to include more organic and locally-sourced food. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** expect further progress to be made in the course of 2021.

We ask that continued **priority** be given to the following measures in the canteens:

- clearly displayed information on the origin and characteristics of the products used, in particular for meat and fish, vegetables and fruit (traceability);
- preference for locally-sourced products with a limited carbon footprint whenever possible (with information signs indicating this);
- progressive introduction of organic products in the canteens and an enhanced offer of fresh and natural products (unprocessed or only lightly processed), with no added sugar or salt;

- introduction of additional options to facilitate dietary requirements (lactose, dairy and gluten intolerance);
- regular monitoring of progress in the implementation of the commitments made on catering ;
- vending machines stocked with organic/natural/sugar-free products (drinks and snacks).

Prices have become too high in the canteens, with the result that it is sometimes cheaper to eat elsewhere. This issue affects colleagues on low salaries, in particular.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** ask for prices to be determined by the cost of the ingredients, as was the case in the past. We also propose the introduction of differing, fairer pricing rates based on the users' salary grades.

We should also remember our contract colleagues working in the GSC canteens. Outsourcing has been the rule for more than a decade in the GSC and this has had negative consequences for the canteen staff who are employed by an external company. To combat the increasing precariousness of the GSC workforce and in the interests of solidarity, we propose a return to the **principle of "insourcing"** and the use of permanent contracts.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** consider that the canteens should not be administered by our employer alone. The canteens have a social role and are financed to a large extent by the users. We would therefore like the canteens to be managed jointly by the Administration and the Staff Committee.

Staff members looking after a person with a disability

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** believe that the Staff Committee needs to be more active in supporting colleagues caring for a person with a disability. The reactivation of the Disability Support Group in the GSC has been a positive step. The spirit of this positive dynamism should be widened, in particular in the current exceptional situation which puts more strain on staff members. We will also defend the principle that each case has its own specific characteristics and so should be dealt with individually.

Retired colleagues



Many retired colleagues keep in touch with other retired colleagues and with colleagues still in active employment. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** recognise the importance of this in social terms and will reinstitute the practice of holding of 2 meetings a year for our retired colleagues. Such meetings can provide a good basis on which to bring to the fore the issues and concerns of retired colleagues. We will also work to see whether retired colleagues may be given access to Domus and how retired colleagues can be involved in initiatives such as "Back to School" and "Back to University".

Crèches and childcare facilities

Nursery age children (up to 4 years old) at the Council have a very beautiful, high quality crèche. For now, it has enough places to accommodate almost all the children whose parents request a place. This is a very positive aspect of our social policy and is key to finding the best possible balance between work and family obligations.

There is, however, an anomaly that **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** wish to address: the parental contribution to the running costs is calculated by taking family allowances into account. In the Member States, this practice is not found anywhere else in the crèches sector. Our view is that family allowances should not be used to finance the crèche. In this regard, we wonder whether the crèche could be free of charge - increasing numbers of Member States and regions have been providing such places free of charge. Why shouldn't the Council?

After-school and outdoor childcare facilities are managed by the OIB (Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels) for children of parents working in the EU institutions in Brussels. The main problem is the lack of capacity. The OIB should allocate far more resources to this sector to meet the demand. We would like to bring this about through the Council staff representative on the Committee on the Management of the Early Childhood Centre.

Sports and Leisure Centre



Our Sports and Leisure Centre, which is directly managed by the Staff Committee, has been closed for a long time because of COVID-19. This was inevitable.

When it is possible, the Centre's reopening will again allow it to play its crucial role in the health, relaxation, development and social life of its many users.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** wish to continue developing more sports and cultural activities, so as to meet the needs and wishes of staff.

In addition, we want to negotiate with the administration the right for staff to do two hours of sport per week during working time. This is essential in the long term in order to promote health, and will have a great benefit in terms of our productivity. It's a win-win.

Health insurance



We have health insurance (JSIS) and accident insurance cover, guaranteed by Articles 72 and 73 of the Staff Regulations.

However, the regulatory texts are somewhat outdated, and certain societal developments or advances in research and medical practice are not reflected in these.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** wish to help update these texts through the work of the Management Committee for Sickness Insurance, on which the Staff Committee has its representative.

We believe that it is legitimate and vital to ensure better health and accident insurance cover for colleagues covered by JSIS.

A provisional assessment of the shortcomings of our health insurance reveals the following:

- Insurance cover for care needs (either because of old age or disability) is insufficient .
- Reimbursement of costs due to a disability, and which are not directly medically-related, must be guaranteed.
- Reimbursement of costs for complementary and alternative therapies must be improved.
- A genuine, preventive rather than a purely curative approach, which is in line with EU public health policy and recommendations, should be developed. For example, all recommended vaccines should be free of charge.
- The definition of 'serious illness', giving entitlement to full reimbursement of costs, must be reviewed. Any essential treatment should be free of charge.
- Reimbursement of costs due to psychological and mental illnesses should be improved.
- Reimbursement ceilings must be updated and indexed. This needs, for instance, to be applied to certain dental and implant costs, the reimbursement ceilings for which are too low and do not take actual costs into account.

Moreover, **the health insurance fund should be managed jointly between employers and members, who co-finance the fund.** At present, all decisions are taken unilaterally by the PMO or the Appointing Authorities, after the Management Committee has issued a purely advisory opinion. Staff representatives are on this Committee and should - as representatives of members - have as much say as employers.

Carry-over of annual leave



As a rule, according to the Staff Regulations, any day of leave not taken within a calendar year is lost, with the exception of 12 days, which can be carried over to the following year.

Leave days that could not be taken owing to the requirements of the service may be added to the 12 days carried over.

A few years ago, the Court held that these excessively restrictive rules violate employees' fundamental rights. If a colleague is prevented from taking annual leave on account of a long medical absence, he/she must also be able to carry over the leave not taken.

The GSC has applied this ruling very restrictively, limiting it to cases of long-term sick leave only. It has so far refused to apply this to cases of maternity leave, parental leave, etc. However, such leave is also beyond the colleagues' control, and may result in loss of annual leave.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** call for staff to be able to carry over their annual leave in these cases, too.

European Schools



The situation of the four Brussels European Schools remains precarious. They are massively overcrowded and there is reason to believe that category I pupils (in principle, the dependent children of officials and other servants of the institutions) will no longer be guaranteed a place in these schools.

Although there is a project in place for a fifth European School, which could help relieve the pressure on the system, its progress has been stalled and the Belgian authorities are often slow in addressing specific needs.

An additional problem is the issue of teaching provision, particularly in English. It will now be difficult to guarantee teaching by mother tongue teachers in the English-speaking section, as well as in subjects taught in English for pupils in the other sections. In addition, and since the start of the pandemic, several sections have struggled to find teachers interested in a secondment in Brussels. This raises the wider question of the attractiveness of working conditions for teachers in the European Schools.

Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** propose that the Council's Staff Committee become actively involved in addressing these problems, thereby supporting the parents' associations. The Staff Committee would do well not to continue leaving the Commission's Staff Committee to handle these matters on its own. The issues also need to be tackled head on by the Council's Staff Committee.

Further strengthening of the GSC's anti-harassment policy through tackling psychosocial risks



Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** acknowledge the good progress made by the GSC in raising awareness about harassment and inappropriate behaviour. We welcome the zero tolerance policy¹ pursued by the Administration, consider this to be the right approach and greatly value the work of the Healthcare and Social Services Unit and the anti-harassment counsellors². The unions and the Staff Committee are also approached by colleagues on these matters and work hard to advise colleagues on who can provide the best help. Legal advice is provided in the most serious cases.

Harassment thrives in silence, so we want to remain vigilant and build on the improved arrangements and response to such cases in recent years. We would like the GSC to take a further step in strengthening its **preventive** approach³ and in ensuring that any behaviours which could lead to harassment are quickly and effectively stopped.

Our proposal

A practical way to tackle the sources of inappropriate behaviour, whilst strengthening staff wellbeing, would be to take up a recommendation from the **2018 Ombudsman's Report on Dignity at work in the EU institutions and agencies**⁴ and include the key risk factors specified in the recommendation in the GSC's Psychosocial Risks (PSR) Survey.

The recommendation refers to *"adverse working conditions that increase the risk of harassment, such as stress, heavy workload, workplace conflict, a lack of clear roles and poor managerial practices"* that need to be *"mitigated"*.

And one *"key"* mitigation measure is to carry out *"regular assessment of psychosocial risks at work"*, i.e. surveys such as the GSC's own PSR Survey.

¹ <https://domusportal.consilium.eu.int/en/supportandservices/Pages/psychologicalandsexualharassment.aspx>

² <https://domusportal.consilium.eu.int/news/Pages/20200717-GSCNews-New-anti-harassment-counsellors.aspx>

³ https://domusportal.consilium.eu.int/news/Pages/20200924gscnews_preventing_harassment_training.aspx

⁴ [Report of the European Ombudsman on dignity at work in the EU institutions and agencies: SI/2/2018/AMF | Report | European Ombudsman \(europa.eu\)](#)).

Based on the findings from the PSR Survey, the GSC should then take appropriate measures to tackle these (and other) risk factors. The PSR Prevention Plan⁵ is a good tool, but we would like the measures to be strengthened and communicated more regularly to staff.

Why do we want this addition to the existing GSC PSR Survey?

As GSC management and the Staff Committee recognise, **prevention** is far better than cure: harassment and inappropriate behaviour need to be tackled at their roots in the interests of general wellbeing, a healthier atmosphere and better working conditions. The Ombudsman's recommendation identifies specific types of adverse working conditions which can - if they are not rooted out - increase the risk of inappropriate behaviour and harassment. Including these specific risk factors in the PSR survey will help the GSC to take an objective look at how it operates as an employer, how managers are dealing with their staff and how conditions can be improved through mitigation measures.

How often should the risk assessment be made?

The Ombudsman suggests conducting a "regular" assessment of psychosocial risks. We would like this to be done once every two years, so that the stakeholders (both the Administration and staff representatives) can keep a close eye on the key risks to staff wellbeing, whilst raising general awareness.

To be clear, we would like increased resources to be allocated by the HR department, so as to ensure that the valuable GSC survey and follow-up on psychosocial risks (PSR)⁶ are carried out on this biannual basis.

⁵ https://domus-docs.consilium.eu.int/Documents/HR%20and%20Admin/Other%20documents/2020_064_Psychosocial_Risks_Booklet_210x115_EN_13_acces.pdf

⁶ https://domus-docs.consilium.eu.int/Documents/HR%20and%20Admin/Other%20documents/2020_064_Psychosocial_Risks_Booklet_210x115_EN_13_acces.pdf

Risk factors to assess⁷ in the PSR survey:

1. "Lack of clear roles and poor managerial practices"

Various situations and problems are avoidable through better management at a senior level as well as through improved and more rational allocation of management responsibilities.

Frequent restructuring of services has the potential to generate some confusion and exacerbate pressure on both staff and managers:

- the merging of units under a single manager, who may as a result be faced with overwhelming tasks and/or may not have sufficient time or other resources to offer adequate guidance and support to individual staff members;
- "delaying" processes leading to a lack of clear hierarchical lines and roles, as well as potential disconnection between managerial and reporting lines;
- the rotation of administrators, which may lead to mismatches between the administrator and the receiving team;
- the rotation of managers - a process that can lead to situations where the new manager(s) know little or nothing about the subject matter dealt with by the unit(s) concerned; this can cause stress for colleagues who know the job and feel they are left with the main burden or responsibility and can be a source of unnecessary stress for the managers themselves.

Other factors also have the potential to generate tensions in the workplace:

- cases in which "acting" Heads of Unit do not have full power to intervene in difficult situations. This can lead to confusion, stress and lack of support for colleagues under their (partial) responsibility;
- in some cases, the lack of adequate recognition and acknowledgement of the key and specific role of AST/SC colleagues;
- increasing work pressure on ASTs as a result of insufficient recruitment in recent years;

⁷ As identified by the Ombudsman.

- the confusion of AST and SC roles. This is a problem that has been specifically identified in LING. Clearer job profiles and clearer promotion and mobility possibilities are urgently needed;
- "mission creep": additional tasks and workload being imposed on or removed from colleagues, or unevenly distributed, with the result that colleagues are expected to do tasks they were not originally recruited to do and their expertise is lost for the tasks in which they are experts.

For its part, the Administration needs to measure these problems properly and address their underlying causes, including by **properly consulting staff**, where appropriate, and taking better account of all the staff concerned when preparing reorganisation and restructuring exercises.

2. *"Heavy workload" and related stress, burnout and possible mitigation*

Heavy workload for colleagues is partly due to managers expecting staff to deliver the same or an increased volume of work despite the recent staff cuts (at least 5% since the last Staff Regulations).

Unpredictable but regular high demand is a problem in LING, for instance, where gaps in staffing owing to retirement or mobility are filled fairly regularly by temporary appointments.

However, the problem of unpredictable and/or challenging workload levels is more general and more attention needs to be paid to staff wellbeing. Indeed, the recent Survey on Psychosocial Risks showed that 37% of GSC staff considered they were ***at risk of burnout***. This is a very high rate that should be seen as a serious warning. If confirmed as a trend, this would be unacceptable for the GSC as a good employer.

Though managers and staff members should try to accept their own limitations and strive for a good work-life balance, managers can play a key role by:

- allocating work as evenly as possible;
- recognising individual staff members' strengths and using these to improve team performance;

- giving timely and positive feedback and acknowledging work accomplished, focusing above all on encouragement, especially in staff reporting exercises (it works!);
- paying closer attention to staff concerns and needs, particularly when these are voiced openly (staff members are best placed to know when things are not working well);
- showing greater awareness: repeated absences and/or a high rate of staff turnover in units should be treated as a cause for concern (including by senior managers);
- managing their own stress levels better, in some cases, since the inability to do so coupled with inadequate empathy may lead to aggressive or insensitive behaviour, causing stress for the staff member/s concerned.

The Administration needs to address some of these problems and incompatibilities through improved professional development and mobility policies.

3. *"Workplace conflict"*

There is a grey area between harassment and abuse of power *or* insufficient intervention by managers. Though a large organisation will not be conflict-free, ***abuse of power*** should not be tolerated and must be stamped out in all parts of the GSC.

Sometimes pressure from others can be subtle and insidious. For example, colleagues may be strongly encouraged to do overtime even when this may cause serious difficulties in their work-life balance. They may also be asked to cover a range of extra tasks on top of their main responsibilities. In both cases, they may be led to believe, for instance, that refusing to engage in such "solidarity" may be viewed negatively in their reports and that their "teamwork" mark will be downgraded. Or that, conversely, by making these extra efforts they will be rewarded in the reporting exercise. As far as possible, managers should try to be aware of and sensitive to colleagues' conflicting work and home-based responsibilities and to respect and protect everyone's work-life balance.

Poor task distribution can also cause tension between the persons affected. As mentioned above, this may sometimes be due to the appointment of "acting" Heads of Unit. This is an unsatisfactory situation for all concerned.

Harassment and/or abuse of power can, however, assume several forms, which are not necessarily easy to identify. These may include:

- attempts to manipulate persons and their opinions, unfounded accusations, insidious statements, defamation, intimidation, humiliation, infantilisation and discrimination;
- active and passive obstruction of work in various forms. Examples include contradictory instructions, retention of key information related to the person's core tasks, or attempts to undermine and ruin the reputation of staff members and to isolate them from their colleagues or hierarchy.

Such behaviour is intolerable. While we recognise that it is not the norm in our institution, there is never room for complacency. We therefore particularly welcome the recent efforts made by the Administration to raise staff awareness about this complex topic. We encourage the continuation and upgrading of initiatives on awareness-raising at all levels, as part of a strategy to prevent such behaviour and situations.

Proven harassment

Although identification and prevention of risk factors are important, we recognise that it is not enough to identify the most serious harassers. It is essential to effectively stop them. This is in the clear interest of the GSC as a whole and of its reputation as an institution.

We therefore expect the GSC to raise the awareness of all concerned, but also to impose effective sanctions against any persons proven to have acted inappropriately or who continue to do so. **In the case of a manager, it must be guaranteed that the person will no longer occupy a management position.** We welcome the 360° evaluations as one of the tools - if properly carried out - that could be used to detect inappropriate behaviour. If such behaviour is identified, immediate corrective measures, including coaching and compulsory training, should be taken to ensure that there is no impunity leading to repetitive patterns, and that the information should be passed up to the person's superiors.

SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY



The GSC encourages its staff to use sustainable modes of transport for journeys between home and work. This is in line with commitments made in its environmental policy. The aim is to reduce greenhouse gases and other pollutants resulting from the GSC's operation and activities.

The GSC's mobility policy is part of that of the Brussels-Capital Region, which has been implemented successively by the IRIS II plan (2010-2020) and the Good Move plan (2020-2030). The ultimate goal of improving modes of transport and the quality of the living environment in Brussels means: promoting sustainable ways of getting around (public transport, walking, cycling); reducing car traffic; reducing the resulting atmospheric and sound pollution caused by motorized transport - and its ill effects on human health. The GSC is also bound by the relevant [Brussels-Capital Region legislation](#), and the GSC transport policy is being implemented via the GSC's [employee transport plan](#).

The target set for 2020 was that 75% of journeys between home and work should be made sustainably. According to the results of the mobility survey in April 2020 (31% answer rate), the share of journeys made sustainably was above 75% and that of journeys made by car had dropped to 22%. Owing to the COVID-19 crisis, the Brussels-Capital Region authority has postponed its survey until 2021. It will be interesting to see if these trends are maintained.

The different elements of the current GSC's mobility policy aimed at encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport include:

The cost of public transport season tickets for the journey between home and work is partially reimbursed by the GSC under certain conditions ([Staff Note 4/16](#)). All practical information about benefiting from such a reimbursement can be found on the Missions unit's [reimbursement of public transport season tickets](#) web page. The reimbursement is subject to giving up the right of access to the car park.

Subscriptions to the bicycle rental schemes Villo! and e-Villo! are reimbursed at 100% ([Staff Note 4/16](#)).

There are **covered bicycle parking areas**, **secure lockers** and **toolkits** for minor bicycle repairs in all GSC buildings. **Electrical sockets** for electric bicycles are installed in the Justus Lipsius and LEX buildings.

The pilot project initiated in 2017 allowing staff to **recharge electric cars free of charge** (DE 19/2017) has been a major success. The policy was recently extended for an indefinite period (DE 41/2020). There are now charging points all GSC buildings, although their total number is still rather limited (7).

Car sharing with GSC colleagues may also be possible by registering on Carpool (<https://sgc.carpool.be/fr>).

The GSC's buildings are also accessible to persons with reduced mobility. The Froissart entrance at the Justus Lipsius, the Loi entrance at the LEX building are accessible to wheelchair users. All other access points are designed for persons with reduced mobility. However, they are not wheelchair accessible. Persons with reduced mobility are also entitled to a reserved parking space.

The **FFPE** and **Union Syndicale** have asked for a review of the existing scheme for reimbursement of staff members' public transport costs for coming to work. The negotiations are ongoing, and we hope to have some new rules that can be applied from 2022 onwards. We are aiming for a much simpler system with substantially increased reimbursement rates. This is a concrete step towards a greener Council, helping to fight climate change, and is an important social measure.

In addition, **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** propose exploring a number of other improvements:

- provision of (electric) bicycles and/or scooters on a self-service basis;
- subsidies for the purchase of an (electric) bike or an electric scooter, particularly for staff on lower grades;
- increasing the number of charging points for electric cars.

Green Council (waste, water, paper, energy)



Union Syndicale and the **FFPE** welcome the positive record established by the GSC in environmental management. Recent achievements include reductions in paper, water, and energy consumption, the installation of solar panels and initiatives promoting the use of environmentally-sustainable modes of transport. In recent years, the GSC has achieved EMAS (Eco-Management Auditing Scheme) accreditation. The GSC has set a good example and we believe it can continue to make further progress in this area.

Waste management. The GSC has striven to optimize **waste sorting and recycling**. There are now new waste collection and sorting areas across all GSC buildings with, for instance, plastic, metal, drink cartons, paper, cardboard and glass recovered for recycling purposes. Organic waste collection has been introduced in the canteens and kitchens, too. We see opportunities for further improvement and the recovery of other materials and waste.

Waste reduction. The GSC also deserves recognition for its success in **reducing waste**. Staff are encouraged to use their own mugs at coffee machines, eliminating the use of disposable plastic cups. More importantly, changes in work practices - for instance, reduced dissemination of paper documents at working party meetings, the increased use of IT and the introduction of network printers - have led to a drop in **paper consumption from around 355 tones in 2010 to 98 tones in 2019**. Teleworking will doubtless lead to a further drop in these figures. The GSC has cut costs and made significant financial savings. We see a chance for still more progress in this area.

Responsible sourcing / procurement. We welcome the GSC's initiative in establishing contracts with suppliers specialized in the **repurposing** of used furniture and computer equipment and in its sourcing of recycled paper. Such measures are environmentally sound, save resources and trees and reduce CO2 emissions. We will continue to press for and encourage innovation in this regard.

Responsible environmental management of the JL patio gardens. This has undoubtedly helped improve the GSC environment and staff well-being. Measures include the creation of a wildflower area and the introduction of "insect hotels" and nesting boxes in one of the gardens. We see the opportunity for further improvements.

For instance, these gardens - and the area to the rear of/between the JL and Europa buildings - offer scope for:

- the creation of a herb garden;
- the addition of flowering plants such as lavender, asters, dandelion, clover and purple vetch, improving the habitat for solitary bees, butterflies and ladybirds;
- the planting of rare, traditional fruit cultivars (apple, pear and plum trees) and berry bushes;
- the planting of trees native to and symbolic of EU Member States. This initial *Eurowood* tree-planting project could set a good example for the EU quarter and beyond. There is a need to encourage municipal authorities (not just in Belgium) to turn post-industrial brownfield into green oases and the GSC is well placed to set a good precedent.

The LEX: the two redundant LEX patio areas (level 8) and the raised bed to the rear of the building offer space for herbs and wildflowers. For practical reasons, pots could be used on the LEX patio floors. The plants selected would be perennial and capable of thriving in the relatively shady conditions.

Children from local schools could be invited to take part in such gardening projects. This would add educational value and generate positive PR for the GSC.

The GSC's rain water collection systems ensure that approximately 330 000 and 600 000 litres of precious rain water are collected annually from the roofs of the Europa and LEX buildings, respectively. The water is used in the sanitary systems and for plant watering. This has cut costs and resulted in significant financial savings for the GSC. We would like to see more done to recover rain water from the roof of the Justus Lipsius building.

Energy consumption reduction and sustainable power generation have also reduced the GSC's environmental impact (depletion of resources and CO₂ emissions) and generated further financial savings. Examples of measures:

- improved regulation of heating during the winter and air-conditioning during the summer;
- automatic switching-off of office lighting and replacement of the lighting system in some parts of the car park;
- installation of cogeneration systems (LEX, Europa and JL). Such systems minimize energy loss, optimize the simultaneous generation of electricity and heat (used for hot water and heating) and cut energy use by 20 % ;
- installation of additional photovoltaic panels, with the percentage of green power in the GSC's overall electricity consumption increasing from 2% to 12% from 2010 to 2019;
- launch of a new, more energy efficient data centre.

Clean energy generation investment resulted in the GSC's CO₂ emissions dropping by 659 tones in 2019. The electricity generated is used on site or fed into the distribution network. The Council is awarded green certificates (proportionate to the CO₂ savings made) which are subsequently **resold** to electricity producers in Brussels, resulting in financial gains for the GSC. We will encourage further innovation and initiatives in this area.

The EU Quarter suffers from high levels of atmospheric pollution owing to road transport / vehicle emissions: for instance, nitrogen oxides (NO_x - NO and NO₂), low level ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter (PM) benzene and other toxic hydrocarbons. The result is that legally permitted pollution limits are often exceeded. The impact on our health is negative (note: according to the EEA, air pollution accounts for around 400,000 premature deaths across Europe every year; this is in addition to the approximately 23,000 road fatalities recorded across the EU annually). Furthermore, nitrogen oxide emissions form secondary particles in the air, contributing to acidification and eutrophication and damaging the environment.

The EU states that it is addressing the problem in order to protecting its citizens and the environment. It is therefore vital that the institutions bring the maximum pressure to bear on the Brussels authorities to reduce the impact and dangers of motorized transport in the EU Quarter. The rue de la Loi is one case in point. At the same time the Schuman roundabout is one of the most photographed and filmed sites in the world - yet it projects a poor image of the institutions.

Proposals to pedestrianize a part of the Schuman square/roundabout area have been on the table for years, but continue to be on hold. Unfortunately, the current proposals make very little provision for any greenery. Instead the proposals are for a space that is heavily paved, which would compound the negative aspects of soil compaction, rain water run-off and drainage - problems that the European Commission has highlighted in its publications for many years. The planting of trees (as part of the Eurowood project) would improve the environment and air quality and offset many of the above problems. **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** will work with the administration to encourage the Brussels authorities to address and resolve these problems.

Finally, and as stated above, widespread teleworking has resulted in additional, significant financial savings owing to decreased water, paper and energy consumption (heating, lighting, air conditioning, lifts) in GSC buildings. Consumption, instead, has shifted to staff members' homes. In view of the above, **Union Syndicale** and the **FFPE** consider it reasonable for such savings to be used in the future to compensate and offset costs for staff, particularly those on the lowest salary scales, and to help offset hardship resulting from the pandemic outside the Council.

Nature at Work

*When you look all around
There's much we could achieve
To create more beauty,
More easily to breathe.*

*The place in which we work
Has empty open space,
Where nature might flourish,
And bestow upon us grace,*

*Where flowers could grow
In rich diversity
Giving calm, peace and refuge,
For the solitary bee.*

*This bee does not sting,
But helps to pollinate,
Saving flowers of rarity
From the Pearly Gate.*

*We could have an orchard, too,
Rare types of native tree,
Bearing fruit and taste,
In variety.*

*Bird song would soothe,
The air would be more fresh,
We would work better,
And suffer less from stress.*

*Above all we could,
With nature all around,
Dissipate blind prejudice
And our critics thus confound.*

(Michael)