



USHU Newsletter

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The unexpressed journey of a staff member in an EU Delegation



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TO HOPE IN VAIN!

There is always hope, and there is hope for the future. Hope is necessary for every moment and under every condition.

Various sources define hope as "**anticipating something good to come in the future**", an "**optimistic state of mind**" based on positive expectations with respect to events and circumstances. That feeling that keeps us going when the odds are stacked against us, when we want something to happen and we believe it is possible or likely....

This short and **permitted four-letter word** is so close and common to everyone's heart. It is caring, promising, daring, loving and looks forward to the future with positive energy, expectation, desire, anticipation, assurance, etc.

Part 1 : The beginning

It is impossible to recall when and how many times I have not hoped. When I joined the EU Delegation in Nepal back in 2003, there was no limit to my happiness and my hope for my professional career. Indeed, it was with **great pride and honour** that I accepted to work for the European Commission, this prestigious institution. I was so excited but equally nervous to enter the EU Delegation offices on that very first day. Back then, we were a small team, **only 9 staff**, housed in a three-story residential building with limited facilities.

When I entered my office so many years ago, my hopes were dashed... I had had overwhelming hope for adequate working conditions because I was of course entering the **prestigious EU offices**. Also, I strongly believed in the need for adequate office space as a condition for a sound working environment, where individual and teamwork increase productivity and help us all to work in a more effective and efficient manner. A **convivial working environment** promoting good performance and results, increased well-being and avoiding unnecessary stress and conflict among colleagues.

Part 2 : The transition

I was bolstered by news in 2004 that there would be new ample and spacious office premises. Once I had hope there would be a suitable working space for each and every one of us whatever our staff category as we are all valued members. Finally, when we moved, my hopes were swiftly swept away. The office space allocated to me was

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no better than the previous one. No privacy to work on project files, visitors entering and exiting constantly through my allocated space, including a personal driver, gardener, friends, contractors, and other service providers. **My office was effectively a thoroughfare!** A passageway leading to another colleague's office despite the larger, new rented office premises. Clearly, no needs-assessment was undertaken and little thought given to individual professional needs.

However, hope did not die as there were discussions to construct an annex given that our new office was again fast becoming inadequate for the increasing numbers of staff. Hope faded fast as plans to construct a new annex were inexplicably abolished.

Cleverly however, a former "garage" was converted into a new "annex". Unsurprisingly, the first staff to be relocated from the main building to the annex was a Junior Professional and two local agents. Garage shutters were replaced by windows and doors, with flimsy partition walls (some were bricks and some with simply plywood). Small offices of 6.6X2.7 meter² were offered with little/no natural light.

Following the annex, additional pre-fabricated blocks were installed to establish the Finance and Contracts section as well as accommodating ECHO on the Delegation premises. **A tiny toilet** (2.2X1.3 meter²) was constructed with minimum facilities - no soap dispenser, no tissue paper to dry hands. Again, we had a reason to hope when there was still a plan to re-define and re-allocate work responsibilities and spaces upon implementation of the Lisbon Treaty.

As expected, I was also relocated to an office, in a so-called new "annex" building. **It had water dripping from the ceiling constantly with a bucket strategically placed below to collect the leaked droplets.** A second colleague had no option other than to locate herself/himself next to the entrance to avoid being sprinkled.

Our working conditions meant that we were often over-argumentative. We did not welcome colleagues to our "offices". **We quarreled** especially during the bitter cold winters as we argued incessantly over whether to leave the entrance door ajar or not.

From 2004-2017, "improvement" works never truly stopped with significant investments in a rented building that was always playing catch up to our needs. Adequate office space for all remained elusive and did not appear to be an organizational priority.

Part 3 : The reality

Fast forward to 2017 when we were informed that the Delegation had purchased the former Danish Embassy, **a notable investment.** Finally, we would have our own building and ensure that the appropriate needs-assessment and proper working spaces would be ensured prior to any additional construction or renovation works. **This would lead to a suitable working environment, greater value for money, and a higher level of staff satisfaction.**

Unfortunately, history seems to be repeating itself as the participatory approach has been somehow overlooked during the planning phase. However, we hope that our voices will be heard and there will be a fair and professional approach to office space allocation.

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Hope is back on the agenda having been rekindled along with renewed expectations that all colleagues will finally have an appropriate working space to build a supportive working culture among colleagues, to foster professional excellence and to build friendly relationships in a content and stress-free environment where there is mutual respect and recognition.

In a nutshell, my and our joint journey of hope continues until we finally get settled into our new office spaces. If not this time, probably never again will my hopes be met during my professional lifetime at the EU Delegation.

Prestige will most definitely return both internally and externally to this great institution I hope!

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