Council of the European Union
General Secretariat
Directorate-General Communication and Information
The Director-General

2018 ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT

OF THE AUTHORISING OFFICER BY DELEGATION

For the attention of the Secretary-General of the Council

I. INTRODUCTION - MISSION STATEMENT

The Directorate-General for Communication and Information (COMM) communicates and informs on the role and activities of the European Council and the Council. The DG is the interface between the public and these institutions. It offers factually accurate, impartial and timely information about their role and activities and about EU policies.

Responsible for external communication, COMM 1 Media and Communication advises the European Council and the Council, their presidents and other related entities such as the Eurogroup. It serves them with communication infrastructure, services, and communication and information products of a quality which meet their needs and the needs of their media audiences.

COMM 2 Information and Outreach Directorate is responsible for engaging and informing the public - including through key multipliers such as non-governmental organisations, think tanks, academics, lobbyists, influential bloggers, government officials and students - about the work of our two institutions. The directorate contributes to the institutions' openness and public accountability by keeping records, creating and publishing archives and by implementing the institutions' obligations on legislative transparency and public access to documents.

II. PERFORMANCE OF DUTIES

A) PERFORMANCES/ACHIEVEMENTS

Media and Communication Directorate

In 2018 the **Media and Communication Directorate** experienced a very high level of activity generated by the policy agenda of the EU.

There continued to be intense media coverage of both the Council and European Council throughout 2018. In addition to the need to communicate the usual full range of activity of both institutions, there was a particularly high level of media interest in the Brexit negotiations, which added to the existing heavy demands on the directorate in its central role of providing timely, accurate and objective information to the media on the full range of Council activities as well as in offering communication support to its stakeholders.

Over the course of the year, the **Media Relations Unit** continued to be the main channel of communication to the media for 15 European Councils and other leaders' meetings, 75 Council meetings and 12 meetings of the Eurogroup, as well as communicating the outcome of negotiations with the Parliament, and responding to questions on a wide range of issues. Overall it organised over 230 background briefings and press conferences. It also provided press support for six bilateral summits (with China, Japan, Ukraine, Korea, Turkey and South Africa) which took place either in Brussels or in the partner country concerned, as well as a number of other high profile meetings such as the Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) and the EU-Western Balkans summit. There were also several informal meetings of leaders outside Brussels which required specific communications support from the unit. In addition to these corporate activities, the unit continued to provide direct assistance to the President of the European Council (in particular in his bilateral contacts and his participation in G7 and G20 summits), as well as to the rotating presidency, the High Representative and the President of the Eurogroup.

The high level of media interest in the EU led to a correspondingly heavy workload for both press officers and press assistants. This also came at a time when there was continuing pressure to expand our range of communication tools to include greater use of data visualisation and more innovative audiovisual material, as well as an increased presence on social media. This added to the demands on the unit.

Extensive media monitoring and analysis was provided to stakeholders through a range of products. Demand for specific media reports for the President of the European Council, as well as for systematic ad hoc monitoring of the media on particular topics, remained high. The number of staff of the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) subscribing to the main morning products also continued to increase. In 2018 a new contract for the provision of some media monitoring products was signed and revised arrangements were agreed with the Commission for the provision of press clippings, following its signing of an updated contract with an external contractor. The network of “correspondents” in six language units of the GSC continued to provide daily input for both the regular and ad hoc monitoring products, thereby enabling the Media Monitoring and Research Sector to offer more comprehensive and analytical products.

For the **Media Operations Unit**, there was a large number of events to handle during the year. The unit made an important contribution to the successful organisation of the second conference on ‘Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region’ that took place in April on Council premises at the request of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The most challenging period was probably the week of 15 October, in which we had seven summits back-to-back, including the large multilateral ASEM12 summit. The new Europa building, which became operational in January 2017, continued to require a considerable effort from all teams in the unit in order to streamline technical infrastructure, coordination and productions and to create a new staging model for events that makes good use of the improved visual opportunities in the building.

The Audiovisual Sector provided the necessary GSC host broadcast services to the media during the many ministerial meetings, high-level summits and activities of the President of the European Council during the year, delivering images and transmitting video and audio signals through host feeds.

Another important service provided by the sector was the live video streaming during the year of more than 404 webcasts, totalling around 430 hours of public Council sessions, press conferences, arrivals, doorstep statements, signing ceremonies and other events. The new possibility of streaming live on social media from our streaming platform was used extensively in 2018, totalling around 160 hours of live streaming on Facebook and Twitter of 29 public debates, 13 press statements by the President, 16 events related to the European Council, 7 international summits and conferences and 2 presidency events.

Furthermore, the sector produced a wide range of video content in many languages, such as video explainers, thematic clips, previews and highlights for each Council meeting. The sector also produced many video clips to support the President’s press and communication activities, particularly for his Instagram account, which became one of the most praised accounts among EU leaders. Many video clips were also produced for the presidency and for internal communication purposes. The sector provided comprehensive photographic coverage of the various events during the year, as well as many of the President’s activities.

The Council’s audiovisual infrastructure and production facilities were further upgraded and improved in 2018 in order to increase efficiency in operations, enhance signal distribution between buildings, including the European Convention Center Luxembourg (ECCL), and handle the increasing volume of video coverage generated by the many important media events as well as the growing demand by media for fast and high-quality (HD) video material illustrating the Council’s activities. Considerable preparatory work was done ahead of the launch of important calls for tenders in the areas of multilingual live video streaming (published end of December), video post-production platforms, and support and maintenance.

The Newsroom platform (tvnewsroom.consilium.europa.eu) is of high strategic importance for the GSC, as it allows the press and media to view, download and embed the Council’s video and photo output in high-resolution quality. Because of its strategic importance it was decided not to continue relying on external services and to undertake the renewal of the platform in close collaboration with in-house services such as COMM’s Digital Communication Unit and the Directorate-General for Digital Services (SMART). A preliminary version of the new solution was put into production in August and the work on improvements and new features was ongoing for the departments involved.

The press centre team continued to provide services to the media and delegations on the press centre premises, covering the two press rooms (in the Justus Lipsius and Europa buildings), the national press briefing rooms and the VIP entrances. The team also managed camera/photo pools for the audiovisual coverage of meetings and events. It took care of arranging branding of events when necessary. The team provided the same level of service during Council meetings in Luxembourg (in April, June and October). During the year the team also made the press accreditation system for summits more user-friendly and created a one-year summit badge to give the media easier access to Council premises. A number of visits for journalists and journalism students, new delegates and other visiting groups were organised during the year.

The **Digital Communication Unit**, which is responsible for the Council's external website and its corporate social media channels, worked to increase its audience on all channels (+9% visits on the website, +13% fans on Facebook, +26% and +92% followers on Twitter and Instagram, respectively). In addition, subscribers to the Council's emailing service, which the unit manages, increased by 19% compared to 2017, reaching a total of 43 600 users.

The unit successfully strengthened its approach to personal data protection. In a bid to improve reporting and analytical capabilities while fully respecting data protection requirements (even before the entry into force of regulation 2018/1725), the unit implemented a new digital analytics solution in cooperation with SMART. The tool combines a sophisticated tracking capability with the privacy-by-design approach towards users' data. The analytics solution that the unit had used previously was discontinued, with no impact on reporting capability and continuity.

The Digital Communication Unit managed the continuous development of the Council's website, in cooperation with SMART, deploying 24 sets of improvements to the website and its content management system, Umbraco. These included a redesigned version of a policy page, which constitutes the fastest growing content type on the website, with a 35% year-on-year growth in visits.

Following the accessibility audit of the Council's website carried out by a specialised contractor, the Digital Communication Unit drew up and started implementing an action plan, which aims to improve the accessibility of the Council's website by enhancing the user experience for people with disabilities. The rollout of the plan, which includes improvements to the website's design, code, visual elements and editorial aspects, will be completed by the end of Q3 2019.

In order to offer users an ever better online experience, five user research activities were carried out in 2018, including one online survey, one on-site survey (with journalists) and three usability tests. The results of the online survey showed an increase in the overall satisfaction level of users visiting the Council's website, which rose from 73% in 2017 to 75% in 2018. Furthermore, a new tool that improves the collection and analysis of qualitative data was identified and would be implemented by the end of Q1 2019.

In 2018, the Digital Communication Unit increased its efforts to promote the Council's activities on corporate social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, running over 100 targeted campaigns. It also tested promotion campaigns through

Google Adwords. Social media analytics efforts were expanded by producing new analytics reports.

To support visual communication efforts, the production of scroll stories and infographics was scaled up. More than 100 infographics, over 30 social media visuals and a number of animations were created in 2018. Interactive infographics were developed and published on the Council's website for the first time. In addition, the unit published three highly visual "scroll stories" on the following topics: impact of the Maastricht Treaty, the EU's response to Brexit, and the Council's achievements in 2018. The unit also acquired and customised a data visualisation tool.

The Digital Communication Unit provided accurate and timely reporting by publishing quarterly and yearly analytics reports, all available on Domus. Digital trends reports were also published on Domus every two months.

Finally, the Digital Communication Unit worked to establish a new framework contract for digital communications activities, in cooperation with the EEAS, by drafting tender specifications, participating in the evaluation committee and drafting the final award report. The contract will be the main vehicle for financing the unit's activities for the next four years.

Information and Outreach Directorate

Finalising the creation of, and subsequently inaugurating the Council's Visitors' Centre, was one of the **Outreach Unit**'s main projects and achievements in 2018. The project required a careful allocation of human resources, in close cooperation with other GSC departments and a number of external contractors. The construction works on-site were finalised towards the beginning of 2018. The installation of the multimedia equipment, the design of the interfaces and the creation of content took place in parallel with each other. The Visitors' Centre opened on 18 July 2018. Since its opening, the Visitors' Centre received approx. 3 600 visitors. The centre helped diversify the GSC's portfolio of visitor experiences, through interactive activities and an immersive multimedia experience. Initial qualitative feedback was very positive, most of the visitors expressing their appreciation for the way the information was structured and for the overall quality of the available content.

Through its visits service, the Outreach Unit welcomed 18 314 visitors in 579 groups in 2018 (compared to 20 185 in 2017 and 14 939 in 2016). Presentations were delivered by GSC officials in the native language of the groups whenever possible. The successful 2018 Open

Day once again helped bring the Council of the European Union closer to citizens, welcoming an unprecedented 8 500 visitors. Guided tours of the new Europa building, given in several languages, allowed visitors to walk in the footsteps of their heads of state or government and thereby experience the places in which key decisions for the EU are taken.

Three other events were organised by the Outreach Team during the year, in cooperation with the presidencies of the Council of the EU. Education was an important topic for the Bulgarian presidency, which organised two events on education-related issues during the first half of 2018. On 11 April, together with the Bulgarian presidency and in the presence of Denitsa Sacheva, Deputy Minister for Education and Science of Bulgaria, and Tibor Navracsics, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, the Outreach Unit organised a conference entitled “Digital and Entrepreneurial Skills for Inclusive, Cohesive and Innovative Societies”. On 21 June, a second event was organised together with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: “Towards a European Education Area – Promoting Common Values and Inclusive Education”. A third event was organised in December, during the Austrian presidency and in close cooperation with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, namely a launch conference for its second survey on antisemitism.

Between 8 and 11 October, the Outreach Unit was present at the European Week of Regions and Cities exhibition, organised by the European Committee of the Regions, representing the Council at its stand and interacting with participants in the event.

On 30 November, a day before Romania’s national day, the Outreach Unit organised a concert with the Romanian choir “Sound”, which received great feedback on the Council’s Facebook account.

The public information service continued to provide the public with quality information while respecting the 15-day reply deadline and answering in the 24 official languages laid down in the GSC’s code of conduct. It handled a total of 3 148 emails, 618 telephone calls and 798 letters. More than 1 205 replies were prepared on behalf of the President of the European Council. The team also assisted the President of the Eurogroup and the rotating presidency in corresponding with the public.

The Creative Services Sector of the **Graphics and Publications Unit** continued to support the activities of the Council by designing and producing various publications and visual communication materials for external and internal audiences. In 2018, the sector produced one book, 28 brochures, 63 posters, 18 leaflets, 5 folders, 20 templates, 16 stationery products, 18 infographics and other visual material. The production of the Europa book, which is an exclusive publication to be offered as a protocol gift, was one of the sector's major achievements in 2018. The sector also contributed substantially to the exhibition about the Maastricht Treaty, including the design and lay-out of the exhibition panels. The sector launched a new product for in-house services: promotional branding campaigns (e.g. for Eureka). The demand for infographics continued to be high throughout the year. The service continued to provide a wide variety of information and visual material packages for events (including the Open Day), conferences (including two organised by the Bulgarian presidency), five European Council meetings, the ASEM summit (32 types of products were produced), the Syria Conference, and various activities organised by the Outreach Unit (including in relation to the newly opened Visitors' Centre). The sector supported in-house services with a range of products, while at the same time starting to offer tailored advice based on their needs. The sector increased efforts to provide templates for independent use with a view to focusing its work on external audiences in line with the communication strategy. The functioning of the sector was streamlined by new working processes drafted and implemented at the end of 2018.

Regarding distribution, printed publications were still in high demand. Distribution of publications from the Council increased by 18%. Overall, 160 808 copies of publications were distributed (from the Council and the Publications Office combined), which means an increase of 7%. The sector consolidated cooperation internally with the Web Team and the Outreach Unit and externally with the Europe Direct Information Centres (EDICs), Commission delegations and governmental organisations, among others. While downloads from the Publications Office's new portal continued to decrease (16 605 downloads), reflecting the portal's indexing and accessibility issues, downloads of Council publications from the Council website increased by 17% (31 836 downloads). During 2018, a user survey took place in order to better understand how the main audiences perceive Council publications and to assist in increasing their impact.

The Production Services Sector of the Graphics and Publications Unit continued to provide graphic material support for all departments in the GSC and for the Council. Working in close collaboration with the Creative Services Sector, it produced and designed layouts for different formats, such as brochures, leaflets and all kinds of graphic products. The sector assisted the holding of high-level events including European Council meetings, the Syria Conference and the ASEM summit, producing invitations, envelopes and all kinds of graphic products needed for those events. Additionally, the sector supported Council meetings, working parties, departments, secretariats, individual staff, etc. on a daily basis.

Several projects were produced entirely in-house by the Production Services Sector, such as the Consilium Journal, visual and material support for the events organised by the Language Library linked to the rotating presidency, a range of visual products for the administration (Social Service, Staff Development Unit, Buildings Directorate). Support was also provided to the Protocol Service on a regular basis, including the provision of material required for the organisation of meetings, such as invitations, folders, envelopes, and personalised books for ambassadors and retired staff, and the printing of photos.

The main activities of the Transparency Team of the **Information Services Unit** were**:**

- In the area of legislative transparency, the Transparency Team prepared 96 slides for displaying voting results in the Council's meeting rooms and on its website and issued 101 documents with voting results. The team also examined and released more than 1 020 legislative documents in implementation of Article 11(6) of Annex II to the Council's Rules of Procedure.

- As regards access to documents, the team dealt with approximately 2 500 initial requests and 29 confirmatory applications for public access to documents in respect of about 8 900 documents.

- The team organised targeted information sessions on access to documents for all political DGs. It also participated in information sessions targeted specifically at newly recruited GSC staff.

The Council Library continued to fulfil its mission to provide authoritative information resources and analytical tools to our institutions: newspapers, periodical publications, databases, news and information portals, books, as well as interlibrary loan and article delivery services. The annual subscriptions renewal exercise was completed on time. As of June 2018, the library enlarged its collection of e-books by implementing a new framework contract and started developing a demand-driven acquisitions programme for e-books.

The new library management system Alma and the resource discovery service Eureka were launched on 31 January 2018. The launch was followed by a series of presentations and training courses for both library staff and end users. The team also invested efforts in streamlining its acquisitions and interlibrary loan workflows in the new library system, including through the input of acquisitions data.

The library organised regular events and presentations to increase staff's awareness of e-resources and databases available in the institutions. The library team also continued publishing its monthly Think Tank Review and curating its special collection of EU-related papers published by think tanks worldwide. The library reached out to external audiences by promoting its collections and activities on its blog. The team continued to provide a reference and bibliographic research service to GSC staff and external researchers.

The activities of the Archives Team of the Information Services Unit can be divided into three main areas: (1) core business; (2) modernisation of the Archives Team's working tools; and (3) communication and modern outreach activities.

(1) The core business of the Archives Team was mainly focused on continuing to phase out paper archives and on the preparation of historical files for their final transfer to the Historical Archives of the EU in Florence. In total, 55 linear metres were organised and transferred to the Historical Archives of the EU and during 2018 new methods were developed to improve the transfer of metadata and digital objects to the archives in Florence. A new structure for the organisation of the files was prepared and for the first time an inventory was produced presenting an overview of all the holdings of the archives of the Council.

(2) The project for the replacement of the HICA database went ahead and the shortlist of systems chosen were evaluated and tested during the last months of 2018.

(3) The Archives Team prepared an exhibition to mark the 25th anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty, the first one produced entirely in-house, from the conception and design to the production of the physical structure. The exhibition received circa 6 000 daily visits from staff and visitors passing through the atrium of the Justus Lipsius building.

The Archives Team received and helped 29 visitors over 46 working days. 333 written requests were processed and answered, coming from 21 countries, other European institutions and internal GSC users.

In order to increase the visibility of the service, the Archives Team organised 16 group visits for newcomers to the GSC, permanent representations and external archivists. The Archives Team were also present at Open Day and contributed to the exhibition on 25 years of the Treaty on European Union.

B) HUMAN RESOURCES ALLOCATED FOR THE INTENDED PURPOSE

As of 1 July 2018, COMM underwent a major reorganisation, as part of the reorganisation of the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union. See Section I for the new mission statement. Consequently, the name of the Directorate-General changed too, from Directorate-General F - Communication and Information to Directorate-General for Communication and Information - COMM (shared service). The staffing level was also adjusted, with circa 100 staff transferred to other GSC departments. Concretely, the following changes were made to the DG's organisational structure:

1. Media and Communication Directorate:

- Within the Media Relations Unit, the Media Monitoring Sector was renamed the Media Monitoring and Research Sector.

- The Web Communication Unit was renamed the Digital Communication Unit.

2. The Information and Knowledge Management Directorate was renamed the Information and Outreach Directorate. Within this directorate:

- The Public Relations Unit was transferred from the Media and Communication Directorate and renamed the Outreach Unit. Within this unit:

  ° The Relations with the Public Sector was renamed the Visitors and Public Information Sector.

  ° The Public Information Office ceased to exist.

  ° The Publications Office ceased to exist.

- A new Graphics and Publications Unit was created. Within this unit:

  ° The Publications/Documentation Sector was transferred to this Unit and renamed the Creative Services Sector.

° The Technical Production Services Sector was transferred to this Unit and renamed the Production Services Sector.

- The Knowledge Management Unit was renamed the Information Services Unit. Within this unit:

° The Library and Research Sector ceased to exist.

° The Archives Office ceased to exist.

3. The following services were transferred from the former DGF to the new Directorate-General for Digital Services (SMART, shared service):

<table>
<tr><td>From</td><td>ex-DGF dept.</td><td>To</td><td>New name of the dept.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information and Knowledge Management Directorate</td><td>Document Processing Support Office</td><td>Customer Services Unit of the Digital Solutions Directorate</td><td>Support and Coaching Office</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information and Knowledge Management Directorate</td><td>Information Management Unit (except the Technical Production Services Sector)</td><td>Digital Solutions Directorate</td><td>Information Management Unit</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information and Knowledge Management Directorate</td><td>Innovation and Projects Unit</td><td rowspan="3">Digital Platforms Directorate</td><td rowspan="3">Document Services Unit</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information and Knowledge Management Directorate</td><td>Notifications and Official Acts Office</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information and Knowledge Management Directorate</td><td>Mail Office</td></tr>
</table>

In the course of 2018, the following managers were appointed:

Entity	Level	Due date
COMM.2 “Information and Outreach”	Director	1 October 2018

COMM.1.C “Digital Communication”	Head of unit	1 August 2018
COMM.2.B “Graphics and Publications”	Head of unit	16 September 2018
COMM.2.C “Information Services”	Head of unit	1 September 2018

COMM had the following human resources on 31 December 2018:

	Permanent staff	Temporary staff	Others	Total
Administrators	54.90	9.00	0.00	63.90
Assistants	109.25	3.90	0.00	113.15
Secretaries (SC)	4.50	0.00	0.00	4.50
Subtotal	168.65	12.9	0.00	181.55
Contractual agents	0.00	12.00	0.00	12.00
National experts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subtotal	0.00	12.00	0.00	12.00
+				
Total	**168.65**	**24.9**	**0.00**	**193.55**

Table includes all staff in place on 31 December 2018, expressed as full-time equivalents (FTEs)

Source: Staffing Office

C) FINANCIAL RESOURCES ALLOCATED FOR THE INTENDED PURPOSE

In 2018, COMM’s final budget, accounting for transfers implemented in the course of the year, was €9.01 million. As a consequence of the reorganisation described in chapter II.B, this figure was €2 million lower than the 2017 budget, which amounted to €11.04 million.

Of the final 2018 budget, an amount of €8.74 million, or 97.0%, was actually spent. This implementation rate was higher than in 2017 (95.7%); without Official Journal-related expenses, the implementation rate was actually 99.0%, stable in comparison with 2017 (98.9%).

There were no major differences between COMM's initial (€9.2M) and final (€9.0M) budget. In addition, the 2018 implementation rate for all COMM budget lines exceeded 90%, except for the following cases:

- Budget item 2211 'Official Journal'. Implementation on this budget line depends on many factors and is therefore highly unpredictable. Implementation depends, for instance, on IT infrastructure investments made by the Publications Office and on the actual number of pages published, which in turn is a result of political agreements reached in legislative procedures and of international agreements. In recent years, expenditure on this budget line has decreased significantly, mainly for three reasons. Firstly, in July 2013, the publication of the Official Journal became fully digital. Secondly, in the first half of 2014, the Publications Office concluded a series of new contracts with consistently lower publication prices than the previous ones. Finally, in the course of 2016-2017, as a new working arrangement between the Publications Office and the GSC, COMM permanently transferred to the Publications Office the indirect costs linked to the publication of the Official journal. As a result, appropriations on this budget line decreased from €5.47 million in 2013 to €0.78 million in 2018. Further adjustments were being made to achieve better implementation rates in the coming years, with a likely alternative being that the management of this budget line would be transferred to the Publications Office as of 2020.

- Budget item 2213 'Information and public events' of the Outreach Unit. Following the successful completion of the Visitors' Centre project (which required €335 000 instead of the €395 000 originally earmarked, a reduction of 15%), the implementation rate of 88.1% was also due to the restructuring of the Directorate-General, which did not allow for timely strategic decisions on expenditure linked to outreach activities, as well as the lack of appropriate financial vehicles. Furthermore, four different units in COMM had access to budget item 2213 'Information and public events'. If totalled at COMM level, the final budget of this item amounted to €4.83 million, €4.77 million of which was committed, equivalent to an implementation rate of 98.8%.

- Budget line 1203 'Outside services'. Very low value budget line which was deleted from COMM activities as of 1 January 2019.

Overall, €3 378 657 was carried over from 2017 to 2018, similar to the amount carried over from 2016 to 2017 (€3 234 739). Of the total amount carried over, 94.1% was implemented. The implementation rate remained below 90% for a small number of budget items, while the non-implemented part of the amounts carried over remained very small in absolute terms. In addition, 58.7% of the non-implemented amount was due to budget item 2213 ‘Information and public events’, and can be explained by the following points:

- This budget item is partly used for host broadcaster services. This is done by issuing individual purchase orders for summits and other high-level events on the basis of standard offers (templates for standard summit setups) or specific offers from our contractor (for atypical events). In addition to the amounts of the standard or specific offers we include a margin of around 10% in the purchase orders for unforeseen changes such as a longer duration of the event (e.g. the evening of the first day of a summit) or the event finishing later than originally planned because of the political discussions. While this practice eliminates the risk of having to issue purchase orders a posteriori, another risk arises: that the amounts carried over between years are not fully implemented. Indeed, the invoicing process for these purchase orders is time-consuming as the contractor has to gather data from the high number of people involved in the event and COMM has to verify and correct the draft invoices. This results in a lengthy process with one or more preliminary versions of the invoices exchanged between the contractor and COMM before the final verified version can be processed for payment. This means that final payments for events in Q4 are typically done at the beginning of the following year and that the purchase orders concerned can only be closed and their values be decreased after the financial closure.

- In COMM, four different units had access to budget item 2213 ‘Information and public events’. If totalled at COMM level, the amount carried over from 2017 to 2018 was €1 592 732, of which €1 456 669 was paid, amounting to an implementation rate of 91.4%.

The 2018 budget was implemented via the existing portfolio of contracts, plus 126 newly concluded ones. The number of contracts concluded in the course of the year was significantly higher than in 2017, when the corresponding figure was 71. While the number of newly concluded framework contracts decreased from 15 to 8, the number of direct contracts increased significantly, from 56 to 118.

Number and typology of newly concluded contracts in 2018

	Low value contracts[1]	Middle value contracts[2]	Category A contracts[3]	Total

[1] Between €1 000 and €14 499.
[2] Between €15 000 and €59 499.
[3] Over €60 000.

Direct contracts	109	4	5	118
Framework contracts	None	None	8	8
Total	109	4	13	126

For detailed budgetary figures, please see table 1 and table 1a ‘Overview of the implementation of the 2018 budget’ and table 2 and table 2a ‘Implementation of amounts carried over from 2017 to 2018’ in Annex I.

III. FUNCTIONING OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM

A) EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

The GSC’s internal control framework (ICF) was revised in 2018. The ICF’s goal continued to be to provide reasonable assurance of the achievement of objectives. The revised ICF took effect on 1 November 2018 by a decision of the Secretary-General. Both the old and the revised ICF were based on the internal control framework guidance by the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO; see www.coso.org), which provides an internationally accepted standard in this field. The present annual activity report will already use terminology referred to in the new ICF, as the revision of the ICF had no effect on the internal control systems in place during the reporting year. The new ICF is composed of five components, 17 principles and 33 characteristics.

COMM adheres to the 17 principles set out in the ICF for the GSC and contributes, together with other departments, to the effective and efficient functioning of the framework, of which a description is given in annex II.

The authorising officer by delegation is of the opinion that the points of focus in place are functioning at a satisfactory level, acknowledging that this is a collaborative exercise by the whole GSC, and that it can therefore be concluded that the principles as well as the components are present and functioning, thereby providing reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of objectives.

B) ASSESSMENT OF THE ESTIMATED COSTS AND BENEFITS OF CONTROLS

There is no exact figure for the total costs of internal controls, but it can be stated that the largest part of the budget of the European Council and Council of the EU covers administrative expenditure and could be attributed to internal control utilised to pursue objectives of the institutions. For instance, costs of controls are linked to human resources, IT, buildings, setting up organisational structures, security, safety, organisation of meetings, etc.

On the other hand, reports by the Internal Auditor, reports by the European Court of Auditors and opinions of the Audit Committee make no mention of misuse of funds or irregularities. This can be taken as an indicator that internal control is functioning at a satisfactory level and that the controls are beneficial to the institutions.

The non-financial benefits of controls include: better value for money, efficiency gains, system improvements, compliance with regulatory provisions, and stakeholder satisfaction.

C) RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE OPERATIONS

The main risk incurred in the Directorate for Media and Communications related to problems encountered with the use of the Europa Building, which became operational in January 2017. The remaining technical issues relating to the audiovisual infrastructure in the Europa building were addressed by sustained and intensive collaboration between the GSC and external contractors, prioritised allocation of resources to streamlining the Europa building's audiovisual infrastructure and its integration in the overall audiovisual operations and workflow.

IV. CONCLUSIONS ON ASSURANCE

Reasonable assurance on the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions can be provided for the following reasons, among others:

- Transactions at the GSC are related to administrative expenses only, which is a minor part of the general budget of the EU.

- A positive assurance on administrative expenditure was given by the European Court of Auditors for several years, and again for 2017.

- There is a highly effective integrated IT financial management system which facilitates the control and monitoring of operations.

- Authorising officers select appropriate workflows, known as ‘financial circuits’, to exercise ex ante controls with varying numbers of control steps depending on risk.
- Declarations of assurance are provided by authorising officers by sub-delegation.
- A centralised Finance Directorate provides specific assistance and advice to all financial actors on procurement, budget management and accounting.
- There is a centralised Procurement Coordination Unit, whose involvement is mandatory when the amount of the contract is above €15 000, and which leads such procedures when the contract is above €135 000.
- An Internal Audit Unit provides (i) a guarantee as to the degree of control over activities carried out in implementation of the budget and (ii) advice on improving the conditions under which those activities are carried out and on encouraging sound financial management.
- An Audit Committee monitors the work of the Internal Auditor with a view to ensuring that it carries out its functions efficiently, effectively and independently. It also monitors the implementation of the recommendations of internal audit reports and of the Court of Auditors’ reports. It makes recommendations to the Secretary-General on any issues regarding the internal audit and the effectiveness of internal control systems.

DECLARATION OF ASSURANCE

I, the undersigned,

Director-General of Communication and Information (DG COMM),

in my capacity as authorising officer by delegation,

declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view[1].

State that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal.

Confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of the institution.

Brussels, 21 March 2019

Reijo KEMPPINEN
Director-General

1 **True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the service.**

Annex I

Table 1: Overview of the implementation of the 2018 budget

Table I : Overview of the implementation of the 2018 budget - COMM activities					
	Initial budget	Final budget	Commitments	Implementation rate	Carry-over to 2019
COMM.1 Media and communication directorate	**€ 5.193.000**	**€ 5.909.500**	**€ 5.882.671**	**99,5%**	**€ 2.363.784**
COMM.1A Media relations unit	**€ 560.000**	**€ 673.777**	**€ 673.487**	**100,0%**	**€ 337.073**
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 120.000	€ 140.500	€ 140.210	99,8%	€ 30.428
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 440.000	€ 533.277	€ 533.277	100,0%	€ 306.645
COMM.1B Media operations unit	**€ 4.208.000**	**€ 4.685.723**	**€ 4.659.662**	**99,4%**	**€ 1.601.107**
1203 "Outside services"	€ 8.000	€ 8.000	€ 6.000	75,0%	€ 2.814
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 875.000	€ 1.038.670	€ 1.038.626	100,0%	€ 364.284
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 115.000	€ 177.330	€ 177.330	100,0%	€ 43.725
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 3.210.000	€ 3.461.723	€ 3.437.706	99,3%	€ 1.190.284
COMM.1C Digital communication unit	**€ 425.000**	**€ 550.000**	**€ 549.522**	**99,9%**	**€ 243.742**
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 425.000	€ 550.000	€ 549.522	99,9%	€ 243.742
COMM.2 Information and outreach directorate	**€ 2.230.000**	**€ 2.314.000**	**€ 2.262.562**	97,8%	**€ 459.478**
COMM.2A Outreach unit	**€ 310.000**	**€ 288.000**	**€ 253.719**	88,1%	**€ 181.862**
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 310.000	€ 288.000	€ 253.719	88,1%	€ 181.862
COMM.2B Graphics and publications unit	**€ 270.000**	**€ 371.000**	**€ 370.286**	99,8%	**€ 23.663**
2212 "General publications"	€ 220.000	€ 282.000	€ 281.704	99,9%	€ 66.909
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 35.000	€ 74.630	€ 74.212	99,4%	€ 19.775
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 15.000	€ 14.370	€ 14.370	100,0%	€ 3.888
COMM.2C Information services unit	**€ 1.650.000**	**€ 1.655.000**	**€ 1.638.557**	99,0%	**€ 253.953**
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 1.650.000	€ 1.655.000	€ 1.638.557	99,0%	€ 253.953
2211 "Official Journal"	**€ 1.777.000**	**€ 781.500**	**€ 593.457**	75,9%	**€ 0**
Directorate General Communication and Information	**€ 9.200.000**	**€ 9.005.000**	**€ 8.738.690**	**97,0%**	**€ 2.823.262**

Please note that table 1 excludes the activities which were transferred outside COMM as of 1 July 2018, as described in chapter II.B. Table 1a includes those figures. Nevertheless, for the two additional items, the figures presented for “final budget”, “commitments” and “implementation rate” reflect the situation as of 30 June 2018. For further information on the development of these lines, please refer to the 2018 activity report of the Directorate-General for Digital Services. For the same reason, the “carry-over amount” column has been deleted.

*Table 1a: Implementation of 2018 budget including activities transferred outside COMM on 1 July 2018

	Initial budget	Final budget	Commitments	Implementation rate
COMM.1 Media and communication directorate	**€ 5.193.000**	**€ 5.909.500**	**€ 5.882.671**	**99,5%**
COMM.2 Information and outreach directorate	**€ 2.230.000**	**€ 2.314.000**	**€ 2.262.562**	97,8%
2211 "Official Journal"	**€ 1.777.000**	**€ 781.500**	**€ 593.457**	75,9%
Activities transferred outside COMM as of 1/7/2018	**€ 2.060.000**	**€ 528.236**	**€ 526.110**	99,6%
2231 "Postal charges"	€ 60.000	€ 34.000	€ 34.000	100,0%
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 2.000.000	€ 494.236	€ 492.110	99,6%
Directorate General Communication and Information *	**€ 11.260.000**	**€ 9.533.236**	**€ 9.264.800**	**97,2%**

Table 2: Implementation of amounts carried over from 2017 to 2018

Table II : Implementation of amounts carried over from 2017 to 2018 - COMM activities

	Amount carried over from 2017 to 2018	Payments	Non-implemented amount	Outturn rate	Carry-over to 2019
COMM.1 Media and communication directorate	**€ 2.722.143**	**€ 2.563.652**	**€ 158.492**	**94,2%**	**€ 0**
COMM.1A Media relations unit	**€ 284.202**	**€ 271.002**	**€ 13.200**	**95,4%**	**€ 0**
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 30.428	€ 30.428	€ 0	100,0%	€ 0
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 253.774	€ 240.574	€ 13.200	94,8%	€ 0
COMM.1B Media operations unit	**€ 2.249.190**	**€ 2.105.402**	**€ 143.789**	**93,6%**	**€ 0**
1203 "Outside services"	€ 838.911	€ 833.129	€ 5.782	99,3%	€ 0
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 625.843	€ 604.627	€ 21.217	96,6%	€ 0
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 17.796	€ 17.796	€ 0	100,0%	€ 0
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 766.640	€ 649.850	€ 116.790	84,8%	€ 0
COMM.1C Digital communication unit	**€ 188.751**	**€ 187.248**	**€ 1.503**	**99,2%**	**€ 0**
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 188.751	€ 187.248	€ 1.503	99,2%	€ 0
COMM.2 Information and outreach directorate	**€ 656.514**	**€ 616.104**	**€ 40.410**	93,8%	**€ 0**
COMM.2A Outreach unit	**€ 383.567**	**€ 378.997**	**€ 4.570**	98,8%	**€ 0**
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 383.567	€ 378.997	€ 4.570	98,8%	€ 0
COMM.2B Graphics and publications unit	**€ 50.410**	**€ 39.154**	**€ 11.256**	77,7%	**€ 0**
2212 "General publications"	€ 24.681	€ 17.595	€ 7.086	71,3%	€ 0
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 19.640	€ 19.535	€ 105	99,5%	€ 0
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 6.089	€ 2.024	€ 4.065	33,2%	€ 0
COMM.2C Information services unit	**€ 222.537**	**€ 197.953**	**€ 24.584**	89,0%	**€ 0**
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 222.537	€ 197.953	€ 24.584	89,0%	€ 0
2211 "Official Journal"	**€ 0**	**€ 0**	**€ 0**	NA	**€ 0**
Directorate General Communication and Information	**€ 3.378.657**	**€ 3.179.756**	**€ 198.902**	**94,1%**	**€ 0**

Please note that table II excludes the activities which were transferred outside COMM as of 1 July 2018, as described in chapter II.B. Table 2a includes those figures. Nevertheless, for the two additional items, the figures presented for "payments" and "non-implemented amount" reflect the situation as of 30 June 2018. For further information on the development of these lines, please refer to the 2018 activity report of the Directorate-General for Digital Services.

	Amount carried over from 2017 to 2018	Payments	Non-implemented amount	Outturn rate
COMM.1 Media and communication directorate	**€ 2.722.143**	**€ 2.563.652**	**€ 158.492**	**94,2%**
COMM.2 Information and outreach directorate	**€ 656.514**	**€ 616.104**	**€ 40.410**	**93,8%**
2211 "Official Journal"	**€ 0**	**€ 0**	**€ 0**	**NA**
Activities transferred outside COMM as of 1/7/2018	**€ 533.847**	**€ 465.080**	**€ 68.767**	**87,1%**
2231 "Postal charges"	€ 23.630	€ 10.450	€ 13.181	44,2%
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 510.217	€ 454.631	€ 55.586	89,1%
Directorate General Communication and Information *	**€ 3.912.505**	**€ 3.644.836**	**€ 267.668**	**93,2%**

Annex II

Description and components of the Internal control framework for the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union

Component: CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

PRINCIPLE 1: The GSC demonstrates commitment to integrity and ethical values.

Focus lies on management to respect integrity and ethical values in their instructions, actions and behaviour, as well as adherence to a code of conduct that is applicable for all staff that sets out the expectations regarding integrity and ethical values.

PRINCIPLE 2: The GSC enables oversight of the development and performance of internal control.

Focus lies on having established appropriate working methods and communication channels between senior management, middle management, the independent Audit Committee and Internal Audit Service, as well as on authorising officers providing annual activity reports and declarations of assurance.

PRINCIPLE 3: The GSC establishes structures, reporting lines, and appropriate authority and responsibilities in the pursuit of objectives.

Focus lies on having in place a comprehensive management structure where authority is delegated, responsibility assigned through appropriate processes and technology, where duties are segregated, as appropriate, and where reporting lines are established within departments-to enable the execution of authority, fulfilment of responsibilities and flow of information. It is worthwhile mentioning that in 2018 an Advisory Management Board was established with the task of assisting the Secretary-General in ensuring that the organisational elements of the GSC are aligned with its mission and with the evolving needs of its stakeholders. In addition, the Advisory Management shall help the Secretary-General prioritise, enhance, promote and monitor strategic initiatives.

PRINCIPLE 4: The GSC demonstrates a commitment to attract, develop and retain competent individuals in alignment with objectives.

Focus lies on defining required competencies to support the achievement of objectives, ensuring the professional development of staff e.g. by providing training and coaching, and by promoting and planning mobility of staff.

PRINCIPLE 5: The GSC holds individuals accountable for their internal control responsibilities in the pursuit of objectives.

Focus lies on enforcing accountability through organisational structures, delegation of authority and assigning responsibility, thereby establishing reporting lines.

Component: RISK ASSESSMENT

PRINCIPLE 6: The GSC's authorising officers work with objectives to enable the identification and assessment of risks.

Focus lies on the use of objectives that are clearly formulated, updated when necessary and reflecting the activities of the GSC.

PRINCIPLE 7: The GSC's authorising officers identify risks and analyse them as a basis for determining how risks should be managed.

Focus lies on the identification and assessment of risks at various organisational levels, based on the methodology of ISO standard 31000, estimating the significance of risks and determining how to treat risks.

PRINCIPLE 8: The GSC considers the potential for fraud in assessing risks to the achievement of objectives.

Focus lies on having in place measures to counter fraud and illegal activities as well as considering during the identification step specific risks related to fraud.

PRINCIPLE 9: The GSC identifies and assesses changes that could significantly impact the system of internal control.

Focus lies on having in place procedures to identify and monitor risks and related risk treatment that consider changes to internal and external environments, such as related to policies, priorities and information technology.

Component: CONTROL ACTIVITIES

PRINCIPLE 10: The GSC selects and develops control activities that contribute to the mitigation of risks.

Focus lies on selecting appropriate risk treatment options that involves balancing the costs and efforts of implementation against the benefits derived, as well as monitoring of risk treatment.

PRINCIPLE 11: The GSC selects and develops general control activities to be applied to technology to support the achievement of objectives.

Focus lies on having in place appropriate internal control activities related to the acquisition, development and maintenance of technology and related infrastructure, as well as ensuring the security of IT systems.

PRINCIPLE 12: The GSC deploys control activities through policies and procedures.

Focus lies on having appropriate policies and control procedures in place that ensure that objectives are achieved, continuity of core businesses is guaranteed, and that persons on premises and assets are safeguarded, as well as that exceptions are dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Component: INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

PRINCIPLE 13: The GSC obtains or generates and uses relevant quality information to support the functioning of internal control.

Focus lies on ensuring adequate information and document management relevant to internal control, in a timely manner and in compliance with applicable security rules.

PRINCIPLE 14: The GSC internally communicates information, including objectives and responsibilities for internal control, necessary to support the functioning of internal control.

Focus lies on implementing a culture of internal communication enabling staff to receive a clear message from senior management on matters of internal control as well as having in place separate communication lines, such as whistleblowing procedures, to ensure information flows when normal channels are ineffective.

PRINCIPLE 15: The GSC communicates to external audiences on the work of the Council and the European Council. This may include communicating on matters related to internal control.

Focus lies on selecting relevant, modern and innovative methods for external communication, which includes communication of information on internal control.

Component: MONITORING ACTIVITIES

PRINCIPLE 16: The GSC selects, develops and performs evaluations to ascertain whether the components of internal control are present and functioning.

Focus lies on mapping, monitoring and evaluating periodically the internal control framework of the GSC.

PRINCIPLE 17: The GSC evaluates and communicates internal control deficiencies in a timely manner to those parties responsible for taking corrective action.

Focus lies on communicating internal control deficiencies to relevant departments and taking corrective action, if necessary, in a timely manner, that are supervised and monitored.