



Council of the European Union
General Secretariat

Directorate-General Communication and Information
The Director-General

2019 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

Throughout 2019, **Media Relations Unit** continued to serve as the main channel of communication to the media for 13 European Council and other leaders' meetings (Euro summits and Article 50 European Councils), 80 Council meetings (77 + 3 CAG (Art. 50)) and 11 meetings of the Eurogroup. It also communicated on the outcome of negotiations with the Parliament, and responded to questions on a wide range of issues. It organised background briefings and press conferences for all Council and European Council meetings as well as for a number of other high-level meetings. It provided press support for five bilateral summits (with Japan, China, the League of Arab States, Ukraine and Canada) which took place either in Brussels or in the partner country concerned. There was also an informal meeting of leaders in Sibiu (Romania) 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. There was increasing pressure on the unit towards the end of the year when it was called to support not just the existing President of the European Council, but also his successor as he prepared to take over on 1 December. The handover placed very heavy demands on the unit both because of a very significant increase in work as well as the need to adapt to different ways of working.

For these reasons the already heavy workload for both press officers and press assistants continued, and actually increased towards the end of the year. Furthermore, there was continuing expectation on the unit to innovate and expand its range of communication tools to include more visual content and to be more present 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. 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, and the cooperation was formalised through an exchange of notes with DG LING. The **media monitoring sector** also produced a detailed report on media coverage of the Council and European Council over the last ten years. This has helped inform both our communication and media monitoring activities.

The **Media Operations Unit** handled a high number of events during the year (see above) making important contributions to the successful organisation of the various and diverse summits and high level events. With the new Europa Building, which became operational in January 2017, the staging of the communication aspects around important events has become well integrated in the overall event organisation and the new building has become an important part of the European Council imagery and branding (Forum, Lantern, meeting rooms etc.).

The Unit's **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. The sector ensured extensive live video streaming during the year of public Council sessions, press conferences, arrivals, doorstep statements, signing ceremonies and other events. This activity also included live streaming on social media (Facebook and Twitter).

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. It also produced many video clips to support President Tusk's press and communication activities, particularly for his Instagram account, which became one of the most praised accounts among EU leaders. Particularly noteworthy was our #Europeans project leading to the production of a series of videos showing the EU dimension in citizens' lives. These videos have a long shelf life and are being used on many occasions, but they were also very much appreciated in the context of the information campaigns leading up to the elections for the European Parliament. The sector provided comprehensive photographic coverage of the various events

during the year, as well as many of the President's activities. Based on a SLA with EEAS the sector provided audiovisual support and services to HR Mogherini and later HR Borrell as well.

For a couple of months we provided audiovisual support and services not only to President Tusk but also to President-elect Michel preparing for the start of his mandate on 1 December. Since the hand-over we have seen a notable increase in the demands from the President that we have to satisfy and adapt to, which is linked to President Michel's vision of his role and his intention to be much more active on the international scene and give his role and institution higher visibility.

The Council's audiovisual broadcast infrastructure and production facilities were further improved in 2019 in order to increase efficiency in operations, make our infrastructure future-proof and more resilient, enhance signal distribution between buildings, including the European Convention Center Luxembourg (ECCL), and to be able to 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 video material illustrating the Council's activities. An important call for tenders for a new multilingual live video streaming platform was brought to a successful conclusion with the signing of a new framework contract and the work with the new contractor was launched in view of the migration to the new solution. Another important call for tenders covering our video post-production infrastructure was also finalised with the signing of new framework contracts (2 lots). We also progressed in the work aiming for some support and maintenance contracts, which should be signed in 2020.

The **press center team** continued to provide well appreciated services to the media and delegations on the press center premises, covering the two press rooms, 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 (April, June and October). A number of visits for journalists and journalism students, new delegates and other visiting groups were organised during the year. The team also played an essential role in the accreditation process for journalists who wish to attend summits and high level events.

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 the channels

(+31% visits on the website, +23% of fans on Facebook, +86% and + 35% of followers on Twitter and Instagram, respectively). Organic traffic to the website, which occurs through search engine optimisation of the website, grew by 16%. In addition, the subscribers to the Council's emailing service, which the unit manages and promotes, have increased by 13%, reaching a total of nearly 50 thousand users.

Editorially, the unit continued to create user-centred and optimised digital content for the two institutions (and the Eurogroup) and the Presidents. The institutional renewal led to a heavy workload for team members having to work simultaneously for the President and the President-elect.

In 2019 the unit invested heavily in increasing scope, reach and impact of policy content available on the website. The so-called 'policy pages', which offer background information about the major initiatives and legislation under discussion in the Council, constituted the fastest growing section of the website (+30%).

Visual communication has been scaled up: the unit has produced 42 infographics and 160 visual products for social media. The unit has also streamlined the use of a new highly-visual content format: a scroll-story, which was used to tell the Council story on trade, the Lisbon treaty, EU fight against climate change, the Europa building or EU achievements in 2019. The scroll-story has now become a standard product in the unit's communication toolbox.

The unit managed the continuous development of the Council's website, in cooperation with SMART, deploying 30 sets of improvements to the website and its content management system – Umbraco. More specifically, these included for example a redesigned mobile-first version of a press release and a new structure and layout of the meeting calendar. In addition, the unit has deployed a new optimised version of topic pages, which offer users a third way (alongside search and navigation) of finding content. In a similar vein, in a bid to optimise content findability, the unit has been working to update internal search engine and improve the functioning of the public register. The implementation of these features, scheduled for 2020, will result in better and more relevant search results for the website users.

The unit further strengthened its approach to personal data protection, by implementing the recommendations formulated by the European data protection supervisor with regard to the use of cookies on the website.

Improving the website accessibility was considered a flagship project by the unit in 2019. The unit organised a number of activities (internal trainings and articles, fares, social media campaign) to raise awareness of digital accessibility. It implemented a majority of web accessibility recommendations, which had been formulated as part of the external audit in 2018. Improvements included changes to the website's design code, visual elements and a better enforcement of editorial practices. This resulted in a better web user experience for persons with disabilities, as measured by the accessibility score, which has risen from 47% at the end of 2018 to 67% in December 2019. The remaining audit recommendations, which are primarily related to user experience and content creation standards will be implemented in 2020.

In order to offer users ever better online experience, six user research activities were carried out in 2019, including one online survey (with an updated methodology and - for the first time - in all the EU languages), one on-site survey (with journalists) and four web usability tests. The continuously updated user research data is used to inform content design decisions taken by digital editors and assistants in the unit. In addition, the unit acquired and customised a new digital analytics platform, Decibel Insights, which allows it to quickly identify suboptimal user experience on the website and roll out necessary improvements.

The Digital Communication unit provided accurate and timely reporting by publishing quarterly and yearly analytics reports, all available on Domus. The digital communications trends reports, which tracks global trends, shows shifting consumer preferences and industry standards were published on Domus on a bimonthly basis.

In 2019, 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 more than 170 targeted campaigns. It has also worked closely with a team of YouTube specialists to improve the impact of our presence on the channel. The first promoted videos generated more than 2 million views (92.5% of all the views on the channel).

In 2019, In response to informal requests submitted to the GSC, to analyse the possibility of building and hosting the unique website for the Council presidency, the unit has worked with SMART to prepare a service offer. The offer received a positive reception from the delegations (both at the meeting of the Working Party on Information and as measured by the survey) and was subsequently endorsed by the Secretary General. The digital

communication unit and SMART have started working with the Slovenian presidency to build a unique and common presidency website. The delivery of the website is planned for March 2021.

In cooperation with SMART, the unit has also worked to select a new email distribution service provider, by drafting tender specifications, participating in the evaluation committee and drafting the final award report. The work is under way to roll out an improved email distribution system in April 2020.

Finally, the Digital Communication unit started using a new framework contract for digital communications activities. The transition from an old contract to the new one, which took place in the spring of 2019, was smooth. The contract is the main vehicle for financing the unit's activities over the period of 4 years.

Information and Outreach Directorate

Implementation of the GSC Visits' Policy and promotion of the 2018-inaugurated Council Visitors' Centre were some of the Outreach Unit's main projects and achievements in 2019. The promotional activities varied from general awareness raising to networking and building partnerships with key stakeholders and multipliers. As a result, the number of group visit requests increased by 11% in comparison to 2018.

The **Outreach Unit** also developed a tailor-made role-play game together with an external contractor - a simulation of a Council meeting. This further diversified the GSC's portfolio of the offer to visitors through an engaging and interactive experience. Moreover, in November, the unit launched a new service - weekly guided tours for individual visitors on pre-registration, which are organised in the morning so that visitors can access the meeting rooms in the Europa building, which are normally occupied during the day. The initial feedback was very positive, most of the visitors expressing their appreciation for the overall quality of the experience.

Through its visits service, the Outreach Unit welcomed 19 168 visitors in 618 groups in 2019, compared to 18 314 visitors in 2018 (an increase of 4.7%, with the same staffing level). Presentations were delivered by GSC officials in the native language of the groups whenever possible. The unit successfully organised the 2019 Open Day which welcomed 7 802 visitors and provided an excellent opportunity to bring the Council of the European Union closer to

citizens. Overall, around 14 000 persons visited the Visitors' Centre, incl. individual and group visitors. In total, the Outreach team welcomed more than 31 000 visitors in 2019.

Regarding the partnership and engagement activities of the Outreach Unit, six events were organised during the year in direct cooperation with the Presidencies of the Council of the EU and with respective Directorates-Generals of the GSC.

The Romanian Presidency organised two public events, one on innovative education and training and one on democratic electoral processes, together with the European Security and Defence College.

During the Finnish Presidency, a public conference was organised on the future of transparency together with the Faculty of Law of the University of Helsinki. Two stakeholder events were also organised by the Finnish Presidency and the Outreach Unit, one policy seminar on the European Integrated Border Management and an innovative role-playing exercise on countering disinformation, in cooperation with Lund University.

In December 2019, the Outreach Unit organised a public conference on the role of Artificial Intelligence in Education and Training with the Finnish Presidency. This was the first time that the GSC co-organised an event outside Brussels. With AI being a key priority for the Finnish Presidency, this two-day conference brought together researchers, policymakers, practitioners and other relevant stakeholders. The outcomes of the conference fed into current policy discussions and actions on the future development of AI in Europe.

In addition to the Presidency-driven events, the Outreach Unit organised five other events with key partners, namely EU Agencies such as the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Institute for Gender Equality, the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, and the European Environment Agency (EEA). The EEA event constituted the launch of its latest five-year report on the state of the environment and provided a platform for debate and discussion on key topics that are closely linked to the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

In October, the Outreach Unit represented the Council at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the largest in the world and gathering more than 300 000 visitors over five days. The Outreach Unit had a stand in the area dedicated to education, since students and teachers were identified as key target audiences. More than 7 000 information items were delivered and staff answered

a variety of EU-related questions. In addition, the GSC organised a discussion forum at the book fair with a speaker on the topic of "The EU - more or less than the sum of its member states?"

The Outreach Unit also organised four meetings between think tanks and GSC Directors-General and one with the Secretary-General. A wide array of think tanks working on different policy areas attended, including several think tanks based outside Brussels. These meetings were highly appreciated by the participating organisations and allowed the GSC to establish valuable partnerships.

The events organised in 2019 were met with success in terms of attendance, as well as audience expectations and satisfaction from involved parties.

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 2 436 emails, 472 telephone calls and 727 letters. More than 900 of these communications were addressed to the President of the European Council.

The **Creative Services of the Graphics and Publications Unit** continued to support the activities of the Council by designing and producing various publications and visual communication materials both for external and internal audiences. In 2019, the Service produced a total of about 400 products for visual communication purposes, including materials for 12 communication campaigns, 83 posters, 64 digital illustrations, 49 brochures, 29 leaflets, 11 infographics, 30 roll-ups, 14 templates and 41 stationery products. Aside from numerous communication materials produced for GSC's internal services, the Creative Services provided a series of key visual communication products for the President of the European Council, the EU Presidencies and the Council/European Council. This included the Handbook for the new President-elect Charles Michel, infographics on the work achieved by the Romanian presidency, visual identity for the Strategic Agenda, adopted by the European Council in June 2019, and visual for several events co-organised with the Finnish presidency. The Service continued to provide a wide variety of information and visual material packages for EU summits (e.g. EU-ASEAN summit and EU-Syria summit), events (including Open Day and Health and Safety at Work week event), conferences (including public conferences co-organised with the Finnish presidency), Council meetings (e.g. agenda and explanatory note for Transport Council), EU initiatives (e.g. rebranding of EU Back to

School + Back to University initiatives), and various activities organised by the Outreach Unit (especially in relation to the Visitors' Centre). The Service also significantly contributed to the success of the first edition of Career Day with more than 60 visual products provided, including presentation panels and booklets for each service represented.

Regarding distribution, printed publications were still in high demand. Overall, more than 200 000 copies of publications were distributed (from the Council and the Publications Office combined) in 2019, compared to 160 000 in 2018. Creative Services consolidated cooperation internally with the Web team and the Outreach Unit, and externally with the Europe Direct Information Centres, Commission delegations and governmental organisations. Downloads from the Publications Office's portal remained stable (approx. 16 000 for 2018 and 2019). Downloads of Council publications from the Council website increased from 31 000 downloads in 2018 to more than 40 000 in 2019.

The **Production Services Sector** continued to provide meeting documents for the interpreters, agreements with third countries (48 agreements including Brexit, more than 500 000 pages in 2019) and graphic material support for all services in both the General Secretariat and for the Council. Daily support was provided to 3 983 meetings in total in 2019 (including Working Groups, COREPER I and II and 80 Council meetings). In close collaboration with the Protocol Service, the Sector assisted the holding of high level events as European Council meetings, EU -ASEAN, EU-SYRIA, EU-IGAD, EU-Arab League conferences by producing meeting documents, designing and printing 2 300 invitations and 2 500 menus, 3 500 trombinoscopes, 500 different booklets and more than 500 folders envelopes and all kind of graphical products needed for these events.

The Sector also gave its support to Creative Services, producing their graphic creations in the form of brochures, leaflets and all kinds of graphic products. The Sector developed numerous visual communication products for all the DGs and also for the President of the European Council, the EU Presidencies and the Council/European Council. This included in particular in 2019 the production of a 70-page report, for the European Council's President setting out the work of the European Council from July 2018 to November 2019, the Consilium Journal and more than 4 000 signage products for the Buildings Unit (evacuation, parking, elevators), produced in a variety of materials (vinyl, pvc, cardboard) and sizes.

The main activity of the **transparency team** of the **Information Services Unit** was to deal with the requests for access to documents.

In 2019, the Council received 2 567 initial requests for access to documents and 40 confirmatory applications, which required 8 222 documents to be analysed. At the initial stage, full access was granted to 6 145 documents (74.7%) and partial access to 470 documents (5.7%). Access was refused to 1 607 documents (19.5%). Following confirmatory applications, full access was granted to 61 documents and partial access to 50 documents. The Council confirmed that access should be refused to 55 documents.

At the initial stage, access to documents was refused mainly to protect the public interest as regards international relations (300 times, or 26.6%), to protect the Council's decision-making process (215 times, or 19.1 %), and for reasons of public security (51 times, or 4.5%). In 45% of cases (509 times), documents were refused based on a combination of several exceptions. In nearly 30% of cases, partial access was granted based on a combination of several exceptions. The next most used exceptions in justifying the granting of partial access only were the protection of the public interest as regards international relations and the protection of the Council's decision-making process (23.2% and 20.6% respectively).

At the confirmatory stage, in most cases when access to documents was refused (56.4%) or only partially released (68%), the reason was a combination of exceptions.

It took the GSC an average of 17 working days to process initial requests and 37 working days to process confirmatory applications. The deadline of 15 working days to process initial requests was extended for 802 requests, i.e. in 31.5% of cases. The deadline was extended for all the confirmatory applications.

The Transparency team also dealt with seven complaints lodged with the European Ombudsman and one strategic inquiry launched by the Ombudsman, which concerned Transparency. Out of the seven complaints, the Ombudsman considered in two cases that there was no maladministration by the Council and decided to close the cases. In two complaints the Ombudsman considered that there had been maladministration and recommended the Council to take action. One case was closed with the conclusion that it had been settled. The other complaints are still pending.

In the enquiry, which concerned the transparency of the bodies involved in preparing Eurogroup meetings, the Ombudsman found that the Council has dealt properly with the relevant requests for public access and that the Eurogroup had taken steps to further improve its transparency policy. In view of these improvements, the Ombudsman decided to close this strategic inquiry.

The transparency team also supported the Finnish Presidency in its actions to enhance the openness and transparency of the EU, in particular by holding more public discussions in the Council meetings on non-legislative items and expanding the proactive publication of certain categories of legislative documents.

In 2019 the **Council Library** continued delivering on its mission to provide access to essential information resources needed for the work of the GSC, the Cabinets and MS delegates: subscriptions to newspapers, journals and databases, dissemination rights, acquisitions of monographs, interlibrary loan and article delivery services. The 2019 budget was spent as follows:

Subscriptions	1 115 521.69 €
Dissemination rights	121 657.50 €
Monographs and interlibrary loan	29 591.39 €
Total	1 266 770.58 €

The service assisted its core users with bibliographic research through the monthly Think Tank Review selection of research papers, the Council bibliographies project, book summaries and thematic bibliographies. The team provided user support, orientation and reference services by treating 6 263 issues relating to subscriptions and 1 868 enquiries at the Info Desk. In the reading room, there were 2 282 visits, including 157 visits by external researchers, and 1163 loans were made. Users performed 43 383 search actions in a total of 27 354 sessions in the resource discovery service Eureka.

The Library implemented various internal and external communication activities to promote library resources and services, such as: 42 promotional events, 61 Library Blog posts, and 22 Domus posts.

In 2019, the **Archives of the Council** continued to perform their activities of collecting processing, preserving and promoting the documents produced or received by the Institution, and eventually transferring them to the Historical Archives of the EU in Florence, following Council Regulation 354/83. In 2019, transfers were made to the Historical Archives of the EU containing 1 557 archive boxes constituting a total of 165 linear metres.

Since July 2018, and throughout 2019, almost all the activities have been subjected to a review and a discussion that have improved certain procedures, making them more streamlined and more up-to-date for the current archives. This re-evaluation of activities and procedures has also been supported by an internal audit that was performed during the first semester of 2019.

The Council Archives are not only updating their procedures but they are also trying to modernize their IT solutions, in particular through the acquisition of a new archive management system.

To ensure long-term preservation, the Archives digitise and produce microfiches. In 2019, 1 209 167 pages (10 615 GB) were digitised and 13 925 microfiches produced.

The Archives also handled 370 requests for documents and information from the GSC, other institutions or external actors and received 20 researchers on Council premises.

The Archives organised 24 visits to its premises and collections, most of them for permanent representations' officials, recent GSC officials and trainees.

B) HUMAN RESOURCES ALLOCATED FOR THE INTENDED PURPOSE

In 2019, DG COMM staff has increased by 9.5 FTEs, or 4.9% compared to 2018. The increase is due to increases in AD staff (+8 FTEs) and contractual agents (+7 FTEs), compensated by a decrease in AST staff (-6 FTEs).

In terms of the DG COMM organisational structure, the only change was that the Creative Services Sector has been suppressed within unit COMM.2B Graphics and Publications as of 1 November 2019.

Regarding management posts, a new head of unit was appointed to COMM.2C "Information Services" as of 16 September 2019 after the retirement of the previous head of unit.

COMM had the following human resources on 31 December 2019:

	Permanent staff	Temporary staff	Others	Total
Administrators	64.90	7.00	0.00	71.90
Assistants	105.15	2.00	0.00	107.15
Secretaries (SC)	5.00	0.00	0.00	5.00
Subtotal	175.05	9.00	0.00	184.05
Contractual agents	12.00	7.00	0.00	19.00
National experts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Subtotal	12.00	7.00	0.00	19.00
+				
Total	187.05	16.00	0.00	203.05

Table includes all staff in place on 31 December 2019, expressed as full-time equivalents (FTEs)

Source: Staffing Office

C) FINANCIAL RESOURCES ALLOCATED FOR THE INTENDED PURPOSE

In 2019, COMM's final budget, accounting for transfers implemented in the course of the year, was €9 095 000, i.e. €90 000 - or 1% - higher than the 2018 budget.

Of the final 2019 budget, an amount of €9 091 969, or 99.97%, was actually committed. This implementation rate was higher than in 2018 (97.0%) and is consistently at the same level across DG COMM business areas without exception.

Overall, € 2 749 922 was carried over from 2018 to 2019, 18.6% less than the amount carried over from 2017 to 2018 (€3 378 657). Of the total amount carried over, 92.6% was implemented.

The implementation rate for the amount carried over from 2018 to 2019 for digital communication unit is below 90%. The under-spend occurred mainly in the framework of social media advertising and is partly due to how it functions. Social media advertising is based on ad bidding systems in which the final price depends on a number of clicks that the ad gets. As a result, certain discrepancies between commitments and payments are unavoidable. In addition, part of social media advertising was funded by budget transfers, which took place in the last months of the year, which made a precise ad spend forecast

challenging. Secondly, DG COMM1 uses web design services, which are provided, among others, by intra-muros contractors. In 2019 a small number of man-days were unused due to the holidays and the transition to a new framework contract, which was launched in early Q2 2019. All in all, the unused amount is very low in absolute terms: €39 935.

The 2019 budget was implemented via the existing portfolio of contracts, plus 139 newly concluded ones. The number of newly concluded contracts has increased compared to 2018, when the corresponding figure was 126. While the number of newly concluded framework contracts has been stable at 8, the number of direct contracts increased from 118 to 131.

Number and typology of newly concluded contracts in 2019

	Low value contracts ¹	Middle value contracts ²	Category A contracts ³	Total
Direct contracts	89	19	23	131
Framework contracts	None	1	7 ⁴	8
Total	109	4	13	126

For detailed figures, please see table 1 ‘Overview of the implementation of the 2019 budget’ and table 2 ‘Implementation of amounts carried over from 2018 to 2019’ in Annex I.

III. FUNCTIONING OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM

A) EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

The goal of the GSC’s internal control framework (ICF) is to provide reasonable assurance of the achievement of objectives. The ICF is 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 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.

¹ Between €1 000 and €14 499.

² Between €15 000 and €59 499.

³ Over €60 000.

⁴ Out of which four framework contracts are child contracts, i.e. multiple GSC services using the same inter-institutional framework contracts

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 the very significant increase in media-related activity both in the run-up to and following, the arrival of the new President of the European Council. The increased expectation of round-the-clock support and a more intense travel schedule has placed a huge strain on press office resources, both in terms of human resources and budgetary funds. This is expected to continue in 2020.

For Digital Communication, there was a risk related to high staff turnover rate. Half of the editorial team were on short-term contracts, which expired at the same time, in December 2019. This, combined with the fact that the end date of the contracts coincided with the arrival of the new PEC as well as the constant need for a quick delivery of digital content and the launch of new communication projects, created a risk to business continuity and under- or no delivery on certain core tasks. This was averted by the green light given by ORG to hire new officials before the end date of the outgoing job holders' contracts as well as by a strict

planning and the efficient organisation of the recruitment process, thus ensuring business continuity.

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 2018.
- 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.
- A centralised assessment and monitoring report on the functioning of the internal control framework for the GSC showing no major overall deficiencies.
- 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. The Internal Audit Unit conducted an audit on commitments and payments in 2019 with a scope and sample selections that included COMM activities. The audit opinion issued indicates compliance with the relevant articles of the Financial Regulation for commitments and payments related to contracts.
- 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.

[FR]

DÉCLARATION D'ASSURANCE

Je soussigné

Directeur général de la direction générale Communication et information (COMM)

en ma qualité d'ordonnateur subdélégué

Déclare par la présente que les informations contenues dans le présent rapport sont sincères et véritables¹.

Affirme avoir une assurance raisonnable que les ressources allouées aux activités décrites dans le présent rapport ont été utilisées aux fins prévues et conformément au principe de bonne gestion financière et que les procédures de contrôle mises en place donnent les garanties nécessaires quant à la légalité et la régularité des opérations sous-jacentes.

Cette assurance raisonnable se fonde sur mon propre jugement et sur les éléments d'information à ma disposition, comme, par exemple, des observations du Service d'audit interne ainsi que des enseignements retirés des rapports de la Cour des comptes relatifs aux exercices antérieurs à celui de cette déclaration. (supprimer une partie de cette phrase si non applicable)

Confirme en outre n'avoir connaissance d'aucun fait non signalé pouvant nuire aux intérêts de l'institution.

Fait à Bruxelles le 24/03/2020

[Signed]

Reijo Kemppinen
Directeur général de la DG COMM

¹ Sincère et véritable dans ce contexte signifie une vue fiable, complète et correcte de l'état des affaires dans le service.

Annex I

Table 1: Overview of the implementation of the 2019 budget

Table I : Overview of the implementation of the 2019 budget - COMM activities					
	Initial budget	Final budget	Commitments	Implementation rate	Carry-over to 2020
COMM.1 Media and communication directorate	€ 6.420.000	€ 6.044.000	€ 6.043.715	100,0%	€ 1.976.524
COMM.1A Media relations unit	€ 585.000	€ 655.000	€ 655.000	100,0%	€ 293.629
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 145.000	€ 130.608	€ 130.608	100,0%	€ 21.678
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 440.000	€ 524.392	€ 524.392	100,0%	€ 271.951
COMM.1B Media operations unit	€ 5.400.000	€ 4.801.000	€ 4.800.995	100,0%	€ 1.240.334
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 1.110.000	€ 847.759	€ 847.759	100,0%	€ 345.577
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 1.080.000	€ 203.241	€ 203.241	100,0%	€ 38.472
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 3.210.000	€ 3.750.000	€ 3.749.995	100,0%	€ 856.285
COMM.1C Digital communication unit	€ 435.000	€ 588.000	€ 587.721	100,0%	€ 442.561
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 435.000	€ 588.000	€ 587.721	100,0%	€ 442.561
COMM.2 Information and outreach directorate	€ 2.245.000	€ 2.361.689	€ 2.358.944	99,9%	€ 625.697
COMM.2A Outreach unit	€ 275.000	€ 419.740	€ 419.637	100,0%	€ 269.093
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 275.000	€ 419.740	€ 419.637	100,0%	€ 269.093
COMM.2B Graphics and publications unit	€ 270.000	€ 310.000	€ 309.789	99,9%	€ 165.873
2212 "General publications"	€ 220.000	€ 220.000	€ 219.999	100,0%	€ 134.982
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 30.000	€ 30.000	€ 29.958	99,9%	€ 18.651
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 20.000	€ 20.000	€ 19.954	99,8%	€ 5.163
2230 "Office Supplies"	€ 0	€ 40.000	€ 39.878	99,7%	€ 7.077
COMM.2C Information services unit	€ 1.700.000	€ 1.631.949	€ 1.629.518	99,9%	€ 190.731
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 1.700.000	€ 1.631.949	€ 1.629.518	99,9%	€ 190.731
2211 "Official Journal"	€ 700.000	€ 689.311	€ 689.311	100,0%	€ 0
Directorate General Communication and Information	€ 9.365.000	€ 9.095.000	€ 9.091.969	99,97%	€ 2.602.221

Table 2: Implementation of amounts carried over from 2018 to 2019

Table II : Implementation of amounts carried over from 2018 to 2019 - COMM activities					
	Amount carried over from 2018 to 2019	Payments	Non-implemented amount	Outturn rate	Carry-over to 2020
COMM.1 Media and communication directorate	€ 2.181.922	€ 2.018.360	€ 163.561	92,50%	€ 0
COMM.1A Media relations unit	€ 337.073	€ 335.469	€ 1.604	99,52%	€ 0
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 30.428	€ 30.428	€ 0	100,00%	€ 0
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 306.645	€ 305.041	€ 1.604	99,48%	€ 0
COMM.1B Media operations unit	€ 1.601.108	€ 1.479.085	€ 122.022	92,38%	€ 0
1203 "Outside services"	€ 2.814	€ 0	€ 2.814	0,00%	€ 0
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 364.284	€ 364.099	€ 185	99,95%	€ 0
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 43.725	€ 43.725	€ 0	100,00%	€ 0
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 1.190.284	€ 1.071.261	€ 119.023	90,00%	€ 0
COMM.1C Digital communication unit	€ 243.741	€ 203.806	€ 39.935	83,62%	€ 0
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 243.741	€ 203.806	€ 39.935	83,62%	€ 0
COMM.2 Information and outreach directorate	€ 568.000	€ 528.490	€ 39.510	93,04%	€ 0
COMM.2A Outreach unit	€ 181.862	€ 172.636	€ 9.226	94,93%	€ 0
2213 "Information and public events"	€ 181.862	€ 172.636	€ 9.226	94,93%	€ 0
COMM.2B Graphics and publications unit	€ 132.185	€ 122.070	€ 10.115	92,35%	• € 0
2212 "General publications"	€ 108.522	€ 102.295	€ 6.227	94,26%	€ 0
2120 "Purchase and replacement of technical equipment and installations"	€ 19.775	€ 19.775	€ 0	100,00%	€ 0
2122 "Rental, servicing, maintenance and repair of technical equipment and installations"	€ 3.888	€ 0	€ 3.888	0,00%	€ 0
2230 "Office Supplies"	€ 0	€ 0	€ 0	100,00%	€ 0
COMM.2C Information services unit	€ 253.953	€ 233.784	€ 20.169	92,06%	€ 0
2210 "Documentation and library expenditure"	€ 253.953	€ 233.784	€ 20.169	92,06%	€ 0
2211 "Official Journal"	€ 0	€ 0	€ 0	100,00%	€ 0
Directorate General Communication and Information	€ 2.749.922	€ 2.546.850	€ 203.071	92,62%	€ 0

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.