



# **2016**

# **Annual Activity Report**

**[Secretariat-General]**





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# THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL IN BRIEF

The Secretariat-General is one of the central services of the European Commission, facilitating its smooth and effective functioning and providing strategic direction.

It is the President's department, at the service of the President, the College and the other Commission departments. It manages the collegial decision-making process and ensures the alignment of EU policies with the political priorities of the Commission. In agreement with the President, the Secretariat-General provides support to the Vice-Presidents in the performance of their role.

In particular, the Secretariat-General:

- Contributes to the definition of the Commission's strategic objectives and priorities and shapes cross-cutting policies;
- Coordinates, facilitates, advises and arbitrates, so as to ensure the coherence, quality and delivery of policy, legislation and operations across policy areas and Commission departments;
- Coordinates the planning and programming of the initiatives of the Commission;
- Ensures the smooth running of the decision-making process and strives to rationalise both procedures and supporting IT tools as part of the evolution towards an efficient and modern e-Commission;
- Acts as the Commission's interface and manages relations with the other European institutions, national parliaments and non-governmental organisations and entities; and
- Fosters the Commission's institutional strengths and the development of a service oriented, transparent, responsible, European administration

which works to the highest standards of ethics and integrity.

The Secretariat-General is structured around 7 directorates and a number of other services (including the Regulatory Scrutiny Board, the Structural Reform Support Service and the European Fiscal Board). It is based in Brussels and it comprises around 700 staff members.

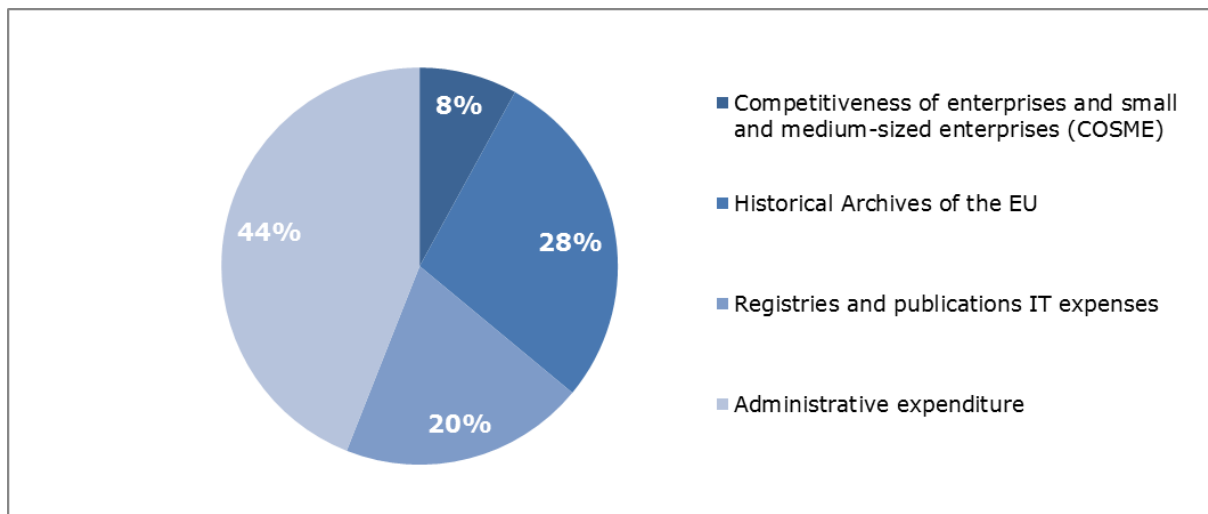
Most of the activities for which the Secretariat-General has a leading role have a high political profile, although without a direct financial risk. The ultimate outcomes of many of these activities depend on the actions of other institutions and Member States.

The Secretariat-General has responsibility for a number of corporate processes, including Commission decision-making, document management, business continuity arrangements, and strategic planning and programming. Robust procedures and IT applications, such as the Decide system or GoPro, have been developed by the Secretariat-General with a view to providing the best possible service to the Commission and to the other Directorates-General. All new applications rely on resilient systems built according to the accepted standards in the field.

The Secretariat-General is also at the heart of the Commission's corporate governance structure, chairing and organising meetings of the Corporate Management Board as well as a number of other specialised boards and groups, including the Information Security Steering Board, the Information Management Steering Board, the IT Board and the Group of Resource Directors.

The breakdown of the 2016 total paid budget of EUR 7 922 313 (see table 2

Annex 3) by type of activity is shown in the following graph (direct management).



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Annual Activity Report is a management report of the Secretary-General to the College of Commissioners. The Annual Activity Reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

## a) Key results and progress towards the achievement of general and specific objectives of the DG (executive summary of section 1)

Within the Commission, the Secretariat-General has a unique function. The Secretariat-General safeguards the overall coherence of the Commission's work – both in shaping new policies, and in steering them through the other EU institutions. The role of the Secretariat-General has been enhanced to support the project-based working methods of the Commission and to coordinate the work of the Commission services on behalf of the President and Vice-Presidents, for instance by chairing inter-service groups and organising project team meetings.

The Secretariat-General continued to play a strong coordinating role in 2016 in relation to the delivery of the Commission's political priorities. In the **Commission Work Programme for 2016**, the Commission announced 23 new key initiatives. The implementation of these initiatives was one of the main priorities for the Secretariat-General, which was involved in the coordination of all of these initiatives and in several cases played a leading role in their delivery. The smooth cooperation between the Secretariat-General and the rest of the Commission services resulted in 21 of 23 initiatives being fully delivered in 2016. The implementation of the outstanding initiatives will continue in 2017.

For some of these priority initiatives, the Secretariat-General played a leading role that went beyond coordination to include, for example, the drafting of key reports and policy documents. The response to the refugee and migration crisis and aspects of the Energy Union and Digital Single Market packages were good examples of this.

The response to the **migration and refugee crisis** is a clear example of a cross-cutting policy priority which has required mobilisation of staff and expertise from across the Commission. The Secretariat-General was uniquely placed to bring these contributions together. To this end, the Secretariat-General set up and led a variety of communication and coordination mechanisms and provided direction and support to the services.

On the **Energy Union**, in 2015 the Secretariat-General coordinated the work with Member States on their individual "Energy Union readiness" and as a follow up, in 2016, the Secretariat-General continued to lead work on the proposals which were adopted by the Commission in the Energy Union package. These actions also led to the Commission delivering the proposals needed for the implementation of the Paris agreement; on effort-sharing and land-use, on strategy on low-emission mobility and on the clean energy for all Europeans package.

As regards the **Digital Single Market**, the Secretariat-General, in close cooperation with the relevant Directorates-General, coordinated, both upstream and downstream, the relevant initiatives which were all major initiatives for 2016.

The Secretariat-General coordinated work on behalf of the President on the Commission Communication on the creation of the **European Solidarity Corps**. The European Solidarity Corps will allow more young people to participate in solidarity activities across the Union. In close cooperation with the relevant Commission services, the Secretariat-General will coordinate the implementation of the initiative's first phase in 2017.

The implementation of the **Europe 2020 strategy** for jobs and growth and the coordination of the **European Semester** cycle of economic policy coordination was again, in 2016, a priority for the Secretariat-General. The Secretariat-General chaired strategic discussions at the level of a core group of Directorates-General and Cabinets, and led technical and analytical work carried out by dedicated country teams. In May, the Commission proposed the 2016 country-specific recommendations for the next 12 to 18 months, which were to a large degree accepted by the Member States. The Secretariat-General also led work on a Communication on the "**Next steps for a sustainable European future**", responding to the United Nations 2030 sustainable development agenda.

The Commission also proposed in 2016 a **mid-term review and revision of the Union's Multiannual Financial Framework**. The Secretariat-General worked with the Directorate-General for Budget to coordinate the preparatory process. This was an opportunity to address shortcomings of the Multiannual Financial Framework and to ensure an appropriate level of financial support for political priorities and the flexibility needed to respond to unexpected crises.

In the area of **Justice and Fundamental Rights**, the Commission's responsibilities for reporting under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism require the Secretariat-General to monitor and follow very closely the process of judicial reform and the fight against corruption in Bulgaria and Romania. In 2016, it was agreed that the next report will be an overview of the ten years of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. The progress made since 2007 will be visible in next year's reporting with benchmarks and it is hoped that this will lead to the conclusion of the mechanism by the end of this Commission's mandate.

The Secretariat-General also led the work on a number of important corporate and institutional developments in 2016. For example, the Commission adopted new rules on how it selects the advisory **expert groups** to help shape the policy-making process. Based on these new rules, it is mandatory for the Commission departments to select all expert group members through public calls for applications and, moreover, experts who apply to represent specific interests or organisations will only be selected as expert group members if they are registered in the Transparency Register.

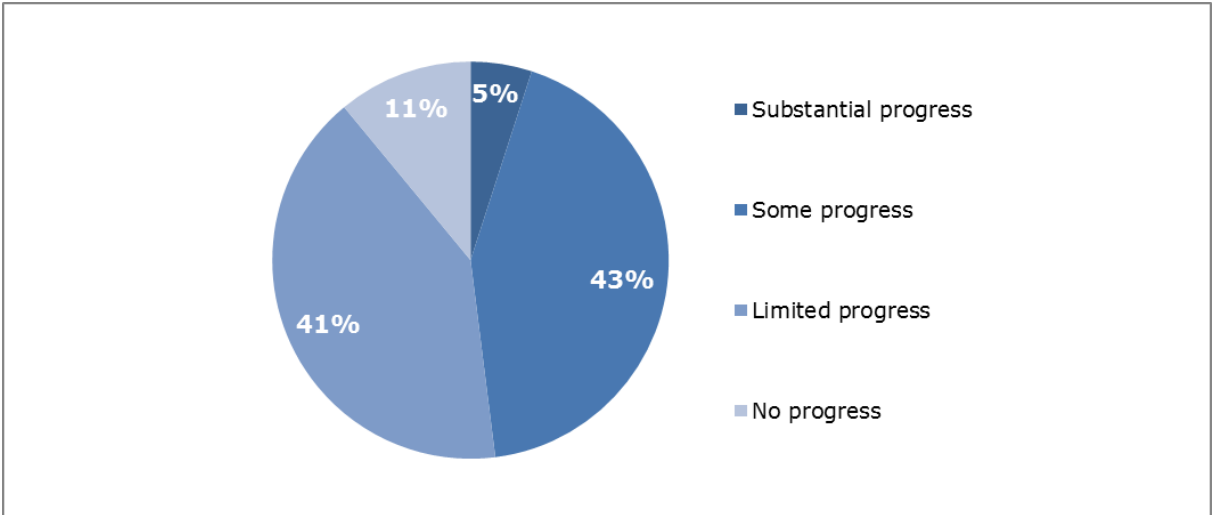
Further progress was made on increasing transparency. The public consultation on the **Transparency Register** was concluded in June 2016. The results of this exercise fed into the preparation of the Commission Proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register which was adopted by the College in September. The Secretariat-General's role was to manage the Transparency Register and the Commission's access to documents policy and to provide the framework and tools for promoting the transparency of contacts with stakeholders of all kinds. The Commission's top political leaders and their closest advisors are already only meeting interest representatives publicly listed in the Register.

In 2016, the Secretariat-General led the work on a major Communication regarding **Data, Information, and Knowledge Management** in the Commission. The objective of the new strategy was to help create a culture of knowledge sharing and learning and to enhance teamwork within and across Directorates-General. In an era where information is vital to achieve policy initiatives, the Commission is working to change its culture in order to empower its staff to contribute their knowledge while enhancing their responsibility for the information to which they have access.



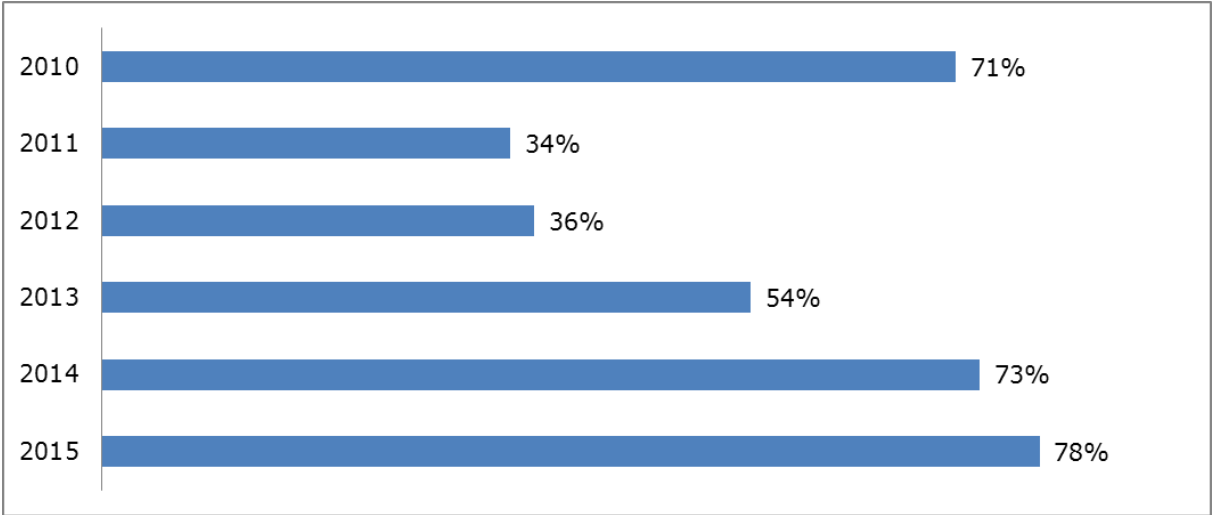
## b) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

### Degree of follow-up by Member States of country-specific recommendations (KPI)



*Latest known results (year 2016 for the implementation of country-specific recommendations adopted by the Council in July 2016)*

### Implementation rate of Commission Work Programme Annex I initiatives (KPI)



*Latest known results (year 2016 – 21 out of 23 = 91%<sup>2</sup>)*

<sup>2</sup> The implementation of the outstanding initiatives will continue in 2017.

## **c) Key conclusions on Financial management and Internal control (executive summary of section 2.1)**

The Secretariat-General conducts its operations in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, working in an open and transparent manner and meeting the expected high level of professional and ethical standards.

The Commission has adopted a set of internal control standards, based on international good practice, aimed to ensure the achievement of policy and operational objectives. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used for the implementation of the budget are set up in accordance with these standards. The Secretariat-General has assessed the internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that the internal control standards are implemented and function as intended. Please refer to Section 2.1.3 for further details.

In addition, the Secretariat-General has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, including those aimed to supervise entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by internal auditors and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on the management's assurance as regards the achievement of control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 for further details.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

## **d) Information to the President**

**The main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of President Juncker.**

# 1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

The Secretariat-General's work in 2016 spanned the full range of the Commission's activities, covering both the delivery of priority policies and initiatives and the updating and strengthening of corporate policies in support of those priorities.

This section highlights the key achievements of the year for the Secretariat-General, which were delivered in close cooperation with the relevant Directorates-General and Services of the Commission. The detailed performance tables are presented in Annex 12.

## 1.1 General objective A: A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment

### European Semester

*The publication and adoption of country reports and country-specific recommendations in the context of the European Semester (Specific Objective A1 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

The Secretariat-General coordinated the Commission-wide work on the **European Semester** cycle of economic policy coordination. It chaired the strategic discussions at the level of a core group of Directorates-General and Cabinets and coordinated the technical and analytical work carried out by country teams. 26 country reports (staff working documents) and an accompanying chapeau Communication were published in February. An additional report on Cyprus was published in March. The reports addressed the issues identified in the 2015 country-specific recommendations and – for 19 Member States – included an in-depth review under the macroeconomic imbalances procedure.

In May, the Commission proposed the 2016 **country-specific recommendations** for the next 12 to 18 months, based on the analysis presented in the country reports and the dialogue held with Member States, along with an overarching Communication. The country-specific recommendations were discussed in the Council and formally adopted in July. In November, the Commission presented its Annual Growth Survey, identifying economic priorities and policy guidance for the following year, on the basis of three interconnected strands: investment, structural reforms and responsible public finances.

Member States are taking action on most of the country-specific recommendations, which are targeted at the key challenges they face. Some recommendations have not yet been fully implemented but more than 89% of the 2016 country-specific recommendations have been at least partially implemented. Progress on the implementation of the 2015 country-specific recommendations was monitored in the 2016 country reports.

Progress on the implementation of the **Europe 2020 strategy** was monitored in the 2016 European Semester country reports, which found that overall, Europe was on course to fulfil several of the Europe 2020 targets. Most Member States were considered to be likely to reach their targets on emissions reduction, renewable energy and energy efficiency by 2020. 17 Member States had already reached their targets on early school leaving and 12 had reached their targets on tertiary education attainment. The employment situation had improved in almost all Member States. Research and development expenditure as a percentage of GDP also increased in about half of the Member States; however achieving the EU target will require significant additional effort.

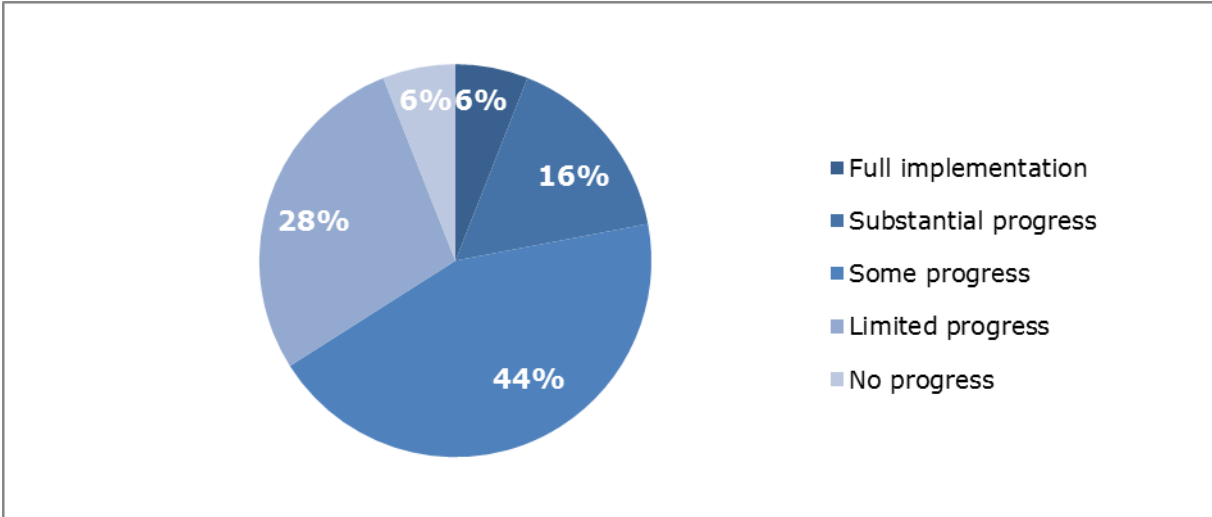
The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe increased due to the economic crisis.

Following a recommendation in the Five Presidents' Report of June 2015, the Secretariat-General was also mandated to set up the **European Fiscal Board** in order to strengthen the current economic governance framework. The European Fiscal Board is now fully operational.

### Next EU long-term growth strategy

The Secretariat-General also coordinated in 2016 Commission-wide work on the Communication on the "**Next steps for a sustainable European future**", which was adopted in November. The Communication set out the Commission's response to the United Nations 2030 sustainable development agenda and the related sustainable development goals. It also explained how the ten priorities of the current Commission and other key EU policies contribute to the implementation of the 2030 agenda, both within the EU as well as outside the EU. An accompanying staff working document presented a mapping of the interaction between the sustainable development goals and European policies.

*Degree of follow-up by Member States of country-specific recommendations (KPI)*



***Multiannual assessment (years 2011-2015 for the implementation of country-specific recommendations adopted by the Council in those years)***

### Multiannual Financial Framework

*The adoption of the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework (Specific Objective A3 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

The Commission adopted the **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) mid-term review/revision package**, coordinated by the Secretariat-General and Directorate-General for Budget in September 2016. The mid-term review was an opportunity to address shortcomings in the Multiannual Financial Framework, to refocus on simplification measures and performance-related aspects, to ensure overall coherence and alignment of the various financial instruments including increased use of innovative financial instruments, the Investment Plan for Europe being a prime example.

The Commission proposed to increase flexibility and to boost funding for jobs and growth, migration and security without revising the agreed ceilings of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Together with the additional spending for migration and security under the Draft Budget 2017, and the additional spending stemming from the technical adjustment of the national cohesion envelopes, this amounted to an investment package of almost EUR 13 billion, roughly half of which for jobs and growth and half for migration and security.

Interinstitutional negotiations are expected to conclude in the first half of 2017.

## 1.2 General objective B: An Area of Justice and Fundamental Rights Based on Mutual Trust

### Cooperation and Verification Mechanism

*Cooperation and Verification Mechanism reports (Specific Objective B1 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

The Commission's responsibilities for reporting under the **Cooperation and Verification Mechanism** require the Secretariat-General to track and accompany the process of judicial reform and the fight against corruption in Bulgaria and Romania (also organised crime in Bulgaria). This process has stimulated and encouraged reform since the two Member States' accession to the EU. Following the adoption of the 2016 reports in January 2016, it was agreed that for the next reports the Commission would take a different approach, with an overview of the full ten years of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism.

The year 2016 was therefore devoted not only to the process of dialogue and cooperation on the follow-up to the recommendations in the January 2016 reports, but also to the process of assessing the progression of the reform over the long term. This was a major theme in the various dialogues undertaken by the Secretariat-General with interlocutors from government, parliament, the judicial authorities and civil society in the two Member States, as well as in discussions with experts from elsewhere in the EU.

This allowed the Commission to develop a new approach which was to bear fruit in the January 2017 reports, defining precisely the progress made on the different benchmarks under the mechanism, and the remaining steps to be taken. This made clear what was needed to allow the two Member States to fulfil the requirements of the mechanism, so that the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism could be concluded within the current Commission's mandate.

## 1.3 General objective C: A Union of Democratic Change

### Better regulation policy and stakeholder engagement

*Adoption of Commission Work Programme 2017 (Specific Objective C1 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

The **Commission Work Programme for 2017** was the third Work Programme of this Commission. It was adopted in October 2016 and followed up on the 10 political priorities set out by the President and on the strategies launched since the beginning of the mandate. The Work Programme set out a focused agenda, presenting 21 new initiatives

where effective European action could make a concrete difference in addressing the challenges facing Europe and its citizens. The preparation of the Commission Work Programme was coordinated by the Secretariat-General.

*The delivery of the 1st phase of the new web portal on Europa implementing the Better Regulation commitments from the May Communication (Specific Objective C2 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

Following the **Better Regulation** package of May 2015, the Secretariat-General prepared a follow up progress report, which was adopted by the Commission in September 2016. The report set out detailed steps being taken to ensure that better regulation is a means to deliver tangible benefits for European citizens and address the common challenges Europe faces. The better regulation approach is underpinned by assessing critically whether action should be tackled at European Union or national level, and engaging more actively and meaningfully with all stakeholders.

Based on the May Communication implementing the Better Regulation commitments for the Commission, a new **web portal** was launched on Europa in June 2016. The launch of the new web portal on 30 June 2016 was one of the highlights of the year for the Secretariat-General and the Commission as a whole, as it opened up feedback on draft delegated and implementing acts, improved transparency on the elaboration of those acts and empowered citizens to get involved in the EU policy-making process.

The Secretariat-General is responsible for overseeing the application of EU law. The Commission pledged to step up enforcement by adopting in December 2016 a **Communication on the Application of Union Law** to promote effective application, implementation and enforcement for the benefit of all citizens, consumers and businesses. It provides a robust and efficient enforcement system, with the following components: (a) making sure that Member States live up to their responsibility to respect and enforce the rules; (b) focusing the Commission's enforcement on those cases where action at EU level makes a substantial difference, and increasing financial sanctions for Member States when they fail to transpose directives on time; and (c) raising citizens' and businesses' awareness of their rights.

*Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law Making*

The European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission signed the **Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law Making** in April 2016, which entered into force with immediate effect. This agreement aims to improve the better regulation principles within all three institutions as well as to deliver improved results for all their external stakeholders. The Secretariat-General issued in May practical guidelines to Directorates-General as to how the agreement should be implemented in the Commission.

## **Transparency policy**

At the beginning of the Commission mandate, President Juncker said: "*We must abide by the highest possible professional and ethical standards at all times. I want the European Commission to lead the way as a modern, efficient and transparent public administration, open to all input that helps us deliver work of a consistently high quality, in full independence and impartiality.*"



*The revision of the Horizontal Rules on Commission Expert Groups as well as the successful roll-out of the new version of the Expert Group Register (Specific Objective C3 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

In May 2016, the Commission adopted new rules on how it selects the advisory **expert groups** which provide external expertise to help inform the policy-making process. These rules were developed by the Secretariat-General in close cooperation with all affected services. The Decision provides a single set of rules and principles aimed at increasing transparency, avoiding conflicts of interest and ensuring a balanced representation of interests. The new rules are binding on all Commission departments.

Under the new rules, it has become mandatory for Commission departments to select all expert group members through public calls for applications. These calls must be published in the Register of Expert Groups and must clearly outline the selection criteria. All possible efforts will be made to ensure balanced representation.

The revised rules further increase transparency of the groups' work by explicitly requiring Commission departments to make available relevant documents including agendas, complete and meaningful minutes, expert submissions and minority opinions.

The revised rules also significantly improve conflict of interest management in relation to individuals appointed in an independent and personal capacity. Commission departments have to carry out conflict of interest assessments, on the basis of Declarations of Interest which will subsequently be published in the Register of Expert Groups.

A **revised Register of Expert Groups** went online on the day of adoption, reflecting the new transparency requirements and ensuring **synergies with the Transparency Register**. Experts who apply to represent specific interests or organisations will only be selected as expert group members if they are registered in the Transparency Register.



In June 2016, the Commission closed a 12-week public consultation to gather stakeholder views on the **Transparency Register** and its future development into a mandatory system covering the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. 1 758 replies were received from citizens, organisations and public authorities coming from all EU Member States. The results of this exercise fed into the preparation of the Commission Proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register which was adopted by the College in September. The Secretariat-General's role was to manage the Transparency Register and to provide the framework and tools for promoting the transparency of contacts with stakeholders of all kinds.

The Commission has already led by example in making meetings with its decision-makers conditional upon interest representatives' registration in the Transparency Register. With this Proposal it called on the European Parliament and Council to follow suit, making the Register mandatory for any interest group trying to influence legislation and policy-implementation.

The Proposal also clarifies the scope of activities and bodies covered, bolsters the monitoring and effective enforcement of the Register's Code of Conduct for interest representatives and will simplify and improve the quality of data through streamlined input requirements and increased quality control. The Commission proposes to increase the resources available to achieve this objective. Registrants who fail to comply with the Code of Conduct could face temporary suspension of their interactions with the institutions or, in the most extreme cases, removal from the Register.

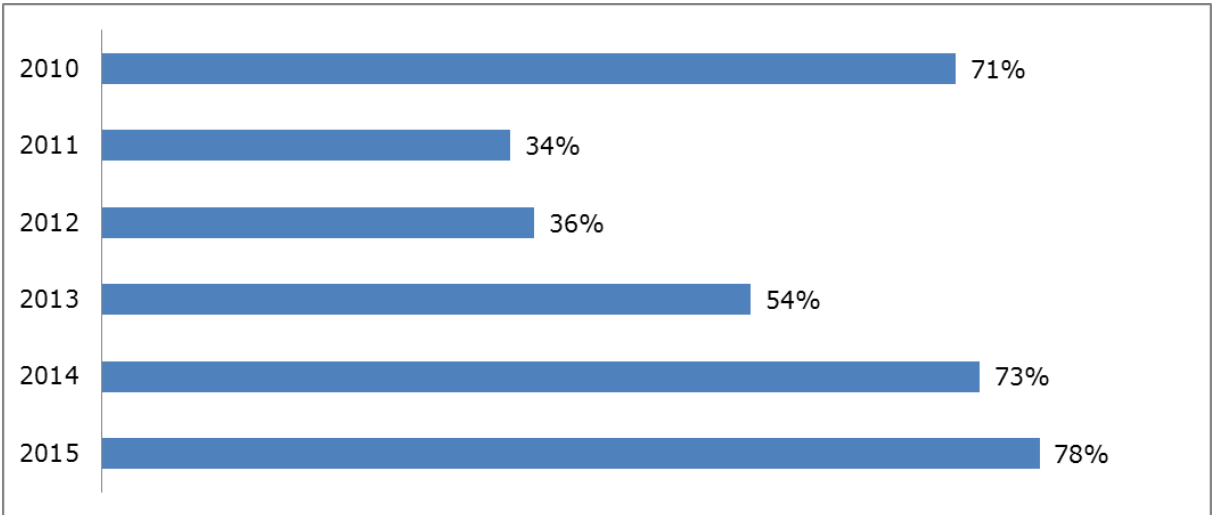


# 1.4 General objective D: To help achieve its overall political objectives, the Commission will effectively and efficiently manage and safeguard its assets and resources, and attract and develop the best talents

## I. Policy coordination and political intelligence

The role of the Secretariat-General in policy coordination has been enhanced with the new structure and working methods of the Juncker Commission. The Secretariat-General plays an active role in shaping and coordinating the work of the Commission services on all the priority initiatives. It does this inter alia by chairing inter-service groups and organising project team meetings.

*Implementation rate of Commission Work Programme Annex I initiatives (KPI)*



The **implementation of the 2016 Commission Work Programme**, which contained 23 new key initiatives that the Commission committed to deliver, was therefore one of the key priorities for the Secretariat-General in 2016. The Secretariat-General conducted extensive policy-shaping and coordination work in order to help the Commission deliver timely and high-quality outputs in all the areas. 20 of the 23 initiatives were delivered in full, and 2 in part, during the year and preparations for the remaining initiatives are well advanced. The Secretariat-General was involved in the coordination of all initiatives and in several cases played a leading role in their delivery. The Regulatory Fitness Programme (REFIT) an integral part of delivering the ten political priorities, was an important element of the Work Programme where the Secretariat-General played a leading role in developing and delivering on its objectives. In 2016, the Commission delivered on 18 out of 28 legislative initiatives under REFIT.

## Coordination of policies

*Examples of policy coordination: Refugee Crisis – Energy Union – Digital Single Market*



The **migration and refugee crisis** is a good example of a cross-cutting policy priority which has required the coordinated mobilisation of a wide variety of tools and expertise. Detailed day-by-day coordination has been essential to harness all the possibilities at the EU's disposal to meet the goals set by the President and the College. The actions taken included very rapid legislative initiatives, negotiations with third countries, access to funds and material support, and deployment of experts. Several Commission services have been engaged in practical implementation on the ground.

All this work has required a particular effort in terms of coordination. The Secretariat-General has set up a variety of communication and coordination tools and provided steer, arbitrage and support to ensure that different services deliver as effectively as possible. It has also taken the lead in preparing a number of relevant policy initiatives in recent months (such as on the Partnership Framework approach for external migration policy, the regular reporting on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and the Communication on the Central Mediterranean Route). The result is that the Commission has thus been able not only to react to circumstances, but also to put in place innovative structures like the regular Western Balkans videoconferences with national sherpas: the Secretariat-General is also the central service involved in the EU integrated political crisis response arrangements, activated for the first time in view of the refugee and migration crisis. One of the three Deputy Secretaries-General is tasked with the overall coordination of all the different actions and services, also in view of ensuring consistency between the internal and external dimensions of the EU policy in response to the refugee and migration crisis. As such, the Commission is able to contribute much more actively today and to look ahead to the future humanitarian and migration challenges.

## Energy Union



2016 was the year of delivery for the **Energy Union**. By the end of the year, the Commission had adopted the majority of the proposals in the Energy Union Strategy. The Secretariat-General played an important part in coordinating the work of the services, facilitating the preparatory process at political level and shaping the proposals. The Commission's assessment of the Paris climate agreement and its proposals for signature and ratification enabled the agreement to enter into force less than a year after the negotiations. The proposals on security of supply contributed to greater resilience and EU solidarity in respect of gas. The Commission delivered all the proposals needed to implement the Paris agreement: the July proposals on effort-sharing and land-use, and strategy on low-emission mobility were followed by the wide-ranging clean energy for all Europeans package in November. This focused on putting energy efficiency first in all aspects of energy policy, setting out how the EU can be a world leader in renewable energy (including a policy on sustainable use of bioenergy) and providing a fair deal for consumers. The legislative proposals were accompanied by enabling actions, including on clean energy innovation and energy-efficient buildings. 2017 will be the year of implementation.

## Digital Single Market





All **Digital Single Market** initiatives in 2016 have been coordinated by the Secretariat-General, from the legislative proposals on geo-blocking, parcel delivery and VAT in e-commerce to the legislative proposals on digital contracts and consumer protection cooperation. They have been presented by the Commission in three consecutive packages; on Digital Technologies, e-commerce, and Copyright and Telecoms Reform. In order to deliver on these legislative and non-legislative measures (18 in total) the Secretariat-General ensured the steer and management of both the preparatory process as well as the interinstitutional negotiations, supporting directly in particular the Cabinet of the Vice-President responsible for Digital Single Market, the Cabinet of the President and the Cabinet of the First Vice-President.

## European Solidarity Corps



The **European Solidarity Corps** initiative was announced by President Juncker in his 2016 State of the Union address and launched by a Commission Communication on 7 December 2016. Its key objective is to strengthen cohesion and foster solidarity in European society by allowing more young people to participate in a wide range of solidarity activities, either by volunteering or gaining occupational experience in helping to resolve challenging situations across Europe. The European Solidarity Corps will support national and local authorities and bodies, non-governmental organisations and companies in their efforts to cope with various challenges and crises. The Secretariat-General, in close collaboration with relevant services, is working on the preparation of the legislative proposal for spring 2017 as well as on the implementation of the first phase based on existing financing programmes.

### *Interinstitutional dimension of coordination of policies (How the interinstitutional involvement of SG contributes to the coordination of policies)*

The Secretariat-General is not only responsible for the overall coherence of the policy coordination but is also responsible for the coordination and monitoring of the **interinstitutional negotiations** on Commission initiatives as well as the Commission's relations with national Parliaments and non-governmental entities. This is mainly achieved through coordination and participation in various types of high-level meetings with the European Parliament and Council and through the preparation of briefings and flash notes for the President and the Vice-Presidents.

The Secretariat-General continued to play a major role in the Commission's efforts to strengthen its relationship with the national Parliaments. Concretely, the number of opinions received from national Parliaments increased from 350 opinions in 2015 to 613 opinions in 2016, an increase of 75%. Commissioners had 177 meetings with national parliamentarians during their many visits to Member States, at inter-parliamentary meetings, and at other events. The Commission continued to stress national Parliaments' important role in bridging the gap between the European institutions and the public.

## II. Corporate policies and administrative coordination

### **Strategic planning and programming**

*The merger of the Synthesis Report and Article 318 Evaluation Report to create the first integrated Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU budget (Specific Objective D4 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

In order to demonstrate that the Commission manages effectively and efficiently its resources and in particular its budgetary resources, the Commission decided in 2016 to streamline its corporate reporting on EU budget performance. For the first time, the Commission issued a new report: the **Annual Management and Performance Report** for the EU budget, coordinated by the Secretariat-General. This report is the merger of two former reports: the Evaluation Report and the Synthesis Report. It combines information on the performance of the EU budget (i.e. of the EU programmes) and the performance of the management of the EU budget (how the Commission and the other stakeholders managed EU funds).

The report draws on the Annual Activity Reports of all services and also on the reporting on progress achieved by every EU programme (through the programme statements and programme evaluations). The Annual Management and Performance Report has a particular focus on budgetary performance and gives an overview of how the Commission delivered against its political priorities. The Annual Management and Performance Report is another step in building a stronger performance framework in the Commission, drawing on recommendations received from the European Parliament and the European Court of Auditors.

### **Document and information management**

*Adoption of the Communication on data, information and knowledge management (Specific Objective D10 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

The Secretariat-General led work resulting in the adoption of a **Communication on "Data, Information and Knowledge Management at the European Commission"** in October 2016. The Communication recognises that data, information and knowledge are key assets for the Commission and sets out a comprehensive strategy that is designed to complement and reinforce the working methods of the Juncker Commission. It responds to a strong demand for a more corporate steer in this domain and seeks to help break the silos between Directorates-General and services by promoting collaborative working and the sharing of data, information and knowledge as widely as possible within the Commission.

As part of the governance of the new strategy, the Secretariat-General will provide the secretariat for the new senior-level Information Management Steering Board which will steer and coordinate the implementation of the strategy. It is chaired by a Deputy Secretary-General and includes 18 members from a wide range of horizontal, technical, scientific and policy Directorates-General. The Information Management Steering Board met for the first time in December 2016.

### III. Commission decision-making process

#### Procedural rationalisation, information, advice and development of the related IT systems

*Third iteration of Decide: new planning module replacing Agenda Planning (Specific Objective D14 of the SG Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

In 2016, the Commission's internal decision-making process was further streamlined through the next phase of the **Decide project**, led by the Secretariat-General. The focus in 2016 was on revamping the IT tool supporting the planning of initiatives and ensuring closer integration with the inter-service consultation process. This allows for a better follow-up of the progress of the initiatives. The system was also adapted to incorporate the political validations that lie at the heart of the working methods of the Juncker Commission, thereby improving transparency and traceability. The delivery in January 2017 of political validation before the launch of an inter-service consultation in Decide Consultation allows to follow up on better regulation requirements stemming from the planning step.

These achievements directly improve the quality of the preparation of initiatives. Information management is also improved, as relevant information about the decision-making process is progressively gathered in one single system for search and reporting purposes. These developments should start generating time and resource savings across the Commission, as users do not need to go to several systems to find the information or execute the relevant tasks.

The screenshot displays the 'Decide' web application interface. At the top, there is a header with the European Commission logo, the 'Decide' title, a user profile for 'Christine THERACE (therach)', and a language dropdown set to 'English (en)'. Below the header is a navigation bar with a 'MENU' dropdown, a search bar containing 'Reference or full text', and an 'Advanced search' button. The main content area is titled 'Commission decision-making process' and features a progress indicator with four steps, the third of which is highlighted in yellow. Below this are three main columns: 'MyFILES', 'MyTASKS', and 'MyTOOLS'. 'MyFILES' includes sections for 'FAVOURITES' (COM(2015)215), 'RECENT' (COM(2015)215), and 'DEADLINES'. 'MyTASKS' includes 'PLANNING' (0 tasks), 'CONSULTATION' (0 tasks), and 'DECISION' (3 tasks). 'MyTOOLS' includes 'GoPro' (Guide to procedures), 'PLANNING SIMULATOR' (Estimate future deadlines), 'APPLICATIONS' (Access IT applications), 'REPORTS' (Get statistics), and 'SUBSCRIPTIONS' (Get documents).

## 2. ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL CONTROL

### 2.1 Financial management and internal control

Assurance is an objective examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an assessment of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

This examination is carried out by management, who monitor the functioning of the internal control systems on a continuous basis, and by internal and external auditors. The results are explicitly documented and reported to the Director-General. The reports produced are:

- The reports by Authorising Officers by Subdelegation (AOSDs);
- The contribution of the Internal Control Coordinator, including the results of internal control monitoring at the Directorate-General level;
- The observations and the recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS);
- The observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

This section reports the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into (a) Control results, (b) Audit observations and recommendations, (c) Effectiveness of the internal control system, and resulting in (d) Conclusions as regards assurance.

#### 2.1.1 Control results

This section reports on and assesses the elements identified by the management that support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives<sup>3</sup>. The Secretariat-General's materiality criteria are set out in Annex 4. Annex 5 contains the Internal Control Template(s) which provide an outline of the main risks together with the control processes aimed to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the control systems.

Please see section 'The Secretariat-General in brief' for a brief overview of the kinds of expenditure.

In conclusion, the Secretariat-General has a low-risk profile in financial management for the following reasons:

- The managed 2016 budget of EUR 7 922 313 in authorised payments is to be considered relatively small;
- Almost all Information Technology expenses are committed based on Directorate-General for Informatics (DG DIGIT) framework contracts (tender procedures not managed by the Secretariat-General, see annex 5);

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<sup>3</sup> Effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; reliability of reporting; safeguarding of assets and information; prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments (Financial Regulation Article 32).

The Secretariat-General introduced in October 2013 one common financial workflow for all transactions and budget lines, including the use of standardised checklists. The financial circuits used in the Secretariat-General in 2016 are based on a fully centralised or a partially decentralised model with a key role of the central financial unit of the Secretariat-General.

No (reputational) event or unmitigated risk has been identified by the management which could have a significant impact on assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives.

The Secretariat-General's management has supported the assurance on the achievement of each of the relevant internal control objectives and there is no reservation in section 2.1.4.

### ***Coverage of the Internal Control Objectives and their related main indicators***

- ***Control effectiveness as regards legality and regularity***

The Secretariat-General has set up internal control processes aimed to ensure the adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments concerned.

The control objective is to ensure that the residual error rate does not exceed 2% annually.

The Secretariat-General's control strategy for the public procurement procedures is based on intensive ex-ante controls, which give a key role to the financial unit. Due to the nature of the activity which is mainly based on procurement, there is relatively limited scope left for additional value from supervisory ex-post controls. However, the Internal Control Coordinator has verified that the recorded control overrides, exceptions and/or non-compliance events would indicate any systemic control weaknesses. Furthermore, the absence of procurement procedures abandoned, the low number of subsequent amendments to contracts 'needed' and the absence of litigation related to procurement decisions, provided an indication for assessing the 'quality' of the Secretariat-General's procurement procedures; which is a second-best alternative to having an estimation of an 'error rate'. Finally, as neither the Internal Audit Service nor the European Court of Auditors have found serious procedural procurement issues – which it would quantify as a 100% error – the Secretariat-General concludes that there are no indications that the Secretariat-General's procurement procedures and payment transactions would not be legal and regular.

Concerning financial transactions, the time to pay is followed up on a weekly basis. 0.52% of payments volume was honoured too late. As it concerned small amounts and only some days of delay, no late payment interest was due.

However, the Secretariat-General's corrective capacity has been calculated at 0,3% by the Directorate-General for Budget these corrections intervened before payment by means of received credit notes and thus are not to be considered as corrective capacity. Furthermore there are no ex-post controls in the Secretariat-General. So, in reality Secretariat-General's corrective capacity is 0%.

Based on the information above, the Secretariat-General concludes that it reaches full assurance on the internal control objective for the effectiveness as regards legality and regularity.



In the context of the protection of the EU budget, at the Commission's corporate level, the Secretariat-General's estimated overall amounts at risk and their estimated future corrections are consolidated. For the Secretariat-General, the estimated **overall amount at risk** for the 2016 payments made is EUR 0. This is the Authorising Officer's by Delegation best, conservative estimation of the amount of expenditure authorised during the year not in conformity with the applicable contractual and regulatory provisions at the time the payment is made.

This expenditure will not be subsequently subject to ex-post controls. The conservatively **estimated future corrections** for those 2016 payments made are EUR 0. This is the amount of errors that the Secretariat-General estimates to identify and correct from controls that it will implement in successive years.

**Table 1 - Estimated overall amount at risk at closure**

SG	"payments made" (2016; EUR million)	minus new <sup>a</sup> prefinancing [plus retentions made <sup>b</sup> ] (in FY; EUR million)	plus cleared <sup>c</sup> prefinancing [minus retentions (partially) released <sup>b</sup> and deductions of expenditure made by MS] (in FY; EUR million)	= "relevant expenditure" <sup>d</sup> (for the 2016; EUR million)	Average Error Rate (weighted AER; %)	estimated overall amount at risk at payment (FY; EUR million)	Average Recoveries and Corrections (adjusted ARC; %)	estimated future corrections [and deductions] (for FY; EUR million)	estimated overall amount at risk at closure <sup>e</sup> (EUR million)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Programme, Budget Line(s), or other relevant level	as per AAR annex 3, table 2	as per DG BUDG report on pre-financing <sup>f</sup>	as per DG BUDG report on pre-financing <sup>f</sup>	= (2) - (3) + (4)	Detected error rates, or equivalent <sup>g</sup> estimates	= (5) x (6)	based on 7Y-avg historic ARC (as per ABAC DWH BO report on corrective capacity) <sup>f</sup> : (X,X%), but [to be] adjusted <sup>h</sup> to be the best but conservative estimate for the current MFF	= (5) x (8)	= (7) - (9)
SG budget	7.92	2.20	0.70	6.42	0%	0	0.3%	0	0
Overall, total	7.92	2.20	0.70	6.42	0%	0	0.3%	0	0

- Cost-effectiveness and efficiency**

Concerning financial transactions, the payment delay is followed up on a weekly basis. The average 2016 time to pay is 9 days which is far below the target of 20 days for procurement.

As non-spending Directorate-General and in line with sections 3.2.5 and 4.6 of the note Ares(2014)3702334 on the minimum set of common control efficiency indicators, below are the details of the overall cost of control indicator.

2016 costs of control							
	Officials		Contract agents		Expenditure		Total
	FTE	EUR	FTE	EUR	n	EUR	EUR
1. Procurement procedures	0.20	27 600					27 600
A - Planning	0.05	6 900					6 900
B - Needs assessment & definition of needs	0.05	6 900					6 900
C - Selection of the offer & evaluation	0.10	13 800					13 800
2. Financial operations (ex ante)	0.70	96 600					96 600
3. Supervisory checks (ex post, non-financial)	0.10	13 800					13 800
<b>Overall cost of control</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>138 000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>138 000</b>

FTE = Full time equivalent

2016 payments (EUR)	
Total payments authorised by Secretariat-General	<b>7 922 313</b>
Cost of control indicator	<b>1.74%</b>

The Secretariat-General quantifies above the costs of the resources and inputs required for carrying out the controls described in Annex 5 and the payments authorised by the Secretariat-General.

The 2016 overall cost of control indicator, being the total cost of control divided by the payments authorised in 2016, is 1.74%. The one for 2015 was 2.14%, the one for 2014 was 1.86% and the one for 2013 was 1.59%. The 2016 decrease was realised through an increase of authorised payments (Structural Reform Support Service, European Fiscal Board, Regulatory Scrutiny Board) within the existing staffing level.

Based on an assessment of the most relevant key indicator and control results, the Secretariat-General has assessed the cost-effectiveness and the efficiency of the control system and reached a positive conclusion.

- **Fraud prevention and detection**

The Secretariat-General has developed its anti-fraud strategy on the basis of the methodology provided by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF). All the resulting measures have been identified. All actions have been implemented. The 2014 anti-fraud strategy will be reviewed every 4 years or upon a material event. There is no review scheduled in 2017.

For the Secretariat-General, the controls aimed at preventing and detecting fraud are not crucial unlike those intended to ensure the legality and regularity of the transactions. No cases were transmitted to OLAF/Investigation and Disciplinary Office for investigation in 2016. In addition, during the same period, OLAF initiated no cases which concern the activities of the Secretariat-General, based on other sources of information.

Based on the above elements, the Secretariat-General has come to a positive conclusion on the effectiveness of the anti-fraud strategy.

- **Other control objectives: safeguarding of assets and information, reliability of reporting**

The Secretariat-General plays a key role in managing information in all its forms, from digital data to conversations. Information should be accurate and reliable and at the

same time accessible and secure. The core principles are confidentiality on a 'need to know basis', integrity and availability.

The Secretariat-General does not manage procedures/systems for sensitive or classified information. This is done by the Security Directorate in Directorate-General for Human Resources.

About the safeguarding of information, the eDomec rules are regularly updated by the Secretariat-General. The Hermes IT system is to be considered the backbone of the information safeguarding policy. The use of Hermes across the Secretariat-General is increasing considerably and is to be considered the main official electronic archive in future.

## 2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations

This section reports and assesses the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors in their reports as well as the opinion of the Internal Auditor on the state of control, which could have a material impact on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on assurance, together with any management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations.

### 2.1.2.1 Audits

#### ***Internal Audit Service audits***

In 2016 the Secretariat-General received reports for the following audits:

- Internal Audit Service - audit on the new Better Regulation agenda in the Commission; and
- Internal Audit Service - audit on financial management.

In addition, the Internal Audit Service requested that the Secretariat-General reports in its 2016 Annual Activity Report on the following open recommendations:

#### 1. Audit on information security governance in the Commission (2015)

The final report of the Internal Audit Service audit on Information Security Governance in the Commission was sent to the Secretariat-General, DG DIGIT and DG HR on 12 October 2015. The report contained four very important recommendations which relate to the need for stronger IT security governance at corporate level in the Commission. The recommendations were fully accepted with the exception of Recommendation 1 on the "Information Security Governance Structure" which the Internal Audit Service considers to have been partially accepted. A revised action plan was sent to the Internal Audit Service on 18 February 2016 and was accepted.

The implementation of the actions under the control of the Secretariat-General<sup>4</sup> is ongoing and it will be completed in the course of 2017 as planned and within the deadlines agreed with the Internal Audit Service in the context of the Action Plan. The Information Security Steering Board created in 2016, performing a.o. the function of Chief Information Security Officer in the Commission, is chaired by a Deputy Secretary-General to ensure its efficient function.

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<sup>4</sup> Several actions are actually performed by DG DIGIT and DG HR.DS (Security Directorate), in close collaboration with the Secretariat-General.

2. Audit on the new Better Regulation agenda in the Commission - what is the state of play approximately one year after its adoption? (Secretariat-General, Regulatory Scrutiny Board, Directorate-General for Employment, Directorate-General for Environment, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs - 2016)

The final report of the Internal Audit Service audit on was sent to the Secretariat-General on 28 October 2016. The report contained two very important and two important recommendations addressed to the Secretariat-General. The recommendations related to areas where the Secretariat-General (and the Regulatory Scrutiny Board) should:

- Better explain working methods and define proper monitoring and measurements arrangements to assess that Better Regulation components are functioning adequately.
- Take actions to foster the Better Regulation culture and facilitate the application of Better Regulation processes.

The Secretariat-General prepared a detailed action plan in response to this audit, which the IAS confirmed on 13 December 2016 as 'satisfactory to mitigate the risks identified'. The implementation of the actions is ongoing. The revision of the on-going Better Regulation toolbox addresses several of the actions identified as does the development of the Better Regulation Portal.

### ***European Court of Auditors audits***

In its special report [No 27/2016 "Governance at the European Commission – Best practice?"](#) the European Court of Auditors reviewed the governance arrangements, and how they evolved since recommendations of the "Wise Men" and the "White Paper of Reform" of 2000. The report did not reveal any concrete breach of the applicable legal frameworks and neither have any high risks been identified. The Commission formally responded to the recommendations and broadly accepted all recommendations. The Secretariat-General is actively engaged in implementing these recommendations.

In this context, the Commission is updating the internal control standards to align them with The Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission 2013 framework; the Commission is also working on an updated governance document and has also grouped its reporting and published in 2016 an 'Integrated Financial Reporting Package' providing a comprehensive overview of how the EU budget is supporting the Union's political priorities. The package contains the Annual Management and Performance Report for the Budget. The Annual Management and Performance Report is a combination of the former Synthesis Report (Article 60 of the Financial Regulation) and the Evaluation Report (Article 318 of the TFEU). The Annual Management and Performance Report also responds to the Court's suggestion for fine-tuning the methodology for estimating the level of error.

#### **2.1.2.2 Internal Audit Service conclusion on the state of internal control**

The Internal Audit Service concludes that the internal control systems audited are overall working satisfactorily although a number of very important findings remain to be addressed in line with the agreed action plans.

Particular attention is drawn to the need to ensure that the Information Security Steering Board has to function efficiently and effectively in its role as Chief Information Security Officer.

### 2.1.2.3 Management conclusion

Taking into account the positive conclusion of the Internal Audit Service on the state of internal control and the existence of relevant action plans for outstanding recommendations, the management comes to a positive conclusion without weaknesses which may have a significant impact on the assurance.

## 2.1.3 Assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control systems

The Commission has adopted a set of internal control standards, based on international good practice, aimed at ensuring the achievement of policy and operational objectives. In addition, concerning financial management, compliance with these standards is a compulsory requirement.

The Secretariat-General has put in place the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to the achievement of the policy and control objectives, in accordance with the standards and having due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Secretariat-General's system of controls in its entirety, the model explained in [the guidelines on assessing the effectiveness of the Internal Control System](#) has been applied. The evidence required to support the assessment has been gathered from management knowledge gained from daily operations, management reviews conducted, audit reports and results of key controls. The functioning of the internal control systems was also closely monitored throughout the year by the systematic registration of exceptions (under internal control standard 8) and internal control weaknesses (internal control standard 12). The underlying causes behind these exceptions and weaknesses were analysed and corrective and alternative mitigating controls were implemented when necessary.

Standards 7 (Operational Structure) and 8 (Processes and Procedures) were prioritised in 2016. Prioritised also in 2014 and 2015 and having attained considerable progress in the Decide and GoPro projects during the past year, these standards will not be prioritised in 2017.

The Secretariat-General has assessed the internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that the internal control standards are implemented and functioning as intended.

## 2.1.4 Conclusions as regards assurance

This section reviews the assessment of the elements reported above (in Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3) and draws conclusions supporting the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified with reservations.

The information reported in sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 stem from the results of management and auditor monitoring contained in the reports listed. These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in a complete coverage of the budget delegated to the Secretary-General.

The information provided in this report is complete and reliable.

The intrinsic risk for administrative expenditure managed by the Secretariat-General including procurement is low because of the limited budget as well as the centralised and

direct mode of budget implementation. The risks are effectively mitigated by means of controls put in place.

Results from audits during the reporting year give an overall positive feedback and did not include any critical findings. The residual risk from audit recommendations remaining open is not considered to have a bearing on the declaration of assurance.

Further assurance is obtained by the risk management process put in place, and the very limited number and significance of exceptions and internal control weaknesses reported in 2016. Management has obtained satisfactory evidence that the internal control system in its entirety is implemented effectively in the Secretariat-General.

In conclusion, management has reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

# DECLARATION OF ASSURANCE

*I, the undersigned,*

*Secretary-General*

*In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation,*

*Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view<sup>5</sup>.*

*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, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex-post controls and the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of control for years prior to the year of this declaration.*

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

*Brussels, 11 May 2017*

*[Signed]*

*Alexander Italianer  
Secretary-General*

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<sup>5</sup> True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the Secretariat-General.

## 2.2 Other organisational management dimensions

In this section, the Secretariat-General illustrates the highlights for the organisational management aspects as presented in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and Management Plan 2016. Sections 2.2.1-2.2.3 refer only to highlights of these organisational dimensions; for an extensive reporting on the Secretariat-General's concrete actions in 2016, please refer to Annex 2.

Additionally, section 2.2 includes a short description of measures the Secretariat-General took in 2016 in order to improve its cost-effectiveness and efficiency. This is one of the numerous measures the Commission takes continuously in order to improve its functioning with a view to investing its resources not only in the most relevant objectives but also in the most cost-effective and efficient manner.

### 2.2.1 Human resource management

The 2016 Staff Survey showed positive results for the Secretariat-General. The Staff engagement index reached 66% in 2016, with an increase of two points compared with 2014, and two points above the average of the Commission. However, the Survey also highlighted areas for further improvement, e.g. only 32.9% of the Secretariat-General staff thinks that the Commission cares about their well-being, compared with an average of 34.9% in the Commission. In response to the 2016 Staff Survey, two Working Groups were set up to look into issues linked to staff mobility within the Secretariat-General and to make the HR allocation more flexible. Moreover, two Sounding Boards composed of a broad sample of staff members have been established with the aim of proposing measures to improve areas that emerged as weaknesses in the 2016 Staff Survey and broadly facilitate the functioning of the Secretariat-General. A draft action plan has been put in place and, on this basis, further initiatives will be carried out in 2017.

Furthermore, the Secretariat-General scored good results concerning female representation in middle and senior management. The Secretariat-General now counts 10 women among the middle managers, representing 33% of the middle management population. Further efforts will be needed to reach the objective of 40% women in middle management by 2019. As for senior managers, the Secretariat-General now counts 7 women, representing 33% of the senior management population<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.2.2 Information management aspects

Following the Communication on 'Data, Information and Knowledge Management in the Commission' adopted in 2016 [C(2016)6626], well-known principles of document management have been supplemented with the notion of information management and its specific objectives. Among the various actors concerned by this new strategy, and in complement to relevant IT developments (e.g. increased use of collaborative tools) Document Management Officers have an important role to play. Consequently information actions have been led by the Secretariat-General's Document Management Officer sector to raise awareness on how to share information better.

Information sharing via files created by the Secretariat-General that are visible to all Commission staff has increased very significantly (from 2.91% in 2015 to 46.90% in 2016) mainly due to the integration of specific Secretariat-General applications into the Commission's document management systems (Hermes-Ares-NomCom) and for which the Document Management Officer sector has provided advisory support. Documents related to different corporate procedures are now available and retrievable via the search tools.

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<sup>6</sup> Figures include staff of the Structural Reform Support Service.



In the context of the modernisation of the Secretariat-General working methods, different actions have been undertaken in 2016 in order to advance towards the generalisation of the use of paperless e-signatory in 2017. This step will be complemented by increased awareness-raising regarding the registration of emails (Areslook) and new instructions concerning the paper circulation.

### 2.2.3 External communication activities

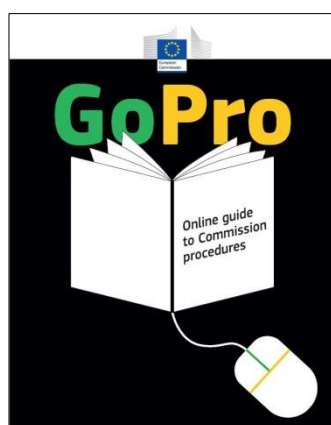
In collaboration with the Directorate-General for Communication, the Secretariat-General ensured the external communication of its major initiatives such as the 2017 Commission Work Programme, the Better Regulation Agenda, the public consultation on a mandatory Transparency Register, Cooperation and Verification Mechanism and the work of the REFIT Platform. In addition, the Secretariat-General was among the first Directorates-General to join the corporate digital transformation programme, working closely with the central team to complete the transformation of its content on Europa in early 2017. The 2016 budget dedicated to communication work was EUR 180 000.

## Initiatives to improve economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities

### *Pôle de procédures and Decide*

Decide is the corporate tool for the Commission decision-making process. Its objective is to cover the whole lifecycle of initiatives and to integrate all steps in order to facilitate the handling of decision-making and the monitoring of progress. In 2016, the new planning step created in Decide after full integration of Agenda Planning has improved information management related to the decision-making process, thus leading to time and resource savings in the Commission.

All developments in Decide aim to improve the efficiency of the decision-making process. The close involvement of the users contributes to the user-friendliness of the tool thus also reducing the time needed for training. Links to GoPro<sup>7</sup> are provided whenever possible in order to guide users all along the decision-making process.



When consulting GoPro, Commission staff easily find in one central Wiki all the information on corporate procedures and the institutional framework of the Union instead of having to search in different manuals of procedures, administrative notes, guidelines or webpages which were not always updated or consistent. The GoPro chapters are drafted and regularly updated in a harmonised and concise style by a dedicated team in the Secretariat-General trained for clear writing.

<sup>7</sup> GoPro is the online guide to the Commission procedures.

