



European  
Commission

# Annual Activity Report 2021

Directorate-General for Communication

# Table of Contents

- THE DG IN BRIEF.....3
- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....4
  - A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission’s general objectives and DG Communication's specific objectives (executive summary of section 1) .....4
  - B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).....7
  - C. Key conclusions on Financial management and Internal control (executive summary of section 2.1).....8
  - D. Provision of information to the President.....8
- 1. KEY RESULTS and progress towards achieving the Commission’s general objectives and DG’s specific objectives ..... 10
- 2. MODERN AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL CONTROL .....24
  - 2.1. Financial management and internal control.....24
    - 2.1.1. Control results .....24
    - 2.1.2. Audit observations and recommendations.....34
    - 2.1.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of internal control systems.....35
    - 2.1.4. Conclusions on the assurance.....37
    - 2.1.5. Declaration of Assurance .....38
  - 2.2. Modern and efficient administration – other aspects .....39
    - 2.2.1. Human resource management.....39
    - 2.2.2. Digital transformation and information management .....39
    - 2.2.3. Sound environmental management .....41

## THE DG IN BRIEF

DG COMM MISSION STATEMENT:

### ***Listen – Advise – Engage***

***DG COMM, as a corporate communication service, brings Europe closer to its citizens.***

In 2021, DG Communication provided the President and the College with evidence-based corporate communication actions, media advice, and state-of-the-art communication products and services. Both centrally and in all Member States, DG Communication provided its support to communicate effectively on the political priorities, including communication on the EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Communication also covered launching a resilient and stable recovery, and promoted benefits from the green and digital transitions. As domain leader for external communication, DG Communication enhanced the impact of the corporate communication campaigns, ensured the alignment of communication activities from other Directorates-General with the European Commission (Commission) political priorities, revamped the Commission's network against disinformation, provided efficient support to services on communication-related matters, improved accessibility to the Commission's web services and organised customised information sessions for visitors' groups from all Member States.

As a presidential service, DG Communication focused communication on President von der Leyen's leadership of the EU's response to the COVID-19 crisis. DG Communication provided the President and the College with political and economic intelligence and supported them in their visits in the Member States. Through the European Commission Representations in the Member States (Representations) (in 27 capitals and six regional offices) and the Europe Direct networks, DG Communication engaged with citizens, national authorities, media and stakeholders on the ground. All these actions contributed to reinforcing the image of the Commission as a strong institution, close to people, resilient in the face of challenging circumstances, and acting to provide solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular.

DG Communication's general budget<sup>1</sup> falls under the institutional prerogatives of the Commission. It is mainly implemented via an annual work programme, serving as the financing decision for specific annual activities. Separate pooled funds for corporate communication actions are anchored in the multiannual financial framework and the respective annual or multiannual Commission decisions<sup>2</sup> (see annex 3 for an overview of key budgetary figures for 2021). DG Communication manages two types of expenditure: (1) administrative expenditure (including real estate expenses related to Representations) executed, for example, by using procurement procedures; (2) operational expenditure, executed by using procurement contracts and grant agreements.

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<sup>1</sup> Amounted to EUR 175.9 million (commitment appropriations authorised) was allocated to its different activities as defined in the programme statement which is part of the 2021 Budget.

<sup>2</sup> C(2020)9390 - 18.12.2020.

DG Communication contributed in 2021 to the general objective of a modern, high-performing and sustainable Commission through the objectives defined in its Strategic Plan 2020-2024 and the objectives, outputs and actions defined in its 2021 Management Plan, as illustrated in DG Communications intervention logic (see page 9).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Activity Report is a management report of the Director-General of Communication to the College of Commissioners (College). Annual Activity Reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission. They are the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordination of the executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties<sup>3</sup>.

### A. Key results and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and DG Communication's specific objectives (executive summary of section 1)

The second year of the von der Leyen Commission focused on paving the way out of the global pandemic and the economic crisis, and towards a greener, more digital and more socially just Europe. In this challenging context, the external communication actions, and notably the **corporate communication campaigns**, were essential to raise awareness of how the European Union's (EU) Recovery Plan contributes to this objective. They highlighted the EU's response to the crisis by disseminating inspirational 'recovery stories' with real examples of EU support across Europe.

The most ambitious corporate campaign, **NextGenerationEU**, kicked off in May 2021 with a series of adverts in newspapers across Europe targeting political stakeholders, with 'Make it Real' as main tagline. In June 2021 campaign was launched on social media channels and online media targeting the general public and especially younger Europeans aged 16 - 24 - Europe's next generation. This ad wave was tied to the President's visits to EU countries whose national recovery and resilience plans were being endorsed by the Commission. (47% of audience reached stated that they had seen at least one of the NextGenerationEU campaign assets).

DG Communication launched the campaign's 'Make it Green' advertising wave in October 2021, featuring sustainability-themed assets, disseminated on various social media channels. By the end of 2021, this ad wave was concluded in 18 Member States and was still running in another three Member States. Taken together, the 'Make it Green' advertising wave has generated 0.9 billion contacts in these 21 countries. There have also been more than 200 million completed video views, more than three million link clicks and more than 85 000 engagements on social media. In this context, DG Communication produced a 30-second TV ad on climate action in partnership with the Union of European Football

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<sup>3</sup> Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

Associations (UEFA) and advertised on television, social media and in football stadiums. The TV ad is estimated to have been seen 128 million times in the European Union in 2021. TV stations in 30 countries and territories outside the European Union have broadcast the ad, too.

In 2021, the activities on **social media and visual communication** supported communication on the COVID-19 response, the recovery, the vaccination campaign and more. DG Communication ensured the Commission's social media presence through original creative content, targeted communication plans, and data analysis and insights. In 2021, **the Commission's central and Representations accounts were followed by seven million people**, earning 729 000 new followers.

In 2021, DG Communication continued making significant progress in the **fight against disinformation**, which was especially relevant in the context of the infodemic related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Representations** supported the EU's actions by reporting on the local situation across the Member States. This helped increase outreach at national, regional and local levels. They played a key role in explaining the EU's role in the fight against the pandemic and the scope of NextGenerationEU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. In addition, the Representations amplified the political messages of the President, with a focus on the National Recovery and Resilience Plans as well as the European Green Deal, Digital Decade, Rule of Law and the European Union as a geopolitical actor. They also engaged in targeted communication in the Member States by promoting the Conference on the Future of Europe and the New European Bauhaus.

The **Corporate Communication Contracts** team concentrated on service improvement in 2021. Two new framework contracts were offered (covering digital services and outreach and media relations), along with a new special procurement procedure: the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). The increased offer led to significant uptake, with almost 600 individual contractual solutions offered throughout the Commission.

The **Europe Direct Contact Centre** answered over 202 000 questions from citizens in 2021, which is the highest number ever. 46 000 (22%) of these questions were related to the COVID-19 pandemic, to the EU's response to it, and to travel rules.

In 2021, a comprehensive refurbishment of the **Visitors' Centre** was launched. The New European Bauhaus-inspired premises, design, concept and visitor journey further improve the Centre's capacity to receive physical, virtual and hybrid visitors. Furthermore, DG Communication worked on a new corporate Commission information centre, **Experience Europe Brussels**, which opened in February 2022.

DG Communication continued providing an enhanced range of **media monitoring and analysis** products for different internal audiences, particularly the President and the College. As vaccination against COVID-19 became a priority, DG Communication ensured constant monitoring and analysis of related media coverage in the EU. It provided summaries and analysis of online and social media content, including identifying potential

disinformation and misinformation. Additionally, **Eurobarometer** continued delivering data and intelligence on the state of public opinion in Member States, through two standard Eurobarometer surveys, one special survey on the future of Europe and a flash survey on vaccination.

For the second consecutive year, the pandemic increased the demand for **audio-visual services and video products** to replace face-to-face meetings and events. The use of the TV studios and video production at headquarters increased by over 200% in 2021. The corporate Audiovisual Service organised photo and video coverage for more than 280 missions by College Members outside of Belgium. The successful coordination and integration of audiovisual products with social media continued and resulted in more than 110 corporate videos and around 180 social media videos, including 100 social media videos featuring the President in 2021. These social media products included highlight videos, snippets and quotes from Press conferences, Instagram stories and reels. A particular effort has been made to produce all major policies' videos with interpretation into sign language, featuring the President and Members of the College (23 videos mainly related to the EU response to the coronavirus crisis).

In addition to the factsheets on the 'Safe COVID-19 vaccines for Europeans' website, in 2021 DG Communication disseminated a total of **5.6 million publications and online material, out of which 68% were in digital formats.**

## B. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KPI 1</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Image of the European Union</p>	<p>Baseline (2019): 43%<sup>4</sup>  Interim milestone (2022): Increase  Target (2024): Increase</p> <p>Result (2021): 45%<sup>5</sup></p> <p>Source: <a href="#">Standard Eurobarometer</a></p> <p>D78 In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? (% - EU)</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Image of the European Union (%) - EU</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Total Positive</th> <th>Neutral</th> <th>Total Negative</th> <th>Don't Know</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>2006</td><td>50</td><td>32</td><td>15</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2007</td><td>46</td><td>36</td><td>17</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2008</td><td>52</td><td>31</td><td>15</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2009</td><td>49</td><td>34</td><td>14</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2010</td><td>48</td><td>35</td><td>15</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2011</td><td>45</td><td>36</td><td>17</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2012</td><td>45</td><td>35</td><td>16</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2013</td><td>48</td><td>35</td><td>15</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>2014</td><td>42</td><td>37</td><td>19</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2015</td><td>40</td><td>38</td><td>20</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2016</td><td>40</td><td>41</td><td>20</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2017</td><td>38</td><td>38</td><td>26</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2018</td><td>39</td><td>39</td><td>28</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2019</td><td>39</td><td>39</td><td>29</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2020</td><td>39</td><td>39</td><td>29</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2021</td><td>41</td><td>38</td><td>28</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2022</td><td>37</td><td>39</td><td>25</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2023</td><td>34</td><td>37</td><td>19</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2024</td><td>35</td><td>38</td><td>23</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2025</td><td>40</td><td>37</td><td>27</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2026</td><td>40</td><td>37</td><td>25</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2027</td><td>40</td><td>37</td><td>21</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2028</td><td>40</td><td>37</td><td>21</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>2029</td><td>43</td><td>36</td><td>20</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2030</td><td>45</td><td>37</td><td>17</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2031</td><td>42</td><td>37</td><td>20</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2032</td><td>40</td><td>37</td><td>19</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2033</td><td>45</td><td>38</td><td>15</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2034</td><td>45</td><td>38</td><td>16</td><td>1</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Total Positive	Neutral	Total Negative	Don't Know	2006	50	32	15	3	2007	46	36	17	3	2008	52	31	15	3	2009	49	34	14	3	2010	48	35	15	3	2011	45	36	17	3	2012	45	35	16	3	2013	48	35	15	3	2014	42	37	19	2	2015	40	38	20	2	2016	40	41	20	2	2017	38	38	26	2	2018	39	39	28	2	2019	39	39	29	2	2020	39	39	29	2	2021	41	38	28	2	2022	37	39	25	2	2023	34	37	19	2	2024	35	38	23	2	2025	40	37	27	1	2026	40	37	25	2	2027	40	37	21	2	2028	40	37	21	2	2029	43	36	20	1	2030	45	37	17	1	2031	42	37	20	1	2032	40	37	19	1	2033	45	38	15	1	2034	45	38	16	1
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KPI 2</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Average percentage of target audience able to recall the messages of corporate campaigns<sup>6</sup></p>	<p>Baseline (2020): 20% of audience reached<sup>7</sup>  Interim milestone (2022): 22% of audience reached  Target (2024): 25% of audience reached</p> <p>Result (2021): 47% of audience reached<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Source: European Commission, DG Communication, unit B1.</p>																																																																																																																																																						
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KPI 3</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Estimated risk at closure</p>	<p>Target: Remains &lt; 2% of relevant expenditure</p> <p>Result (2021): EUR 0.62 million<sup>9</sup> &lt; 2% of relevant expenditure</p> <p>Source: European Commission, DG Communication, ex post controls performed during the reporting year, unit D3.</p>																																																																																																																																																						

<sup>4</sup> Share of positive and fairly positive views. Baseline based on EU-28.

<sup>5</sup> The result is based on the Standard Eurobarometer 95 of Spring 2021.

<sup>6</sup> The indicator measured the recall of the corporate campaigns messages of the audience reached. This is an average percentage cumulative number of all the different ongoing campaigns per calendar year.

<sup>7</sup> The indicator measured the recall of the corporate campaigns messages of the audience reached. This is an average percentage cumulative number of all the different ongoing campaigns per calendar year.

<sup>8</sup> This figure refers to general asset recall, and not to message recall. Hence 47% of young respondents aged 16-34 stated that they have seen at least one of the NextGenerationEU campaign assets.

<sup>9</sup> Representing 0.5% of the DG Communication's total relevant expenditure (EUR 124.04 million).

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

In line with the Commission's Internal Control Framework, DG Communication assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and concluded that they are effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall. Although some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified related to some non-critical areas, those do not have a significant impact on the assurance. See AAR section 2.1.3 for further details.

In addition, DG Communication systematically examined the available control results and indicators, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the internal auditor and the European Court of Auditors. These elements were assessed to determine their impact on management's assurance about the achievement of the control objectives. See Section 2.1 for further details.

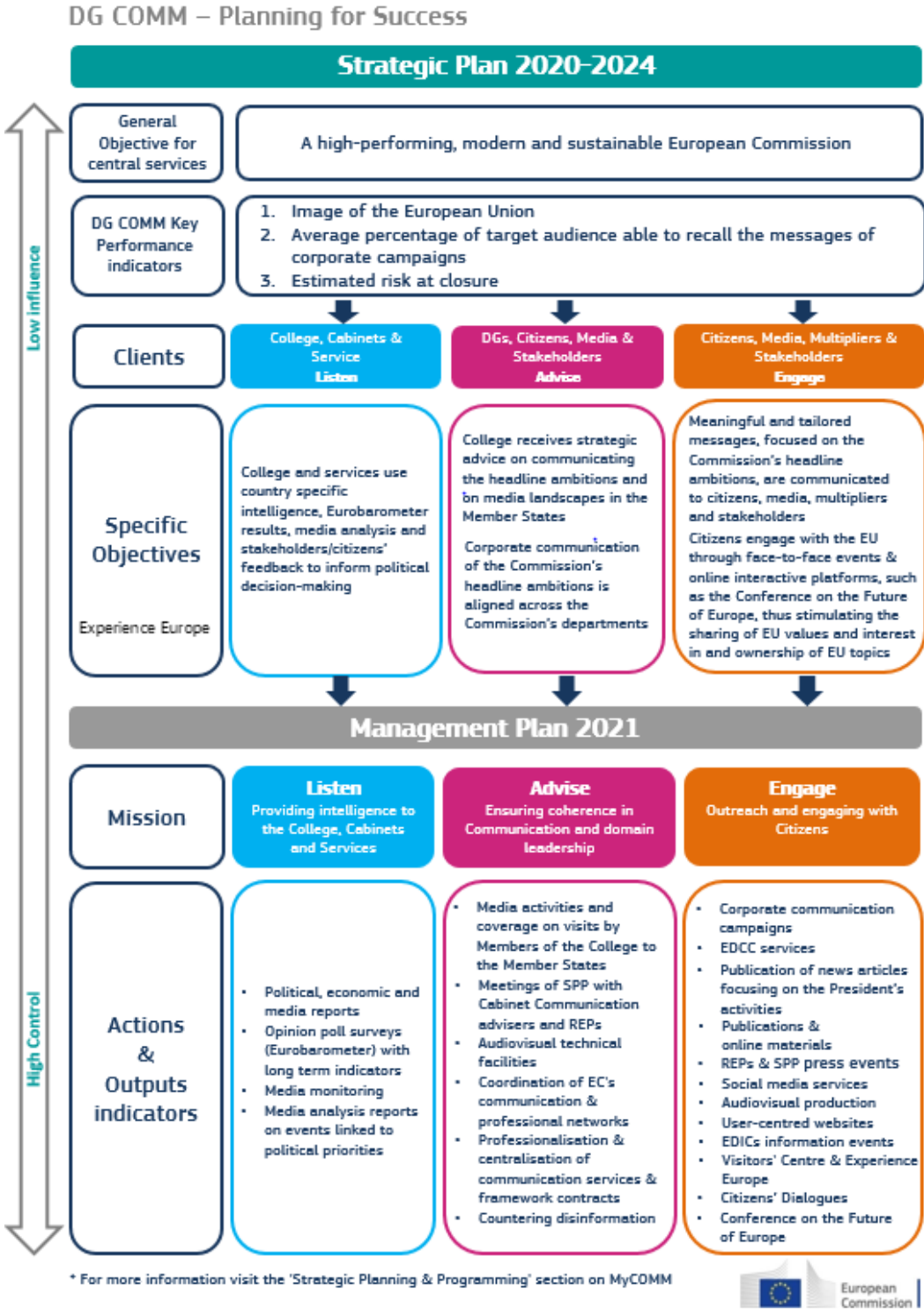
In conclusion, management had reasonable assurance that, overall, suitable controls are in place and working as intended; risks are being appropriately monitored and mitigated; and necessary improvements and reinforcements are being implemented. The Director-General, in her capacity as Authorising Officer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

## **D. Provision of information to the President**

In the context of the regular contacts during the year between the Director-General and the Cabinet of President von der Leyen, on management matters, the main elements of this report and assurance declaration, were brought to the attention of President von der Leyen, responsible for DG Communication.



The information below gives an overview of ‘What DG Communication delivered in 2021’.



This infographic illustrates objectives, actions and outputs contributed to the achievement of the main objective, ‘a modern, high-performing and sustainable European Commission’

## 1. **KEY RESULTS and progress towards achieving the Commission's general objectives and DG's specific objectives**

In 2021 the **Spokesperson's Service** continued to make all the necessary efforts to ensure the maximum efficiency and functioning of the Service and of the Commission. To provide a regular coverage on the Commission's general objectives, 459 press events and 173 midday briefings were organised. The service also vastly communicated on the recovery measures taken by the Commission in light of the COVID-19 outbreak and its effects on Europe's economy, including the implementation of the green and digital priorities. Additionally, the service organised 125 press conferences with College Members, 35 press points at the VIP corner and 126 technical briefings. The Members of the College received regular strategic advice from the Spokesperson's Service on the communication aspects of their work, including all the press materials, which in 2021 amounted to 917 press releases, 288 speeches and 184 statements published. The Spokesperson's Service's activities also covered intelligence gathering based on media coverage and preparation of specific reports based on information collected from other Directorates-General/services and Representations, with a view to accompanying the local communication of major initiatives. The service delivered around 180 speeches, video messages, op-eds, articles, written contributions, speaking points, letters, interviews, forewords and podcasts for the President.

On 11 May 2021, the Commission launched the **corporate communication campaign NextGenEU**. The objective is to make EU citizens aware of NextGenerationEU and the impact it will have on their daily lives. The campaign is intended to inspire and empower EU citizens to take an active part in the green and digital transitions and show that NextGenerationEU offers an opportunity to emerge stronger from the pandemic. The campaign has been fully launched in those 22 EU Member States, whose national recovery and resilience plans have been assessed and visited on that occasion by the Commission President in 2021. By the end of 2021, the NextGenEU campaign has already become the most visible communication campaign that the Commission has ever run. Press work, advertising, communication partnerships and owned media ensure that the campaign has reached a higher percentage of the population than any previous corporate communication campaign. Advertising alone generated 1.9 billion contacts with the audience in 22 Member States.

In line with their Joint Statement 'Communicating together at the service of citizens and European democracy', the European Parliament and the Commission undertook a stocktaking exercise at the end of 2021, highlighting achievements in key areas such as Eurobarometer, crisis communication and recovery communication, Europe Day and cooperation on the ground in Member States. In 2021, the Commission stepped up cooperation with the Council's Working Party on Information (WPI) and the Member States, following the enhanced WPI mandate from the Integrated Political Crisis Response mechanism (IPCR) Roundtable. DG Communication exchanged with the Member States on communicating the EU's COVID-19 pandemic response, including on vaccines and EU

recovery, dis/misinformation and other topics. DG Communication also coordinated and shared the Commission's contributions of (often EU-branded) communication assets and highlights on a weekly basis via the Council's Communicators' Portal with the Member States and other EU institutions.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the new multiannual financial framework 2021-27, DG Communication started monitoring the implementation of the communication and visibility requirements by Commission services and Member States, as well as providing support and guidance as needed.

The **Corporate Communication Contracts** service delivered almost 600 contractual solutions throughout the Commission, allowing Directorates-General to conduct their external communication and reach out to Europeans.

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** was rolled out following the signing of the [Joint Declaration](#) on 10 March 2021. DG Communication was central to the organisation of the EU Citizens' Panels and the design and organisation of the digital [Conference Platform](#). The Platform is the Conference's central hub and a unique instrument at the pan-European level in terms of scale, interactivity and multilingualism. It centralises all Conference-related contributions from online interactive debates, various grassroots citizens' events across Europe, as well as information on and debates emanating from European Citizens' Panels and Conference Plenaries.

The Commission's **Representations** and the Regional Offices in the Member States served the interests of the whole institution and the Union, connecting with national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders. Representations also supported the President, Vice-Presidents, Commissioners and senior officials by contributing to the preparation, conduct and follow-up of visits to the Member States. In 2021, the Representations successfully managed 633 visits and many activities in Member States. Additionally, the Representations provided the Commission with in-depth, accurate and timely political, economic and other information and analysis. Representations assessed the 2021 political and communication environment in the Member States, by gathering information on local communication sensitivities and by designing communication activities that matched objectives at European level, while also being anchored in the local context, tailored to the local media environment and responding to local needs. Corporate objectives were translated into country-specific communication actions, many of them organised in partnership with the European Parliament and/or with the Member States' authorities as well as with the Committee of the Regions and with the European Economic and Social Committee. This created synergies and helped to coordinate information and communication activities on the EU, tailored to local environments. Representations adapted their outreach activities to the epidemiological situation and used innovative cooperation formats to communicate about recovery measures and the green and digital priorities. EU action to fight the health crisis continued to be an essential component of their communication outreach. Lastly, in support of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Representations stepped up their efforts on stimulating debates and contributions from citizens and event organisers.

The **Social Media Network** of the Commission, managed by DG Communication, consists of digital leaders in the Representations, social media officers in the Directorates-General and the central social media team. The network acts as a multiplier of the Commission's messages and facilitates targeted communication to their specific audiences. In 2021, DG Communication organised two full Social Media Network meetings, and a series of three workshops to gather inputs and ideas to feed into the European Commission's long-term social media strategy.

The network of **EUROPE DIRECT centres** continued acting as an effective partner and multiplier in bringing the Commission's messages to Europe's local communities, with a particular focus on the Commission's regional, economic and health policies. On 1 May 2021, a new generation of over 400 EUROPE DIRECT centres was inaugurated, with extended local outreach covering almost the totality of EU regions

## **General objective 7: A modern, high-performing and sustainable European Commission**

In 2021, DG Communication contributed to the general objective of being a modern, high-performing and sustainable Commission. This was done by ensuring that the College receives high quality communication advice and intelligence, and by providing information and communication services addressing citizens directly, with messages aligned to the Commission priorities. This, in turn, had an impact on how well-informed European citizens feel and whether they feel their voice is heard in the EU. At the same time, DG Communication contributed to a more modern, high-performing Commission by continuously adjusting its tools and products (such as the Commission websites, digital outreach and social media presence) to face the challenges of the constantly evolving communication environment.

## **Specific objective 1: College and services use country specific intelligence, Eurobarometer results, media analysis and stakeholders /citizens' feedback to inform political decision-making**

**Social media intelligence** of the local landscapes in the respective languages is provided through constant contact with the digital leaders in Representations who provide and relay alerts and tone of debate to the Spokespersons' Service.

To inform the Commission policy, decision making and political communication, DG Communication set up a robust reporting mechanism on the developments of the pandemic in the Member States since March 2020. In close cooperation with the Representations, weekly COVID-19 reporting was put in place. This also included flash reporting for breaking COVID-19 developments, enabling a fast response to pandemic-related issues in the Member States. In parallel, potential rule of law implications of the anti-pandemic measures taken by the Member States were also regularly covered. DG Communication and Representations also participated in the work of the country teams supporting the Rule of Law process in its very first annual cycle.

In the context of the National Recovery and Resilience plans, DG Communication facilitated the temporary attachment of European Semester Officers to the SG RECOVER Task Force so they can contribute to the efficient and effective implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Fund in Member States. In the same vein, DG Communication worked jointly with the SG/RECOVER Task Force and DG ECFIN to develop a communication strategy for the Recovery and Resilience Facility, to be implemented jointly with Member States, and to ensure its complementarity and synergies with the corporate communication campaign on the recovery / NextGenerationEU.

Furthermore, DG Communication is cooperating with the Secretariat General and the Joint Research Centre on foresight and on the development of resilience dashboards on different fields. This includes social and economic trends, the green and digital transitions and the geopolitical dimension to strengthen the EU's resilience to potential threats going forward.

In addition to the above, DG Communication developed further a good working relationship with the European External Action Service to ensure smooth exchange of information on issues related to Common Foreign and Security Policy. It also cooperated with the European External Action Service in relation to countering disinformation through information sharing and operational activities at the level of Headquarters as well as through the Representations.

**Eurobarometer** continued delivering data and intelligence on the state of public opinion in all Member States, despite the persisting difficult conditions for face-to-face interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Standard Eurobarometer provided data on the image of the European Union and on issues related to the Commission's headline ambitions. A survey, part of the Future of Europe series, conducted jointly with the European Parliament, was published in March 2021 on the signing of the joint declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe. Another survey from the same series was carried out in September-October 2021. Its results were published in early 2022. In addition, in 2021 a flash survey was conducted to gain insights into the public opinion at regional level as well as one focused on vaccination. In April 2021, a revamped version of the Eurobarometer [website](#) was launched.

In 2021, the **media monitoring services** ensured, at corporate level, continuous feedback and analysis on media coverage of the Commission and the European Union in all Member States and selected non-EU countries, on issues of European interest and on important aspects of national policy or political developments. In addition, at executive level, the media monitoring service provided the President, members of the College, Cabinets and the Spokespersons' service seven days per week with specific press reviews and a selection of press agency wires. The service also made available specific and targeted monitoring related to important political communication events and carried out media analysis in support of a coherent, well-targeted long-term communication and media relations strategy (e.g., European Green Deal). The service also provided regular reports on the media coverage of vaccination and related campaigns in the EU.

In 2021, DG Communication continuously monitored and analysed social media trends, conversations and comments of citizens and EU stakeholders. It accordingly informed

decision-makers via its regular and ad-hoc reports and provided on-time alerts on breaking news and ongoing debates related to EU policies – in particular via its morning digest monitoring report and during the daily Spokespersons' Service's management meeting, but also via Signal and week-end digests.

## **Specific objective 2: College receives strategic advice on communicating the headline ambitions and on media landscapes in the Member States**

In 2021, DG Communication provided strategic advice on how to best communicate the Commission's top priorities on **social media** (messages, hashtags, communication plans) and through visual communication assets (factsheets, brochures, banners). It drafted and disseminated a weekly editorial calendar for priority political communication including suggested social media posts, visual assets and narratives, distributed to all Communication advisers of the College Members. This editorial calendar goes hand in hand with a social media wiki curating a wealth of social media assets – easily accessible by the communication advisers of the Commissioners for optimal use on their Commissioner's social media accounts.

DG Communication also offered ad-hoc social media trainings to communication advisers of the College and continued facilitating the use of its social media monitoring tools to help them assess the performance of their social media accounts on an ongoing basis. DG Communication developed and shared a repository of social media 'how to' guides and tutorials to support them in their daily management of the Commissioner's social media accounts. It also answered regular ad-hoc requests by Communication advisers of the College for strategic advice on their initiative-specific visuals and social media activities.

The **Representations' Country Strategies** underwent an update in autumn 2021 in order to reflect both the new realities in every Member State and the communication opportunities and challenges related to [President von der Leyen's State of the Union speech](#) and the [Commission's work programme for 2021](#). Based on the 2021 Country Strategies of the Representations, 20 overall analytical reports on local needs and opportunities for communicating on the President's political priorities were prepared and shared at corporate level. They were complemented by specific reports on major initiatives developed by Representations, linked to the twin green and digital transitions, the 9 May celebration and the follow-up to 2021 State of the European Union speech. In the context of the conference on the Future of Europe, Representations reported on their own and national outreach activities, stepping up their efforts to support the debate on the conference in their respective Member States. They were involved in 633 visits (physical and virtual) by Members of the College to Member States and ensured respective media coverage. Specific meetings between Commissioners and Heads of Representation (virtual REPTalks) were also organised to exchange views, policy and country related intelligence to support efficiently the communication of Commission legislative work.

## **Specific objective 3: Corporate communication of the Commission's headline ambitions is aligned across the Commission's departments**



DG Communication produced a weekly editorial calendar with strategic guidelines and alignment recommendations on **key political communication opportunities** and policy announcements for social media communication and shared it to all communication departments of the Commission. The social media network used the calendar as a basis for their social media posting and deemed it highly relevant to their daily work (according to a 2020 internal survey carried out by the Social Media and Visual Communication service). A new survey is planned in 2022.

The **Social Media Network** of the Commission, managed by the DG Communication, acted as a multiplier of the Commission's messages and facilitated targeted communication to their specific audiences.

The **Graphic Design Network** of the Commission, managed by DG Communication, consists of around 60 professionals working on visual communication for print, the web, social media and events. In 2021, DG Communication organised three network meetings and a series of visual identity workshops and training sessions, as well as collaboration projects such as the Global Gateway visual identity.



Throughout 2021, DG Communication continued delivering on its mandate as **external communication domain leader**. Having completed the centralisation of the Commission wide framework contracts for corporate communication, the drive to widening the range of the provided services continued: the centralised ticketing system was further expanded and improved and new contracts for outreach and digital services were signed and are now active. The overall number of contractual solutions offered by DG Communication significantly surpassed the target: instead of the initially planned 300 specific contracts, DG Communication offered almost 600 relevant solutions. The increase was due to the diversification of the services offered to Directorates-General, in particular via the new 'Digital Communication' framework contract.

In 2021, DG Communication worked closely with other Directorates-General to promote the dissemination of the '**recovery success stories**', showcasing real examples of EU support in response to the crisis. The stories were developed in close collaboration with policy Directorates-General and served as a bridging action ahead of the launch of the flagship NextGenerationEU campaign. In parallel, DG Communication collaborated with the services and asked for their support in the adoption of the NextGenerationEU visual identity and messaging and the dissemination of communication products through their own channels as well as via their networks.

Concerning communication governance and corporate communication, DG Communication continued in 2021 to work closely with the Secretariat-General and to ensure the secretariat of the **Corporate Communication Steering Committee**, thus ensuring the strategic alignment of the communication priorities with the policy priorities of the College, and overseeing their implementation across the Commission. Moreover, the

**Communication Network**<sup>10</sup> continued its regular monthly meetings in 2021 and to support the professionalisation of the communication community across the Commission by organising ten communication laboratories. These training sessions covered a wide range of topics, including optimising communication through neuroscience, promoting inclusive communication, explaining the corporate audiovisual framework contracts, and communicating on the conference on the Future of Europe.

Thanks to the steer of the Corporate Communication Steering Committee, the regular involvement of the Communication Network and the close cooperation of numerous Commission services, DG Communication was able to fulfil its monitoring, guidance and alignment role to ensure the coherent and effective implementation of the **communication and visibility rules**. The main developments in 2021 were:

- [Visual identity](#) guidelines on the use of the EU emblem and funding statement for beneficiaries of EU funding;
- corporate Question&Answer document (developed in close cooperation with DG REGIO), which supports and guides Commission services in the practical implementation of the new rules;
- survey among the Commission services in March 2021 to obtain feedback about their awareness and readiness to implement the requirements.

In 2021, DG Communication further increased the coherence, relevance and cost-effectiveness of the **Commission's web presence** of around 800 websites by various activities, including: enriching the Europa Web Guide with new content, advancing in the transition to the new corporate web publishing platform (including the transition of all websites of the Representations in Member States), and/or improving editorial and visual alignment across websites<sup>11</sup>. These actions were supported by a strengthened client management service to website owners of the Commission, who expressed a 74% satisfaction rate with the services. Six relevant network meetings were organised.

Work against **disinformation** was stepped up in 2021 with an upgraded mandate for the internal network. The mandate pools the resources of Directorates-General, European External Action Service and European Parliament in thematic working 'subgroups' to maximise synergies. The new subgroups on vaccines, the green deal and data and methodology were created. Several successful meetings were held in old and new configurations with outputs like the successful 'Fighting the Fallacies' report while, in cooperation with European External Action Service, a new Network platform was created.

Through the Country Strategies exercise, DG Communication continued closely cooperating with key policy Directorates-General in view of the strategic communication planning for

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<sup>10</sup> A forum to promote effective corporate communication in support of the political priorities of the Commission composed by Heads of Communication units in the Directorates-General.

<sup>11</sup> The Europa Component Library was enriched by 2 new releases, adding a new visual identity dedicated for 'European Union branded' websites, 5 new components and multiple improvements of existing features.



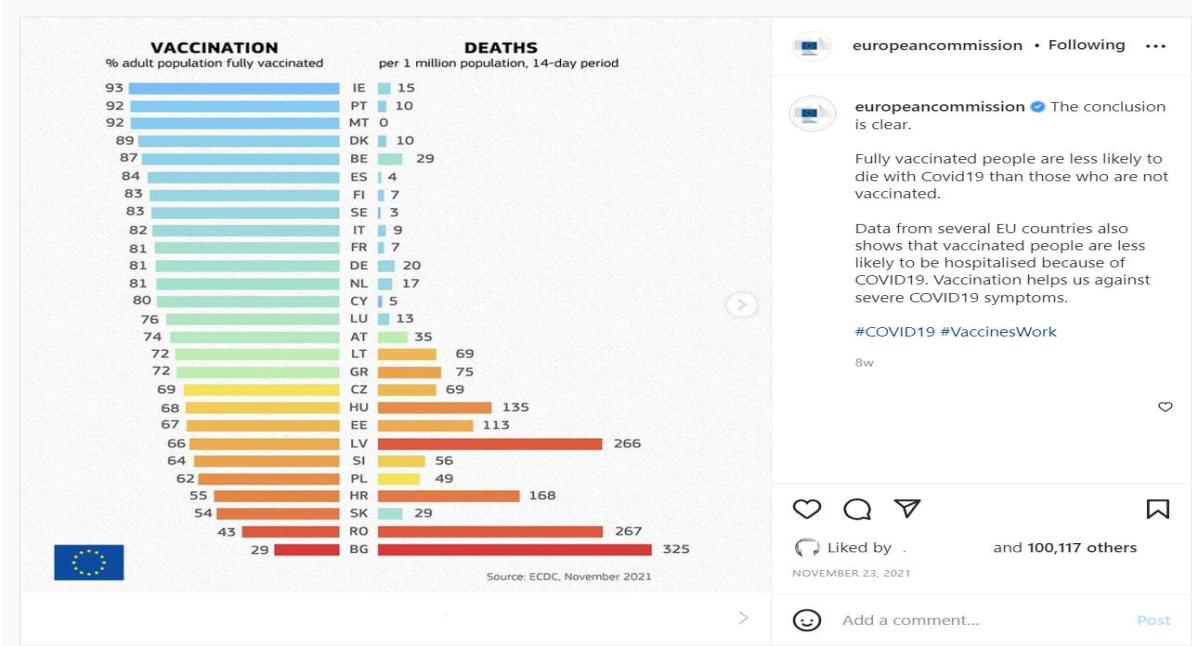
the Representations to reach maximum communication impact in the Member States. Besides organising targeted online briefings between Representations and line Directorates-General focusing on the key priorities of NextGenerationEU and recovery efforts underpinned by the twin digital and green transitions, DG Communication enhanced cooperation by prioritising requests from policy Directorates-General for support by the Representations.

**Specific objective 4: Meaningful and tailored messages, focussed on the Commission’s headline ambitions, are communicated to citizens, media, multipliers and stakeholders**

In 2021, the activities on **social media and visual communication** supported communication on the COVID-19 response, the recovery, the vaccination campaign and more. DG Communication ensured the Commission’s social media presence through original creative content, targeted communication plans, and data analysis and insights. In 2021, **the Commission’s central and Representations accounts were followed by seven million people**, earning 729 000 new followers.

Furthermore, the DG Communication spearheaded data visualisation as a strong avenue of the Commission’s visual communication strategy and the conception and implementation of #EUDataCrunch initiative – an original social media format conveying strong and convincing messages based on data visualisations. In 2021, the data crunch format earned over 16 million impressions on the accounts of the Commission’s Social media ecosystem, generating over 258 000 engagements from which more than 19 000 were shares.

Another remarkable achievement concerning the promotion of vaccinations was a [chart](#) that generated a total of 6 million impressions and 206 000 engagements, of which 12 400 were shares. This was the most successful post ever on EC Central Instagram and LinkedIn accounts.



Throughout 2021, DG Communication continued to produce, promote and disseminate **publications and online content** for citizens in 24 languages and in various formats. Content for different age groups, including children, was continuously updated, with the aim of increasing awareness of the European Union and its priorities. Products were updated in the autumn of 2021, to reflect the first two years of successful delivery of the EU's priorities for 2019-2024 and the EU's ongoing actions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Two testing panels gave advice on how to improve the relevance and quality of publications and online content for target audiences. One panel was composed of EUROPE DIRECT centres' managers, while the other comprised teachers from primary and secondary schools from all EU countries. The annual meetings of both panels were held in November 2021.

The **General Report** on the activities of the European Union – 'The EU in 2020' – was completely revamped and redesigned to present the first full year of delivery of the EU's priorities for 2019-2024. It provided a comprehensive insight into the major events, initiatives, decisions and deliverables of the European Union in 2020. As a novelty, it contained many infographics and examples of data visualisation throughout, including eight infographics in the chapter 'A concerted response to COVID-19'.

Furthermore, visits amount on the EU's [Learning Corner website](#) and targeted advice to Directorates-General involved in child-friendly communication significantly increased. **Learning Corner received around two million visits in 2021 compared to 1.7 million in 2020.** Designed for children and teenagers aged from 5 to 18, their teachers and parents, the site brings together, in 24 languages, a wide range of educational resources on the EU produced by the Commission and by other EU institutions. A new section on the Learning Corner, entitled 'Top Publications', was added in November 2021. Top Publications provides with general information, in various formats, about the European Union, what it does, and what its current priorities are.

The Commission's **Audiovisual Portal** remained the central point for everything related to audiovisual communication, centralising the Europe by Satellite video news service and the Commission's central deposit for all photo and video productions. **Europe by Satellite** continued to provide free of charge video transmissions (1 938 hours in 2021) of main EU institutional events, produced by all EU institutions, via satellite and online, to media outlets.

More specifically, the audiovisual service in 2021: (1) ensured video and photo coverage of more than 200 news-events outside of Belgium; (2) produced 110 corporate videos (covering, among others, EU policy and EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic)<sup>12</sup> and 180 news videos for social media (100 of them featuring the President); (3) completed the renovation of the TV studios, a completely new conceptual design of the Master Control Room, including a new LED video wall, production and teleprompter system, equipment to

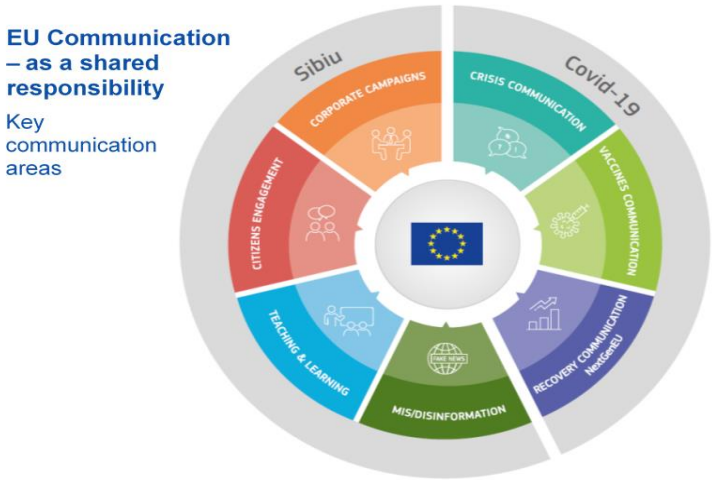
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<sup>12</sup> A particular effort was made to produce all major policies' videos with interpretation into sign language, featuring the President and Members of the College (23 videos mainly related to the EU response to the coronavirus crisis).

ensure a very low-noise work environment; (4) launched its first Service Desk<sup>13</sup>; (5) continued the digitisation of the photo and paper archives and the implementation of the mandatory Central Deposit for the preservation of the Audiovisual heritage.

In 2021, corporate communication efforts focused on the launch of the multiannual **NextGenerationEU campaign**, which served as a thematic umbrella for communicating the EU priorities and the European Green Deal. It targets Europeans aged 16 to 44 years old, while maintaining a strong focus on the 16-24 age segment – Europe's next generation. The NextGenerationEU campaign will continue to run until 2024 and will gradually shine the spotlight on various thematic areas of EU action.

Also, DG Communication **continued to cooperate with other institutions** in the spirit of shared responsibility in the following areas:



The Commission stepped up the cooperation with the **Council Working Party on Information** (WPI) and the **Member States** on communicating the EU's COVID-19 pandemic response, including vaccines and EU recover; dis/misinformation; NextGenerationEU corporate communication campaign; and other communication topics. In November 2021, DG Communication issued a tailor-made guidance document to support Member States in their awareness-raising efforts in their own administrations and among stakeholders about the communication and visibility rules.

DG Communication implemented together with other institutions, a series of joint actions and projects to raise citizens' awareness of the EU's political priorities in key areas such as crisis and recovery communication and fighting disinformation. When it comes to **Europa Experience** installations in the Member States, works were carried out together with the European Parliament to establish local communication stations as part of a new generation of installations, starting with Paris. In the second half of 2021 preparations were launched to open Europa Experience in Paris, in addition to the existing ones in Berlin, Ljubljana,

<sup>13</sup> The Service Desk provides a single point of entry and reference for all incoming requests and the respective solutions related to support, fixes and improvements for the AV IT Digital Services applications.

Helsinki, Copenhagen and Tallinn. Though the COVID-19 pandemic was an impediment to reach the desired number of visitors and to host physical events, the five Europa Experiences attracted more than 75 000 visitors since June 2021.

Moreover, coordinated by DG Communication, the Commission joined forces with other EU institutions and bodies<sup>14</sup> around a **fully digital Europe Day 2021** that coincided with the formal **launch of the conference on the Future of Europe**. Joint communication efforts focused on the EU's priorities through an interinstitutional [Europe Day web hub](#), a virtual [Berlaymont space](#), to coordinate press announcement and social media activities and joint actions by Representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices on the ground. These activities resulted in **53 million impressions on social media**, a total estimated reach of 32 million, over 25 million video views and more than 3 million engagements on social media; 4 000 articles/news items were published in traditional media (newspapers and TV/radio), most of them focusing on the inauguration of the conference on the Future of Europe that took place on 9 May 2021.

The **Europe Direct Contact Centre answered over 202 000 questions from citizens** in 2021, this being the highest number ever, with 46 000 (22%) of these questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the EU's response to it. The biggest number of questions were received and replied during the summer of 2021 concerned travel rules in EU countries.

The **Commission and the interinstitutional EU websites** are instrumental in bringing Europe closer to its citizens. In total, more than **142 million visits** were registered on these websites in 2021. An exit survey recorded a 74% user satisfaction on the interinstitutional EU website, which was completely revamped in November 2021. The Commission's core website (ec.europa.eu) was essential to the online communication of the Commission's political priorities in important areas like NextGenerationEU, the Recovery Plan, the European Green Deal and the EU's digital strategy. Moreover, the core website has been a key platform for the Commission to communicate its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, in May 2021, DG Communication ensured the online presence of the 'Global Health Summit' by providing the relevant website.

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<sup>14</sup> The European Parliament, the Council, the European External Action Service, the European Social and Economic Committee, the Committee of the Regions and – for the first time – the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank. Other bodies and agencies were linked up through the Commission's online presences.

In 2021, the **cooperation between Representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices**<sup>15</sup> was further deepened and broadened through a new cooperation scheme which included joint work programmes and the reinforcement of the ‘**Europa House**’ concept (as coherent branding, phasing out ‘European public spaces’). Representations organised communication actions in partnership with the European Parliament’s Liaison Offices offering online and hybrid formats. For landmark events, such as Europe Day festivities, the State of the European Union speech and in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the co-operation on communication further intensified, leading to a more concerted corporate spirit through: new opportunities of online actions to attract a bigger audience; promotion of visuals, testimonials and other online multilingual material for communication outreach; and co-creation of corporate activities and messages.



*Examples of the Representations’ activities.*

### **Specific objective 5: Citizens engage with the EU through face-to-face events and online interactive platforms, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, thus stimulating the sharing of EU values and interest in and ownership of EU topics**

The **Conference on the Future of Europe** demonstrated a number of unique features, comprising the first ever fully [multilingual digital Platform](#) and the use of participatory methods in the EU Citizens’ Panels with a set of 4 x 200 randomly chosen citizens in 24 languages. These EU Citizens’ Panels were held on-site in the premises of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, fully online as well as in hybrid format at the European University Institute in Florence.

In 2021, **live chats** were one of the most coveted features and used on many occasions such as Europe Day or for the vaccination campaign for which DG Communication organised chats with health experts, social media influencers and Commissioners. Overall, it managed to get the attention of over 19 000 users while the on-demand version of those events generated over **138 000 video views**.

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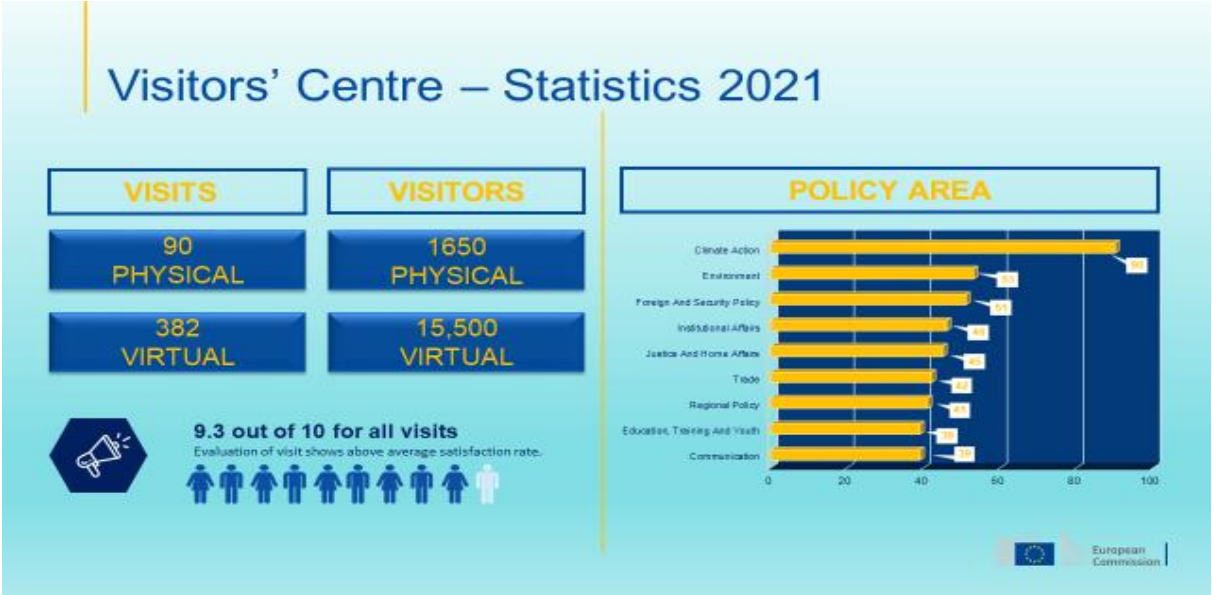
<sup>15</sup> The ‘Joint Statement on Communicating together at the service of citizens and European democracy’ signed in December 2019, urged European Parliament Liaison Offices and Representations to strive for coherent messaging and coordinated communication to use synergies and to ensure that the EU speaks with a single voice whenever it is appropriate.



In 2021 DG Communication took social media to the ground, covering events and capturing content live. This proved particularly valuable in panels of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**, as it created tailor-made content that would otherwise be hard to find, bringing more social media attention to this citizen involvement effort. In addition to these initiatives, DG Communication replied to 15 242 comments from social media audience on the central accounts, adding details, busting myths and providing context.

The Commission’s **Audiovisual Service** closely collaborated with colleagues from the European Parliament to cover the citizens’ panels and plenary sessions of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This resulted in the joint production of a number of highlight videos and citizen testimonials. The Audiovisual Service launched a new series of podcasts **‘Europe Calling’** on EU Top news featuring Commissioners (four episodes) and developed corporate guidelines on podcasts for the Commission.

In the challenging context of COVID-19 pandemic, the **Visitors’ Centre** provided concrete examples of how to adapt visits formats to continue communicating with the public in an innovative way. When it became even more important to raise awareness about the EU response to the pandemic and the European green deal and digital transition, the Visitors’ Centre maintained its political-driven approach with the Representations, targeting groups through virtual/hybrid visits with new flexible formats. Physical visits resumed gradually in October 2021. As part of its efforts to continuously develop the Centre’s offer to visitor groups, a modernisation of the Centre in the Charlemagne building is taking place through an architectural and communication project inspired by the new European Bauhaus values.



Visitors’ centre statistics for 2021.

In 2021, **Europe Day** was held against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and was organised as a largely digital offer for citizens across the Union. The roll-out of vaccinations and the coordinated European response were however visibly progressing, paving the way to a sustainable European recovery. Europe Day 2021 was a crucial moment for Representations in the Member States to show the variety, creativity and power of our common mission: bringing Europe closer to citizens, with a focus on and the

transition to a greener, more digital and more resilient Union. Representations and European Parliament Liaison Offices in the Member States played an important role in the outreach at national, regional and local levels, often in cooperation with local actors. Variety and creativity were the motto for these activities – ranging from dynamic media activities over vivid formats featuring the Conference on the Future of Europe up to cultural, pedagogical and visibility actions. Some activities were organised cross-border, reflecting a true European spirit, such as Europe Music Day or Europe’s biggest online orchestra.

**EUROPE DIRECT centres** are an essential channel to bring Europe closer to its citizens, by providing localised information on EU initiatives and programmes, and engaging citizens in the debate on the Future of Europe. On 1 May 2021, a **new generation** of over 400 **EUROPE DIRECT** centres was inaugurated, with extended local outreach covering almost the totality of EU regions. Additionally, a new interactive and synoptic [map](#) was created in November 2021 to provide a one-stop-shop to access all points of presence of EU outreach networks throughout the EU territory. EUROPE DIRECT centres and European Documentation centres were instrumental to the roll-out of the Conference on the Future of Europe outside of the capitals. In 2021 EUROPE DIRECT centres organised around 660 events on the topics of the Conference and carried out around 430 promotional activities, including info sessions, launch events, social media campaigns and promotion in local media.

Strengthening EU democracy means also bringing participation and engagement at all levels in the Member States. In particular, the local level, which usually benefits from a higher level of trust thanks to its proximity to citizens, is important for relaying communication and organising accessible events to get citizens to participate. However, the first survey of local elected politicians, conducted by the Committee of the Regions in 2021, showed an unfulfilled need for information and support among local politicians. During 2021, DG Communication prepared the launch of the pilot project ‘**Building Europe with Local Entities**’ (**BELE**) initiated by the European Parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee (launch planned for the first semester of 2022). The project aims at engaging elected local councillors in the participating municipalities, with a task to communicate and engage with local citizens and local media on EU initiatives, opportunities and programmes.

## 2. MODERN AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL CONTROL

### 2.1. Financial management and internal control

Assurance is provided based on objective examination of the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

This examination is carried out by management, who monitors 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 following reports have been considered: (1) the reports from 120 Authorising Officers by Sub-delegation; (2) the reports from Authorising Officers in other Directorates-General managing budget appropriations in cross-delegation; (3) the contribution by the Director in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control, including the results of internal control monitoring at Directorate-General level; (4) the reports on recorded exceptions, non-compliance events and any cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Art 92.3 FR); (5) the reports on ex post supervision and/or audit results; (6) the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, and the observations and recommendations by the Internal Audit Service; (7) the observations and the recommendations by the European Court of Auditors.

These reports are based on a systematic analysis of the available evidence. 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 Director-General of DG Communication.

This section covers the control results and other relevant elements that support management's assurance. It is structured into 2.1.1 Control results, 2.1.2 Audit observations and recommendations, 2.1.3 Effectiveness of internal control systems, and resulting in 2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance.

#### 2.1.1. Control results

This section reports and assesses the elements identified by management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives. DG Communication's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in annex 5. Annex 6 outlines the main risks together with the control processes to mitigate them and the indicators used to measure the performance of the relevant control systems.

DG Communication's operational and administrative expenditures<sup>16</sup>, fall under the **institutional prerogatives** while the separate **budget for corporate communication**

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<sup>16</sup> Respectively in titles 07 and 20.



**actions** is anchored in the Multiannual Financial Framework and the respective annual or multiannual Commission Decisions.

The budget of DG Communication is implemented under direct management by a relatively large number of entities in all 27 Member States.

**The total expenditure of DG Communication for 2021** was EUR 125.5 million (payments made). The commitments made amounted to EUR 171.1 million, with a budget implementation rate for commitments of 100%.

DG Communication manages two types of expenditure: (1) operational expenditure, executed by using procurement contracts and grant agreements, (2) administrative expenditure (including real estate expenses related to Representations in the Member States) executed by using procurement procedures.

**The budget under the corporate communication decision for 2021**, received via co-delegations, amounted to EUR 30 million (commitment appropriations). For this delegated corporate budget, a budget implementation rate of 100% for commitments (detailed information in table 1 of the annex 3) is calculated based on the internal reporting for 2021 on budgetary outturn<sup>17</sup>. This budget was implemented via central campaigns as well as decentralised activities of the Representations, for the European Green Deal, Europe fit for the Digital Age, EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic and NextGenerationEU<sup>18</sup>.

### **Overview of 2021 commitments, payments, revenues and incomes (million EUR)**

Expenditure detail	Commitments made	Payments made	Incomes and Revenues
Communication actions and Other budget lines (procurement)	117.46	77.79	0.02
Communication actions (grants)	11.90	13.59	-0.13
Administrative expenditure – Communication policy area	41.73	34.13	4.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>171.09</b>	<b>125.50</b>	<b>4.81</b>

### **Cross sub-delegations**

DG Communication received two cross sub-delegations from other Directorates-General (DG RTD and DG MOVE) in 2021 amounting EUR 708 212. DG Communication did not give any cross sub-delegation to other Directorates-General.

### **Results**

The reported control results cover 100% of the payments made by DG Communication. In 2021, the financial operations were managed exclusively under direct management. The table below displays different layers of controls linked to the main activities. It also lists the relevant control objectives being part of the assurance for each of the activities concerned.

<sup>17</sup> Including only the operational budget; the administrative budget, carried over appropriations, assigned revenues and others budgetary titles are excluded.

<sup>18</sup> For description of the campaigns, see chapter 1 of this Report.

### Overall conclusion table (million EUR)

Activity	Procurement	Grants	Cross sub-delegations to other Commission services	Revenues, assets, off balance sheet...	RER
07.04 Communication actions – Other budget lines (co-delegation)	77.79	13.59	N/A	N/A	<2 %
20.04 Administrative expenditure - Communication policy area	34.13	0	P.M.	Assets (property, plant, equipment):14.4	<2 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.4</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Internal control objectives	RER <2 % Sound Financial Management=OK Antifraud Strategy=OK (report for cross sub-delegated amounts = OK)			Safeguarding of assets=OK	N/A
Availability of independent information from auditors (IAS, ECA)	No overdue critical or very important recommendation				
Reservation	No				
Links to annex 3	125.50 See table 2, payments made		N/A	See table 4 (Assets)	

The controls on the execution of the budget (see annex 5) revealed no events or control issues that could have a material impact on assurance as to the achievement of the internal control objectives.

In line with the Financial Regulation, DG Communication had no cases in 2021 which fall under these reporting requirements under FR articles 92.3, 125.3, 181.6 and 193.2. Regarding article 130.4 (Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years), the new generation of EUROPE DIRECT Centres has started operating for the period 2021-2025, supported by partnership agreements for a total duration of 4 years and 8 months (detail in annex 3).

## 1. Effectiveness of controls

### a) Legality and regularity of the transactions

DG Communication uses internal control processes to ensure sound management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions it is responsible for. This is carried out considering the multiannual character of programmes and the nature of the payments concerned. The control objective is to ensure that the residual error rate is as low as possible and does not exceed 2% of annual budget implementation, as determined in the materiality criteria in annex 5. The amount of payments made is used as a basis for calculation. The control system is designed to prevent, detect and correct errors, irregularities and fraud by ex ante and ex post controls covering all types of financial operations and procurement and grant procedures.

Several layers of ex ante controls are applied to the transactions, which differ if the transaction was initiated in headquarters or in Representations. Ex post controls are in turn planned annually based on a risk analysis and apart from the sampled transactions, audit selected elements of the internal control system. DG Communication control strategy contains a detailed description of the controls in place.

## Overview of controls by type of financial circuit

	Centralised circuit in headquarters' units	Decentralised circuits in Representations
Review and control before award (ex ante)	Financial Unit in headquarters for grants and procurement over EUR 139 000 <sup>19</sup> . Units in headquarters for grants and procurement below this threshold.	Financial Unit in headquarters for grants and procurement over EUR 139 000 and exceptional negotiated procedure. Representations for grants and procurement below this threshold.
Financial Initiation (ex ante)	Financial unit in headquarters Coverage: 100%	Representation Coverage: 100%
Financial Verification (ex ante)	Financial unit in headquarters Coverage: 100%	Representation Coverage: 100%
Second level Financial Verification (ex ante)	-	Financial unit in headquarters; risk-based sample covering 5.4% of transactions in 2021.
Ex post control (supervisory desk reviews)	1 Unit (out of 11) controlled in 2021; risk-based sample.	7 Representations (out of 28 <sup>20</sup> ) controlled in 2021; risk-based sample.

The Finance and Control unit in headquarters also provides an ad-hoc helpdesk service giving orientation and guidance to procedural and legal queries with an awareness-raising and preventive function, for both headquarters and Representations (see annex 6).

Procurement represented 89.2% of the administrative and operational expenditure (payments made) in 2021, where grants represented 10.8%.

### Review and control before award (ex ante)

24 procurement procedures, amounting to EUR 329 million, were submitted for ex ante review before publication of the contract notice or launch of the invitation to tender. Ex ante control of the procedure before award was carried out on 28 calls for tenders, for a total amount of EUR 436 million<sup>21</sup>.

Most of the grant procedures were low-value specific grant agreements signed under the existing framework partnership agreements with the EUROPE DIRECT centres in all the Member States. In addition, two calls for proposals were subject to ex ante review before publication in 2021. Ex ante control was carried out on twenty-three calls and one prize, amounting to EUR 9.5 and including twenty EUROPE DIRECT centres.

Other procedures below the threshold were managed by Units in Headquarters (centralised circuit) and Representations (decentralised circuit).

### Second level Financial Verification (ex ante)

721 transactions, amounting to EUR 52.4 million, related to procurement (commitments, de-commitments, payments and recovery orders) initiated in Representations were selected

<sup>19</sup> Threshold from the Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26.2.2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC.

<sup>20</sup>Including the Representation in London closed after United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU.

<sup>21</sup> The value of checked procedures is the value of the contract over its total duration (generally 4 years). Therefore, the total value of the procedures checked is not linked to the annual budget.

by MUS-DICE<sup>22</sup> for ex ante second-level financial verification. This control covered 4.29% of the total number of transactions implemented by all Representations and accounts for 36.3% of the value of all the transactions. 82 transactions, amounting to EUR 4.68 million, were returned for correction due to technical errors, not having impact on the assurance. Five transactions, amounting to EUR 0.07 million, were refused for technical errors.

180 transactions, amounting to EUR 4.9 million, related to grants (commitments, de-commitments, payments, recovery orders) initiated in the Representations were selected by MUS-DICE for ex ante second-level financial verification. This control covered 1.07% of the total number of transactions related to grants, implemented by all Representations and 3.4% of the value of all the transactions. 28 transactions, amounting to EUR 0.53 million, were returned for correction due to technical errors, not having impact on the assurance.

### ***Ex post control (supervisory desk reviews)***

121 procurement payments<sup>23</sup>, amounting to EUR 15 million, were checked. Nine substantial, non-quantitative errors related to procedures were identified in the sampled transactions subject to ex post controls. In addition, nine irregularities were detected or declared ex post in the headquarters and Representations, leading to non-compliance reports under internal control principle 12 (see section 2.1.3). Ex post controls have not detected any quantitative error related to payments in 2021. These controls provide additional assurance, detect errors, have an awareness-raising and dissuasive effect on financial actors and are cost-effective (3.2 FTEs in 2021).

3 grant files<sup>24</sup> were checked for a total value of EUR 0.04 million. No quantitative (on payments) or procedural errors were detected. Since 2015, all grants managed by DG Communication are low-value and have progressively been switched over to simplified forms using lump sums for EUROPE DIRECT centres (implementation of an evaluation recommendation). Given the low-risk and the limited share of grants in the overall expenditure, ex post control is not carried out on beneficiaries on the spot, thus keeping controls proportional to the risk and cost-effective.

### ***Error rate***

The calculated average error rate on procurement and grants for both the administrative and operational expenditures was 0.08% (see annex 7, table 1), which is lower than the 2% threshold, set in the materiality criteria (see annex 5). However, since all the errors related to procurement were procedural, for which the financial impact cannot be quantified, the

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<sup>22</sup> Monetary Unit Sampling-Decentralised Integrated Control Environment, a corporate tool linked to ABAC.

<sup>23</sup> The ex post controls covers the payment and all related operations (procedure, budgetary commitment, legal commitment, ...).

<sup>24</sup> EUROPE DIRECT centres grant files.

financial exposure of the budget is considered to be 'zero'<sup>25</sup>. Since no errors (financial or procedural) were found in grants, the final error rate is considered to be 'zero' (0%).

**An average error rate of 0.5% has been used as a conservative estimate for the purpose of the calculation of the average error rate for both procurement and grants.**

This leads to the conclusion that DG Communication has set up internal control processes which guarantee an adequate management of the risks and a reasonable assurance relating to the legality and regularity of transactions, as well as the nature of the payments concerned. This system operates effectively, finding, correcting and preventing errors. Furthermore, the resources assigned have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management.

In the context of the protection of the EU's budget, at the Commission's corporate level, the Directorates-General estimated overall amounts at risk and their estimated future corrections are consolidated. DG Communication's portfolio consists of segments with a relatively low error rate. This is, respectively, thanks to the inherent risk profile of the work programme, the beneficiaries, the funding modalities and the performance of the related control systems.

For those latter (sub)segments with control weaknesses, the (root) causes of the issues are procurement issues. Management's mitigating actions taken to address these weaknesses are described in particular in DG Communication's control strategy, which was adopted in 2020. The accompanying action plan contains a list of measures to be implemented to make controls more effective on certain categories of procurement and financial operations.

Through recoveries and financial corrections, DG Communication has in place an effective mechanism for correcting errors. During the reporting year, the executed corrective capacity was null, as for the benefit at ex ante level control and the recoveries and financial corrections following the results of the ex post controls.

DG Communication's relevant expenditure, its estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are set out in Table X: Estimated risk at payment and at closure. The estimated overall risk at payment for 2021 expenditure amounts to EUR 0.62 million, representing 0.5 % of the DG Communication's total relevant expenditure for 2021. This is the Authorising Officer by Delegation's best, conservative estimate of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year not in conformity with the contractual and regulatory provisions applicable at the time the payment was made. This expenditure will subsequently be subject to ex post controls and a proportion of the underlying errors will be detected and corrected in subsequent years. The conservatively estimated future

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<sup>25</sup> In line with the Commission guidance, the entire value of the contract cannot be considered at risk or a loss for the EU's budget. Therefore, it cannot be used for the calculation of the amount at risk and the materiality of error.

corrections for 2021 expenditure amount to EUR 0 million. The difference between those two amounts results in the estimated overall risk at closure of EUR 0.62 million, representing 0.5% of the total relevant expenditure for 2021.

For an overview at Commission level, the Directorates-General estimated overall risk at payment, estimated future corrections and risk at closure are consolidated in the Annual Management and Performance Report.

**Table X : Estimated risk at payment and at closure (amounts in EUR million)**

The full detailed version of the table is provided in annex 9.

DG Communication	Relevant expenditure	Estimated risk (error rate %) at payment		Estimated future corrections and deductions		Estimated risk (error rate %) at closure	
(1)	(2)	(3)		(4)		(5)	
	m EUR	m EUR	%	m EUR	%	m EUR	%
Procurement	73.97	0.37	0.5%	0	0%	0.37	0.5%
Grants	15.95	0.08	0.5%	0	0%	0.08	0.5%
Administrative	34.13	0.17	0.5%	0	0%	0.17	0.5%
<b>DG total</b>	<b>124.04</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>0.5%</b>

#### b) Fraud prevention, detection and correction

DG Communication has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy since 2014, based on the methodology provided by European Anti-Fraud Office. It is updated every three years since then. It was last updated in June 2020. Its implementation is being monitored and reported to the management, notably in the frame of the annual Risk Management process. All necessary actions have been implemented. The results achieved during the year thanks to the anti-fraud measures in place can be summarised as follows: (1) targeted awareness-raising actions for DG Communication managers, capacity-building seminars and presentations during ex post controls have been organised for headquarters and Representations; (2) transactions identified as containing potential 'red flags'<sup>26</sup> do not exceed 2% of all transactions checked

Based on the available information, DG Communication has reasonable assurance that the anti-fraud measures in place are effective.

#### c) Other control objectives: safeguarding of assets and information, reliability of reporting (if applicable)

The buildings of the Representations are considered key assets of DG Communication. The Commission owns the buildings in 10 out of the 33 Representation sites<sup>27</sup>, in most cases

<sup>26</sup> Red flags are warning signals which can indicate the existence of irregularity or fraud. It does not mean that fraud has been committed; it points out that a certain area of activity needs attention.

<sup>27</sup> 27 Representation offices in the capitals of the 27 Member States and 6 regional offices, for a total of 33 offices; this includes the Representations in Belgium (CHAR, managed by OIB) and

jointly with the European Parliament. In 2021, DG Communication continued researching the real estate market in Athens and Bonn for Commission Representations' needs and in cooperation with the European Parliament to find premises in Bratislava, Madrid, Paris, Prague, Riga, Rome, Stockholm, Vilnius, Warsaw and Zagreb, where lease contracts are ending. In Paris, the lease contract was extended to cover the French Presidency in the first half of 2022. Similarly, an extension was negotiated in Rome to complete the ongoing market prospection. The headquarters provided continuous support in infrastructure and security matters to the Representations, ranging from identifying adequate premises and defining negotiating terms, to providing architectural, logistic, safety advice and procedural support for the procurement (supplies, services, renovation works).

DG Communication also provided logistical support to DG Reform in some Member States, in relation with the management of premises, local procurement procedures and inventories.

DG Communication is responsible for maintaining the security infrastructure in the Representations. Headquarters provides specialised advice on security installations and measures for new locations and renovation works under the supervision and guidance of the Directorate for Security of DG Human Resources (DG HR.DS). For each Representation premises a digital security file has been established. It describes the main systems, their configuration and the procedures. These files are regularly updated during DG Communication visits, the DG HR.DS security inspections and during procurement of security works and equipment.

As in 2020, the extensive teleworking in the Commission and the sanitary measures put in place by the Member States in relation to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, made it difficult to carry out the annual inventory tracking and control in certain Representations. Flexibility concerning the deadline was thus introduced so that staff concerned could perform the exercise in a safe way when the health situation in the host country allows<sup>28</sup>. Given the limited inventory movements during the year and the established headquarters controls on entry and exit operations, the risk caused by the delayed annual inventory tracking is considered as very low.

Based on all the elements above, it is possible to conclude that the control systems for safeguarding of assets present no weakness and provide a fair and true view.

## **2. Efficiency of controls**

The efficiency indicators are monitored regularly to ensure that the controls in DG Communication operate smoothly. DG Communication executed 12 649 payments in 2021, against 14 218 payments in 2020. In 2021, 97.7% of payments were made within time limits (98% of payments for the maximum payment time of 30 days, 96% for 60), a

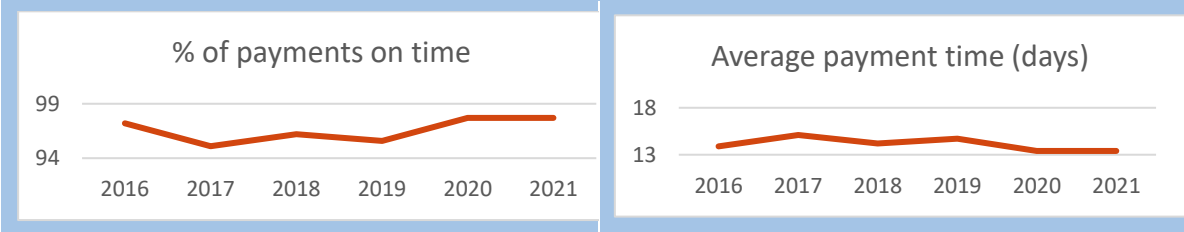
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Luxembourg (KAD, managed by the European Parliament). Most premises outside Brussels and Luxembourg are rented or owned jointly with the European Parliament, except for Bonn and Athens.

<sup>28</sup> The deadline for the 2021 Annual inventory report in Representations is 31.1.2022.

bit over the target set in the 2021 Management Plan (97%) and similar to the 2021 result. This indicator is included in the budgetary report sent periodically to the management. The average Net Payment Time was 13.4 days, well below the threshold of 30 days.

**Evolution of time-to-pay indicators on all expenditure**



**Procurement**

The average time-to-pay related to invoices was 11.8 days for the administrative expenditure and 14.3 days for the operational one. The share of payments within time limits was 99%.

**Grants**

The average time-to-inform, time-to-grant and time-to-pay were respectively 160.3, 34.1 and 26.6 days for the operational expenditure (new Europe Direct centres’ network with 2021-2025 framework partnership agreements and related 2021 specific grant agreements). The share of payments within time limits was 87%.

**Financial scoreboard - corporate standard ‘timely payments (%)’ indicator**

As from 2020, the former ‘payments-on-time (%)’ indicator changes from the number of payments on time (in percentage) to the payment accepted amount in time (in percentage). This new perspective is reflected in the corporate standard ‘timely payments (%)’ indicator, as reported in the new Financial Scorecard (annex 4). The score of the timely payments new indicator is an achievement by DG Communication of 97% compared to the Commission result of 98%.

Timely Payments	COMM Score	EC Score
	<b>97%</b>	<b>98%</b>

The reasons behind this result are that 10 out of the 12 649 payments made in 2021 by DG Communication account for a third of this late payment rate. By comparison to 2020, DG Communication has improved the execution from 96% to 97% of payments operations in the foreseen delay and the average payment time has been maintained (13.4 days). Finally, most of the late payments registered carried no or very low interest payments.

In addition to its constant efforts to improve efficiency, DG Communication has implemented different actions to obtain a gain of efficiency in the financial management,



such as dashboards for managers, standardised templates for procurement procedures, stricter monitoring of late payments.

### **3. Economy of controls**

The estimation of cost and benefits of controls considers the multi-site nature of the DG Communication and its activities, as well as the combination of two different types of financial circuits – centralised and decentralised – in headquarters and the Representations. The indicators are provided separately for procurement and grants, ex ante and ex post controls based on the number of posts, allocated functions and staff categories.

The overall cost-effectiveness indicator results from the sum of these sub-indicators (for more detailed information can be found, see annex 7).

The estimated cost of controls in 2021 is EUR 7.5 million or 5.97% of payments made and is lower than the result reported in 2020 (6.86%) mainly due to the increase in the funds managed (payments made), which amounted EUR 125.50 million in 2021 compared to EUR 112.47 million in 2020. The results of the analysis show that the controls carried out in 2021 for the management of the budget appropriations were relatively cost effective, considering the size of the budget and the highly decentralised organisational structure.

The benefits of controls are difficult to quantify. The value of the recoveries has decreased since 2016 mostly due to the reduced weight of grants in the overall expenditure, the use of simplified forms of grants, and the improved effectiveness of ex ante controls. The main non-quantifiable benefit of controls is the compliance with the rules and the low error rate resulting from the controls implemented at ex ante stage. Another non-quantifiable benefit resulting from the controls operated ex ante, during the programming phase, is the assurance that the financed actions contribute to the achievement of policy objectives. The ex post supervisory controls of the units and Representations, in addition to the assurance they provide, have a deterrent effect, as they contribute to awareness-raising of the internal control principles and fraud. The reports of ex post controls provide valuable feedback on their effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement.

### **4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls**

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, DG Communication has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of its control system and reached a positive conclusion.

DG Communication operates in direct management mode. Administrative expenditure, procurement and low value grants based on lump sums are in general considered as a low risk. However, elements such as the multi-site organisational structure, the decentralised financial circuits, the differences in national law affecting public contracts, the mandatory rotation of financial agents in Representations, the wide variety of appropriations managed in co-delegation, and the relatively high reputational risk in case of error require more sophisticated control systems than in the case of standard procurement.

### 2.1.2. Audit observations and recommendations

This section sets out the observations, opinions and conclusions reported by auditors – including the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control. Summaries of the management measures taken in response to the audit recommendations are also included, together with an assessment of the likely material impact of the findings on the achievement of the internal control objectives, and therefore on management's assurance.

#### European Court of Auditors

The Special Report of the European Court of Auditors No 14/2019 '*Have your say!*' '*Commission's public consultations engage citizens but fall short of outreach activities*' recommended to the Commission to improve the outreach of its public consultations and adapt its communication measures to promote greater participation, particularly the range of potential participants. DG Communication took action following the recommendation by using its networks managed by Representations in Member States to more frequently and systematically inform about public consultations and motivate stakeholders and citizens in general to contribute. In April 2021, the new Better Regulation Communication was adopted and the related revision of the Better Regulation Toolbox finalised.

The Special Report No 09/2021 '*Disinformation affecting the EU: tackled but not tamed*' addressed a number of recommendations rated 'important' to various services. It relates notably to improving the coordination and accountability of EU actions against disinformation, adopting an EU media literacy strategy that includes tackling disinformation and taking steps to enable EDMO to fulfil its ambitious objectives. DG Communication, as associate to the implementation of mitigating measures, supports the lead services (SG and DG CNECT).

#### Internal Audit Service

By the end of 2021, DG Communication had no open critical or very important Internal Audit Service recommendations. Only one recommendation of the Internal Audit Service rated important, is still open and under implementation: *Audit on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) supporting activities: IPR management for audio-visual productions*. It concerned the verification of all the existing audio-visual archives, covering 60 years of activities, for compliance with the current copyright and image rights legislation. Considering the volume of the audio-visual archives, this project is scheduled for implementation until end 2030. So far, about 19% of the archive has been verified.

The Internal Audit Service issued a positive conclusion on the internal control systems in place for the audited processes of DG Communication.

In October 2021, the Internal Audit Service issued its consulting report on 'Synergies and efficiencies in procurement in DG Communication' (requested by DG Communication in July 2020). The proposals of the Internal Audit Service have been assessed and follow-up actions are being examined. In November 2021, the Internal Audit Service also provided its

final audit report on 'Crisis communication'. It concludes that DG Communication has put in place processes ensuring adequate communication during crisis. Although no critical or very important issues have been identified, the Internal Audit Service considers that *'there is room for further improvement to enhance the Commission's preparedness to communicate effectively and efficiently during a multi-sectoral crisis, in particular through the development of a crisis communication framework that complements on a need basis the Commission's working arrangements on communication at operational level and in relation to crisis communication capacity building.'* The Internal Audit Service issued three recommendations rated 'important', for which an action plan was developed and submitted to Internal Audit Service in February 2022. DG Communication will implement the action plan in collaboration with Secretariat-General.

### **Impact on assurance**

The risks related to the open Internal Audit Service recommendations do not have a material impact on the assurance for 2021. Therefore, the declaration of assurance is not qualified in this regard.

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

The Commission has adopted an Internal Control Framework based on international good practice, to ensure the achievement of its policy and management objectives. Compliance with the internal control framework is a compulsory requirement. DG Communication uses the organisational structure and the internal control systems suited to achieving its policy and internal control objectives in accordance with the internal control principles and has due regard to the risks associated with the environment in which it operates.

### **Methodology**

The Internal Control and Risk Management Group set up in the DG Communication regularly monitors and assesses the functioning of five internal control components and seventeen principles in line with the corporate guidelines. The assessment is based on the desk review of indicators and other information sources, such as internal surveys and registers, which are discussed with the units responsible for each principle. It also considered recommendations of the 2020 limited review on the implementation of the new internal control framework the Directorate-General, which were closed in 2021.

In particular, evidence from the following sources has been analysed for 2021: (1) state of the internal control monitoring criteria, composed of 29 indicators, established at the time of the 2021 Management Plan. The number of indicators increased since the new internal control framework was put in place in DG Communication and some indicators were replaced to focus on the effectiveness of internal controls; (2) state of internal control deficiencies and priority actions decided by the senior management for 2022; (3) register of exceptions and non-compliance events, which in 2021 contained 21 entries. All the cases have been analysed and followed up. The detection of such events and their recording supports the statement that controls are effective. At the same time, targeted financial training, checks on procedures done and mandatory use of the Public Procurement

Management Tool, since early 2021 to plan and launch all procurement procedure are expected, on a longer term to reduce the number of such events; (4) the audit recommendations of the Internal Audit Service and European Court of Auditors and the state of implementation of the related action plans; (5) the results of the risk assessment exercise, conducted in 2021 in the headquarters and Representations. The Risk Management Group monitors the risks and the related mitigation measures at Directorate-General. The Risk Register of DG Communication contained a risk on 'Physical security in the representations' which was considered critical in 2020 and has been downgraded following the implementation of a broad range of mitigating measures; (6) the information on indicators, changes and actions asked from the officials responsible for the principles, as a preparation prior the assessment meetings; (7) the results of the internal control survey (iCAT), sent to all (89) managers of DG Communication, covering all 17 internal control principles. The overall result of the survey has been positive (overall effectiveness rate of 80%). The analysis of results and comments revealed a few areas for improvements, but no major or critical deficiencies.

### **Results of assessment**

The objective of the annual internal control assessment is to provide reasonable assurance that in DG Communication the internal control principles are functioning, deficiencies are communicated and corrected in a timely manner, with serious matters reported as appropriate. Following the principle of reporting on an exception basis, the assessment mainly aimed at detecting and assessing deficiencies, although the evidence collected during the year proves the existence of numerous strengths. The assessment of the internal control principles displays only five moderate deficiencies. Substantial improvements justifying a change in the assessment have been noted for one internal control principle. The changes refer to a reduction in the level of deficiency for ICP 6 ('The Commission specifies objectives with sufficient clarity to enable the identification and assessment of risks relating to objectives').

DG Communication has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as moderate deficiencies were identified related to internal control principles 3 ('Management establishes, with political oversight, structures, reporting lines, and appropriate authorities and responsibilities in the pursuit of objectives'), 4 ('The Commission demonstrates a commitment to attract, develop, and retain competent individuals in alignment with objectives'), 5 ('The Commission holds individuals accountable for their internal control responsibilities in the pursuit of objectives'), 12 ('The Commission deploys control activities through corporate policies that establish what is expected and in procedures that put policies into action') and 13 ('The Commission obtains or generates and uses relevant quality information to support the functioning of internal control'). The improvements and/or remedial measures implemented or envisaged are the list of measures foreseen in its internal control strategy.

## **Conclusion**

DG Communication has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and the components and principles are present and functioning well overall, but some improvements are needed as minor deficiencies were identified related to some non-critical areas, which do not have a significant impact on the assurance.

### **2.1.4. Conclusions on the assurance**

Section 2.1 stems from the results included in the listed reports on management and auditor monitoring. These reports result from a systematic analysis of the available evidence.

The assessment of the elements reported in Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, and the sub-conclusions already reached draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified without reservations. This information also supports the five statements included in the declaration of assurance.

The approach provides sufficient guarantees on completeness and reliability of the reported information and results in a comprehensive coverage of the budget delegated to the Director-General of DG Communication in the exceptional COVID-19 pandemic, still present in 2021. In that context, DG Communication has demonstrated its capacity to perform under challenging conditions.

### **Overall Conclusion**

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

## 2.1.5. Declaration of Assurance

### **Declaration of Assurance**

*I, the undersigned, Pia AHRENKILDE HANSEN*

*Director-General of DG Communication*

*In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation*

*Declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view.*

*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, the work of the Internal Audit Service and the lessons learnt from the reports of the Court of Auditors 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, 31 March 2022*

*(signed)*

*Pia AHRENKILDE HANSEN*

## 2.2. Modern and efficient administration – other aspects

### 2.2.1. Human resource management

When it comes to the area of human resources and specifically female representation in middle management, as of 31 December 2021, DG Communication have 60% women in middle management positions, thus successfully reached the target set by the Commission for the end of 2022.

As regards staff engagement, in October 2019, DG Communication developed an action plan to address challenges revealed from the results of the 2018 Staff Survey. This action plan included actions to foster talent management and learning & development, as well as boost internal communication and engagement with staff. During 2021, DG Communication continued to implement these actions, especially the ones supporting two-way communication between teleworking staff and management and making full use of the new digital collaborative videoconferencing tools urged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

DG Communication's HR Business correspondent and Internal Communication teams actively supported the Directorate-General's staff and managers by carrying out internal communication actions, running participatory events (especially a series of staff consultations on the ongoing need to 'go digital'), finding flexible solutions for ad hoc service reinforcements under difficult prioritisation conditions, clarifying corporate guidance on working arrangements under the pandemic situation, providing timely guidance on learning and professional development opportunities, and supporting DG Communication's domain leader role in external communication. A 'local' Human Resources strategy was drafted, tailored to the specificities of the Directorate-General to cover the next years and it will be finalised after the Commission adopts the new corporate HR strategy.

### 2.2.2. Digital transformation and information management

DG Communication continued its efforts to implement the Commission's Data Protection Action Plan and its review adopted on 9 November 2020, focusing on compliance and resources. All processing activities of DG Communication have been documented and published as records under the Data Protection Officer (DPO) register. It is to be noted that the record for the IT system for contact management (CONREP) was published providing a compliant data protection framework for the deployment of the tool. Moreover, the record for the Conference of the Future of Europe was published allowing the compliance of the digital tool with the data protection provisions. Lastly, DG Communication verified and updated the content of 14 existing records during the annual review exercise.

DG Communication started an inventory of contracts potentially involving data transfers to third countries and continued monitoring contractual relations with possible personal data transfers to third countries and assessing their impact on the individual rights and freedoms of data subjects.

In addition, DG Communication:

- fully updated its webpage with data protection matters to increase awareness of staff on basic principles and definitions of data protection and procedures in place;
- raised further awareness of staff, and middle and senior management on data protection matters;
- provided training modules on data protection topics identified as essential for staff; the training activities in 2021 covered 17% of staff;
- offered tailored assistance and training to minimise the risks of data breaches.

Finally, in 2021, DG Communication continued the cooperation with the network of Data Protection Coordinators and the DPO to ensure coherent implementation and interpretation of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 in the Commission, to discuss subjects of common interest and set up best practices.

DG Communication advanced in the alignment of its way of working with the EC Digital Strategy. This has also led to a new design in its internal IT Governance, to enable the higher management to monitor and steer the strategic orientation of DG Communication Digital Transformation. In fact, under the supervision of the internal IT governance organs (the *Digital Transformation Steering Board* and the *Digital Operational Committee*) DG Communication successfully completed the first phase of the digital transformation, aimed at integrating the Digital Workplace (DWP) at headquarters and Representations.

Furthermore, the *Digital Transformation Steering Board* promoted in 2021 a review of the social media community management in the Representations, with a view to defining new business processes and a comprehensive and articulated digital toolkit.

Responding to the strategic need of reaching out and engaging with EU citizens through enhanced digital solutions, the Conference on the Future of Europe platform and the Virtual Visits managed by the Visitors' Centre were consolidated and progressed in 2021. Also, DG Communication has completed the IT project that gives the Representations a tool to ensure the data-protection compliant management of contact lists (CONREP). Furthermore, the new system was also deployed to provide citizens with information on European Networks outlets by use of a geographical map.

In 2021, headquarters and Representations successfully shared common collaboration tools that mitigated the barriers to internal communication caused by the working conditions under lockdowns and telework. The IT-infrastructure upgrades in Representations (required to support the digital transformation of communication and collaboration) were already implemented. Further improvements were launched, such as the roll-out, which began in 2021, of a new, enhanced-performance 'wide area network' to connect all Representation offices. This will be completed at the beginning of 2022.

DG Communication continued to play an active role in the initiatives of the Information Management Steering Board (IMSB) in 2021, especially in country knowledge, where DG Communication generates a wealth of useful data every day. In collaboration with the Joint Research Centre, DG Communication agreed to contribute two initiatives to the IMSB's



Rolling Action Plan 2022-2024 on data, information, and knowledge management. These are both country knowledge initiatives for creating a ‘country knowledge community of interest’ and a ‘country knowledge portal’ in the Commission. Together, these initiatives will facilitate the access to, and reuse of, country knowledge data by policy officers across the Institution. Work is due to begin on these in the first half of 2022.

### 2.2.3. Sound environmental management

In support of the Green Deal and its 2030 target on a climate-neutral Commission, DG Communication continued to implement various initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint, with particular focus on Representations. This is reflected also in DG Communications’ renewed membership in the Steering Committee of the Commission’s Environmental Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS).

Following the positive outcome of a gap-analysis, the two pilot Representations<sup>29</sup> successfully completed internal audits and are to undergo external verification, leading to EMAS certification in 2022<sup>30</sup>.

During the year-end period, Representations participated for the first time in the corporate energy saving action (BEST) preparing the ground for more cross-cutting initiatives geared towards the greening objectives.

DG Communication increased the use of green public procurement (GPP), to support the Green Deal and EMAS requirements, through training, promotion of the inter-institutional GPP Helpdesk and the systematic greening of relevant high-value contracts. The greening of the Representations’ car fleet further progressed, with the addition of five plug-in hybrid and the first fully electric vehicle.

The positive trend to reduce paper consumption and missions continued, undoubtedly due to the ongoing pandemic, also because the continued implementation of the paperless DG Communication strategy and the push towards online and hybrid meetings. An example of this shift to virtual events is a youth-oriented role-play project by the Representation in Germany which won a special award for innovation at the second corporate competition for sustainable events and conferences.

### **Examples of initiatives to improve economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities**

#### **Efficiency gains in governance of external communication domain**

DG Communication aims at aligning corporate communication of the Commission’s headline ambitions across the Commission’s services. This implies an overview and

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<sup>29</sup> Valletta, Vienna.

<sup>30</sup> This is done in the context of a joint project with the European Parliament, aiming to progressively EMAS-certify the Houses of Europe in the Member States.

assessment of communication expenditures, and DG Communication is mandated to grant or withhold consent for external communication actions of a value exceeding EUR 1 million. As a Presidential service and as a leader of the external communication domain, one of DG Communication's central tasks is to improve the economy and efficiency of financial and non-financial activities. In 2021, the number of major communication actions for which consent has been required went up from 11 to 16, allowing for increased alignment and synergies. Consent was granted to all 16 requests, in some cases on the condition that DG Communication's comments were taken on board. In most cases such comments concerned the evaluation part of actions.

Furthermore, the Communication Network (CN) brought together Heads of Communication units for 11 monthly meetings throughout 2021 to align communication initiatives, plan ahead, and foster partnerships between line Directorates-General. For example, during these meetings DG Communication gave a regular update on the progress with the NextGenerationEU campaign and informed colleagues on how best to support the Commission's flagship communication initiative through their own communication channels and networks. Moreover, the CN also fulfilled its role of preparatory body for the strategic orientations and decisions in the Corporate Communication Steering Committee. Finally, the CN also supported the communication community across the Commission by organising ten training sessions in 2021 covering a wide range of cross-cutting topics, such as explaining the corporate audiovisual framework contracts and communicating on the Conference on the Future of Europe.

### **Efficiency gains in the context of the centralisation of communication framework contracts and the related support to Directorates-General through a Corporate Communication Contracts Team (i.e., a one-stop shop)**

The following four areas are the main efficiency gains resulting from the centralisation of communication framework contracts and the delivery of modern and streamlined services to Directorates-General through the dedicated pooled team (Corporate Communication Contracts Team): (1) budget efficiencies: decreasing unit prices of goods and services while preserving quality; (2) corporate messaging alignment: framework contract centralisation allows strategic DG Communication input into policy-driven communication actions, further aligning and adapting them to the overall political priorities and messages of the Commission; (3) professionalisation of the community of procurement practitioners through continued exchange of information leading to a more coordinated approach; (4) full compliance with the Commission Human Resource Strategy.

DG Communication has completed the centralisation of the corporate communication framework contracts at the end of 2020. The total number of contracts at the end of 2021 was 23. These contracts include both DG Communication framework contracts and 'derogated' framework contracts managed by other services as agreed by domain leaders of DG Communication and DG Interpretation and approved by Corporate Communication Steering Committee, in line with the original planning. All these derogated framework contracts are becoming corporate assets, available to all services, with the support of

DG Communication. No further centralisation is deemed necessary because the Commission's communication needs can be best met in this setup while maintaining a necessary degree of diversity of contractors. The focus will now move to the increased modernisation, quality, speed, and range of the provided services.

The centralisation of the framework contracts has been bringing economy and efficiency gains in four main areas:

- human resources: it allowed communication units to concentrate on their core activity, rather than deal with procurement procedures;
- corporate communication: it allowed to align messaging and communication spending to major Commission priorities and 2021 Commission work programme;
- better procurement practice: it allowed the gradual implementation of measures to mitigate some of the supply-side distortions in the communication market around the Commission in cooperation with Legal Unit of DG Communication and DG Budget;
- quality/clients satisfaction: stepping up quality of service delivery by completing the Corporate Communication Contracts Team, professionalisation through the running of a communication procurement network and regular meetings and newsletters, developing a streamlined IT request system in SharePoint for framework contracts, and measuring satisfaction of client Directorates-General through EUSurveys as one of the main key performance indicators.

### **Efficiency gains from enhanced governance of replies to citizens' questions via the Europe Direct Contact Centre**

The efficiency in replying to questions from citizens was enhanced by the implementation of a new contractual arrangements for the Europe Direct Contact Centre. The smooth transition to a new contactor and changed pricing rules allowed the contact centre to reply without any budget increase to a record number of citizens – in particular about COVID-19 related matters.

During 2021, the Europe Direct Contact Centre implemented the new charter, which was agreed by the Corporate Communication Steering Committee in 2020. Remarkable progress was achieved in:

- transforming the Europe Direct Contact Centre into a corporate tool, better equipped to deal with the public's queries, so that Directorates-General can focus on their core business and save further resources;
- streamlining and further professionalising the way the EU deals with citizens by continuing to provide speedy, relevant and factually correct replies, thus contributing to a positive image of the EU among the public;
- improving operational services via the new framework contract entering into force in 2021, including knowledge sharing and reporting (and the opening of instant messaging apps as a communication channel for citizen).

At the same time, the new framework contract resulted in significant savings, allowing Europe Direct Contact Centre to cope with the significant increase in queries without supplementary budget allocations.

### **Efficiency gains in web communication**

DG Communication provides technical enablers to realise the editorial strategy of its web presence that should render it more relevant, coherent and cost-effective. These are:

- Europa Component Library: providing technology agnostic, standardised design to be used on online solutions;
- Europa Web Publishing Platform: off-the-shelf content management system, allowing for setting up websites within a matter of days;
- webtools: various technology agnostic visualisation or other technical solutions such as machine translation, maps, charts, etc.

By using these tools, other services are saving important resources, as they reuse existing solutions and do not pay for custom IT development. In 2021, DG Communication transitioned 55 websites to the new web publishing platform and 35 new websites were set up on this tool. All websites created on the corporate platform use the Europa Component Library. A new technical solution implemented by DG Communication under webtools now allows Commission services to install DG Translation's e-translation services on their websites, saving important human resources for the Commission and proposing better services to the citizens. The solution is currently implemented on approximately 70 Commission websites.