



2019

Annual Activity Report

Secretariat-General



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THE SECRETARIAT-GENERAL IN BRIEF

The Secretariat-General is at the heart of the European Commission as an institution and of its civil service. Under the authority of the President, it serves the whole College, oversees the implementation of the European Commission's political priorities and ensures the collegiality, the consistency, the efficiency and the regularity of the Commission's action.

To this end, it is tasked with a range of policy development, steering and coordination functions, both upstream and downstream of the decisions of the Commission, internally and externally.

The Secretariat-General is the service of the President and closely coordinates its work with the other presidential and the central services, which ensure the smooth functioning of the institution. In agreement with the President, the Secretariat-General also provides advice and support to the Executive Vice-Presidents and the Vice-Presidents in the performance of their role as deputies of the President and coordinators of Groups of Commissioners and Project Teams, as set up by the President.

In particular, the Secretariat-General, under the authority of the President:

- steers and coordinates the work across the Commission to ensure that all initiatives are aligned with the political priorities of the President and to ensure the quality, coherence and timely delivery of policy and legislation, in line with the better regulation principles;
- manages the Commission's decision-making process;
- acts as the interface between the Commission and the other European institutions and bodies and national Parliaments, and non-governmental organisations and entities;
- fosters the Commission's institutional competences and the development of an efficient, transparent, sustainable and high-performing administration, which works to the highest ethics and integrity standards;
- leads policy development on certain crosscutting policy files, such as the European Semester of economic policy coordination, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania, and on a range of corporate

policies, such as the Commission's better regulation agenda.

- coordinates the Commission's work on policies with an external or international dimension, including the Union's external representation as provided for in the Treaties, and supports the President for all Summits with third countries, contacts with international partners and participation in international organisation and fora, notably the United Nations, the G7 and the G20.

The Secretariat-General is also at the heart of the Commission's corporate governance structure, chairing and organising meetings of the Corporate Management Board as well as a number of other specialised boards and groups, including the Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board, the Information Management Steering Board and the Group of Resource Directors. Additionally, one of the three Deputy Secretaries-General, responsible for Strategy, Better Regulation, Decision-making, Operations and Resources, holds the role of the Commission's Chief Operating Officer.

The Secretariat-General is also responsible for a number of corporate processes, including document management, business continuity and crisis management arrangements. Robust procedures and IT applications, such as the Decide system or GoPro, have been developed by the Secretariat-General in order to provide the best possible service to the Commission and to the other Directorates-General. All new applications rely on resilient systems built according to the accepted standards in the field.

In July 2019, following the appointment of an acting Secretary-General by the Commission, the Secretariat-General duly followed the internal guidelines regarding the change of Authorising Officer by Delegation. A handover report was transmitted to the acting Secretary-General with the necessary information on the achievement of objectives, financial management and internal control until that point of the year. Her appointment as Secretary-General on 14 January 2020 concluded the procedure.

The structure of the Secretariat-General reflects its unique role in supporting the collegial decision-making process and bringing services together in pursuit of

common priorities. The Secretariat-General is structured around eight directorates and has a number of independent services attached administratively to it (the Regulatory Scrutiny Board and the European Fiscal Board). It is based in Brussels and has 639 staff members (including officials, temporary agents, contract agents and seconded national experts; excluding the Regulatory Scrutiny Board, the European Fiscal Board and the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom). Also, attached to the Deputy Secretary-General is the independent Mediation Service of the Commission. The Mediation Service is an independent service, only attached for administrative purposes to the Secretariat-General.

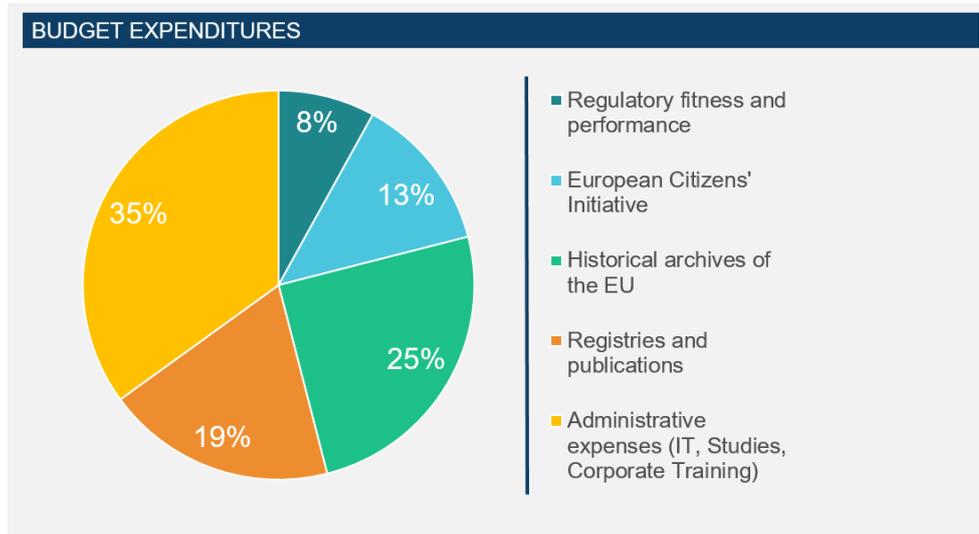
On 16 November 2019, the Brexit Preparedness unit became part of the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom (UKTF). The UK Task Force is part of the Secretariat-General's

organisation chart but the Head of the Task Force serves as the Authorising Officer by Delegation. The same status applied to the former Structural Reform Support Service which was transformed into the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) with effect on 1 January 2020.

More detailed information on the activities of both newly-created bodies can be found in their respective Annual Activity Reports.

From a financial point of view, while many of the activities of the Secretariat-General have a high political profile, it does not manage a large budget and its activities do not pose a direct financial risk.

The breakdown of the 2019 total paid budget of EUR 8 586 393.90 by type of activity is shown in the following graph.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Activity Report is a management report of the Secretary-General to the College of Commissioners. Annual Activity Reports are the main instrument of management accountability within the Commission and constitute the basis on which the College takes political responsibility for the decisions it takes as well as for the coordinating, executive and management functions it exercises, as laid down in the Treaties¹.

a) Key results and progress towards the achievement of the Commission's general objectives and the Secretariat-General's specific objectives (executive summary of section 1)

2019 was a transitional year for the European Commission. The focus in the reporting year was on completing work on the priorities of the Juncker Commission, while in parallel assisting the incoming President and Commission. **The smooth passage from the Juncker to the von der Leyen Commission** was the result of intensive preparatory work coordinated by the Secretariat-General. This work encompassed a wide range of tasks from the drafting of speeches, general and specialised briefings, proposals for new working methods and rules of procedure, to the coordination of the preparation of hearings in the European Parliament and the provision of training, handover files and adaptation of IT tools.

At the heart of the decision-making process, **the Secretariat-General steered and coordinated all major policy initiatives and led on key cross-cutting policy files** such as the negotiation of the future multiannual financial framework, the European Semester of economic policy coordination and the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania. The sustained efforts led to a 100% implementation rate of the initiatives listed in the 2019 Commission Work Programme. The Secretariat-General also led on a range of corporate policies, such as the Commission's better regulation agenda and data protection. It acted as the interface between the Commission and other institutions and bodies, facilitating agreements on the legislation previously tabled.

Throughout 2019, the Secretariat-General led work in the Commission, in close coordination with Member States, **on preparedness and contingency planning at all levels for the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the Union**. The Commission adopted three Communications setting out the Union's coordinated approach to preparedness and contingency and the state of play of EU-level preparations. It also adopted a number of unilateral contingency measures, including several legislative proposals and around 60 non-legislative acts in various areas. The Commission worked closely with Member States to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the Union approach and a large number of outreach and communication actions were carried out to help Member States prepare.

The leading role of the Secretariat-General in the 2019 **European Semester** cycle of economic policy coordination was crucial for the delivery of high quality country analysis, recommendations and guidance for the Member States. The Secretariat-General chaired strategic discussions within the Commission and coordinated the technical and analytical work carried out in country teams. Country reports and an accompanying Communication were published at the end of February and on this basis the Commission proposed **country-specific recommendations**. These were formally adopted by the Council in July. The analysis in 2019 showed that more than two thirds of the country-specific recommendations issued by 2018 have been implemented with at least 'some progress', although implementation varies across country and policy area.

In December, the Commission relaunched the European Semester cycle by presenting its new **Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy**, replacing the previous Annual Growth Survey. The new strategy adds to the Annual Growth Survey a new economic narrative for 2020-2024 including a stronger focus on environmental sustainability and integrating the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

¹ Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union.

2019 was a crucial year for the negotiations on the 2021-2027 **multiannual financial framework**. In close cooperation with the Directorate-General for Budget, the Secretariat-General represented the Commission in technical discussions with the European Parliament and Council, and supported the President and the Commissioner for Budget in political negotiations. The Secretariat-General also coordinated the negotiations with co-legislators on the sectoral legislative proposals. By the end of 2019, the institutions had finalised at least partial negotiating mandates for a large majority of the sectoral legislative proposals underpinning the future long-term budget.

In 2019, the Secretariat-General invested significant efforts in the **better regulation** agenda. Following extensive consultation of stakeholders, the Commission produced a Communication on 'Better regulation: taking stock and sustaining our commitment'. A full-day conference followed to discuss the results of the stocktaking and gather new ideas on the ways forward.

A new regulation on the **European Citizens' Initiative**, on which the Secretariat-General leads for the Commission, was adopted in 2019 and entered into application on 1 January 2020. The goal of the new regulation is to improve usability and reduce the administrative burden for citizens who would like to organise or support an initiative.

In the area of **Justice and Fundamental Rights**, the Secretariat-General monitors the process of judicial reform and the fight against corruption in Bulgaria and Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. In October, the Commission adopted a report on the progress made on recommendations issued in January 2017. Progress in Bulgaria has been assessed as sufficient to meet Bulgaria's commitments made at the time of its accession to the EU and to envisage concluding the mechanism once the European Parliament and the Council have submitted their observations. However, the situation in Romania remains uncertain and the conclusion of the mechanism by the end of the previous Commission's mandate did not materialise.

In addition, the Secretariat-General steered and coordinated the preparation of the 2020 Work Programme within the Commission and contributed to exchanges with the European Parliament and the Council. The Commission Work Programme identifies the key new initiatives of the Commission, simplification and burden reduction initiatives, a list of priority pending proposals to be considered for inclusion in the Joint Declaration, a list of pending proposals the Commission intends to withdraw, and a list of acts the Commission intends to repeal for 2020. On this basis, the Secretariat-General **coordinated the policy process** from the initial stages of policy planning to adoption and implementation in all priority areas, including for example the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union, migration, border management and humanitarian aid, defence and security policy, the digital single market and the creation of the European Labour Authority.

The Secretariat-General also assisted the outgoing College in preparing its contribution to the **EU27 leaders' meeting** in May 2019, setting out policy recommendations on the future of the Union. This contribution fed into President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines and shaped the 2020 Commission Work Programme. The Secretariat-General was also instrumental in the delivery of major initiatives planned for the first 100 days of the new Commission, including in particular the **European Green Deal Communication**, with the aim for Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

A number of other independent services are administratively attached to the Secretariat-General and report to the Secretary-General.

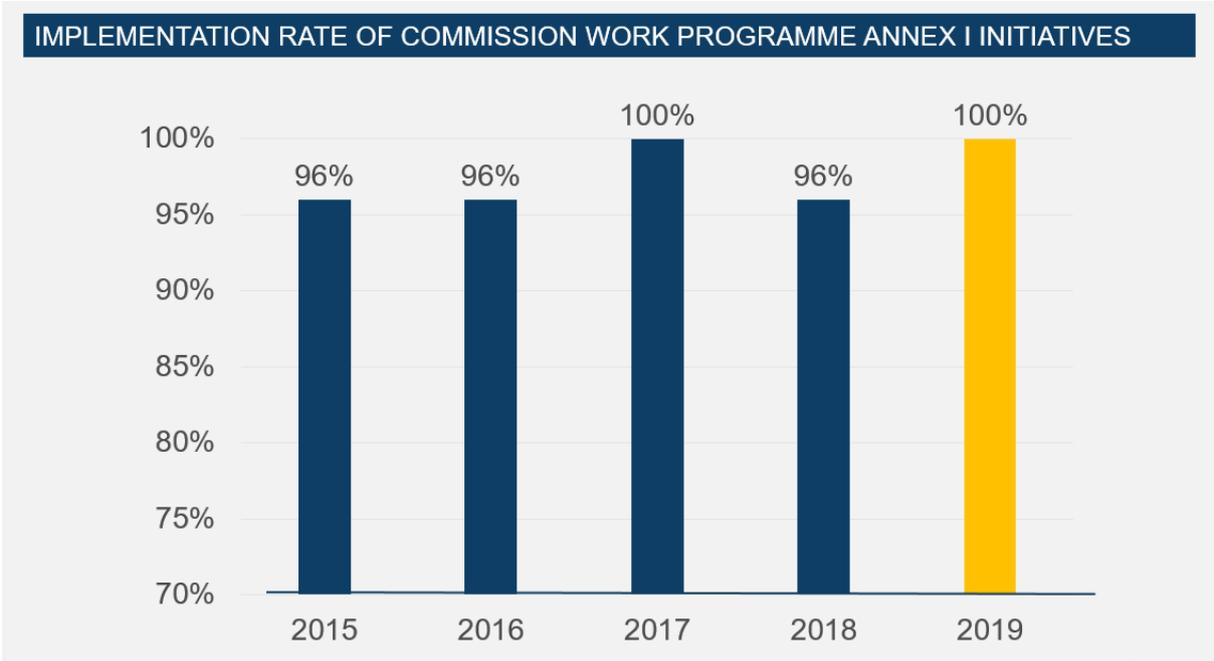
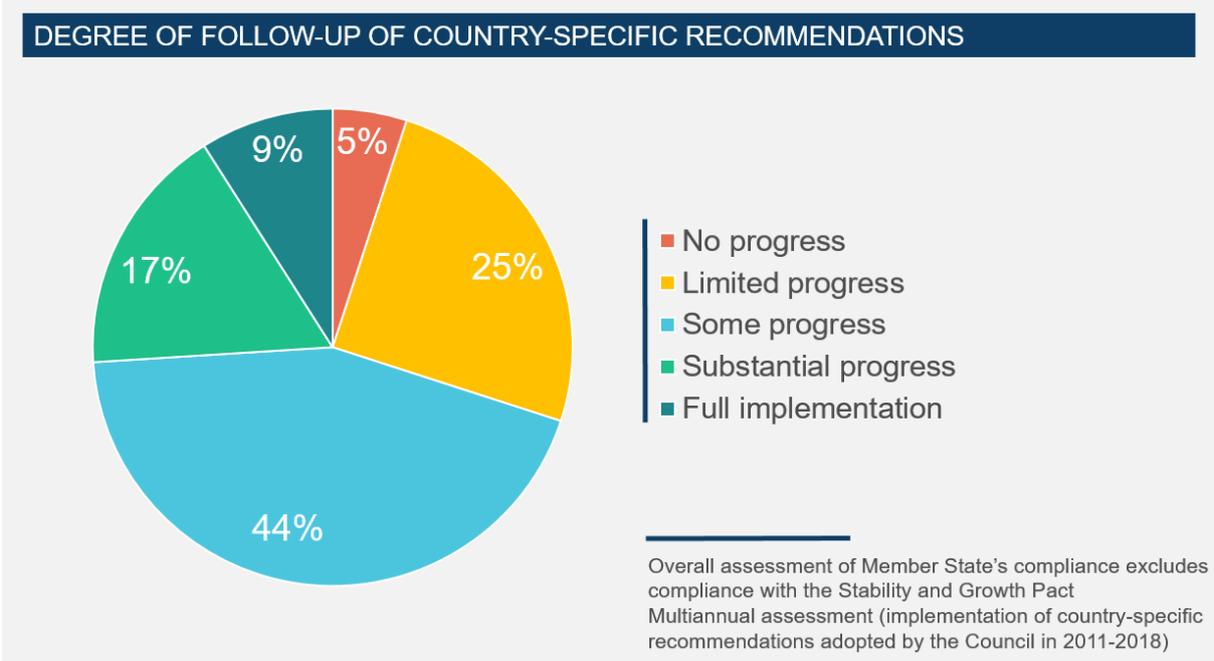
The **Regulatory Scrutiny Board** contributes to the implementation of the Better Regulation agenda. Given the stage of the policy cycle, the focus in 2019 was on scrutinising fitness checks and major evaluations. In 2019, the Board issued opinions on 17 evaluations, of which four were fitness checks, and one on an impact assessment. It also reviewed its working methods to support transparent and evidence-based policymaking.

2019 was the third year of operation for the **European Fiscal Board**. Its activities were documented in two main reports: an assessment of the prospective fiscal stance appropriate for the euro area, published in June, and its Annual Report published in October. The Board also submitted to the Commission President, as requested, an assessment of the effectiveness of the EU fiscal rules with a focus on the six and two-pack legislation strengthening the Stability and Growth Pact.

The **Structural Reform Support Service** was part of the Secretariat-General until January 2020, when its tasks were taken over by the newly created Directorate-General for Structural Reform

Support (DG REFORM).

b) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)



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

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

To ensure the achievement of policy and management objectives, the Commission has adopted a set of internal control principles, based on international good practice. The Financial Regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used for the implementation of the budget be set up in accordance with these principles. The Secretariat-General has assessed its internal control systems during the reporting year and has concluded that they are effective and the components and principles are present and functioning as intended. Please refer to Section 2.1.3 for further details.

In addition, the Secretariat-General has systematically examined and updated the available control results and indicators, including those relating to the supervision of entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by internal auditors and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on the management's assurance as regards the achievement of control objectives. Please refer to Section 2.1 for further details.

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

d) Provision of information to the Commissioner(s)

The main elements of this report and assurance declaration have been brought to the attention of President von der Leyen.

1. KEY RESULTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND SG'S SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The Secretariat-General's work in 2019 spanned the full range of the Commission's activities, covering the delivery of priority policies, the updating and strengthening of corporate policies in support of those priorities, and the preparations for the transition to a new Commission. The detailed performance tables covering progress towards all objectives set in the Secretariat-General's Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 and the outputs identified in the Management Plan for 2019 are presented in Annex 12.

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

European Semester

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

The Secretariat-General coordinated the Commission-wide work on the 2019 European Semester cycle of economic policy coordination. It chaired strategic discussions in the (core) group of Directorates-General and lead Cabinets, and coordinated the technical and analytical work carried out by country teams. Country reports for all Member States and an accompanying Communication were published at the end of February. The reports addressed the issues identified in the 2018 country-specific recommendations and the key challenges ahead. The reports also included an in-depth review under the macroeconomic imbalances procedure for 13 Member States. As in previous years, Member States were consulted on the analytical content of the country reports before their publication.

In line with a key political priority of the Juncker Commission, the 2019 country reports placed a special focus on investment, spelling out the reform and investment needs in each Member State. This analysis substantiated the Commission's view on the best use of cohesion policy funds for 2021-2027, as laid down in annex D to the country reports, which provides guidance on investment priorities for these funds.

Based on these country reports, the Commission proposed country-specific recommendations. The recommendations benefited from an enhanced dialogue with Member States. They were published in early June, along with an overarching Communication. The recommendations were discussed in the Council and formally adopted in July 2019.

In December 2019, the Commission presented its new Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, replacing the previous Annual Growth Survey. The new report goes beyond identifying economic priorities and policy guidance for the following year, and presents a new economic narrative for the 2020-2024 mandate, including a reinforced focus on environmental sustainability and incorporating the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

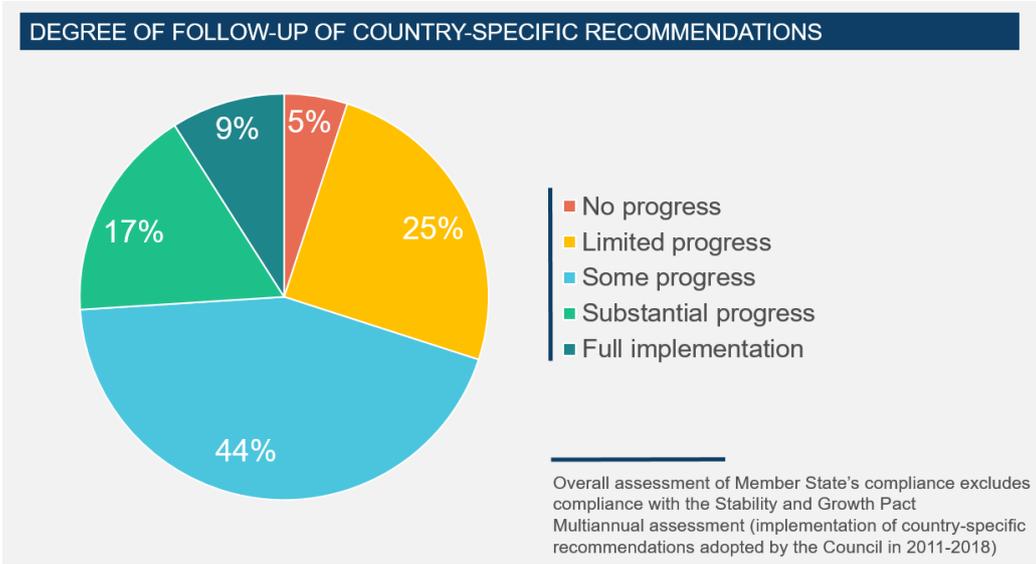


"I want Europe to strive for more when it comes to social fairness and prosperity. This is the Union's founding promise."

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

The experience of the past few years confirms that the Member States are committed to pursuing structural reforms. Yet, the pace and depth with which these have been implemented by Member

States continue to vary across country and policy area. More than two thirds of the country-specific recommendations issued until 2018 have been implemented with at least 'some progress' (figure below). While implementation of the recommendations agreed with Member States since 2011 continues on a stable path, in some cases there is evidence of backtracking on elements of major reforms adopted in the past. Most progress has been achieved in financial services, followed by progress on legislation governing labour relations and employment protection. Progress has been particularly slow on broadening the tax base, health and long-term care, as well as on competition in services. This is also because reforms take time to design, consult upon and implement, and progress is dependent on national ownership and circumstances. Therefore, the assessment figures need to be interpreted in the context of individual countries.



Multiannual Financial Framework

Adoption of the Commission proposal for the post-2020 multiannual financial framework (Specific objective A3 of the Secretariat-General's Strategic Plan 2016-2020)

2019 was an important year for the negotiations on the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework. The Commission made the case for a swift agreement on an ambitious future budget to deliver on the Union's political priorities. The Secretariat-General, in close cooperation with the Directorate-General for Budget, represented the Commission in technical discussions with the European Parliament and Council, and supported the President and the Commissioner for Budget in political negotiations. The key political issues for the next multiannual financial framework were identified in a draft 'negotiating box' produced by the Council Presidencies. At the December European Council, Leaders discussed the main features of the new multiannual financial framework and mandated its President to take the negotiations forward with the aim of reaching a final agreement. The European Parliament has shown its strong commitment to a timely and ambitious agreement on the future long-term budget in its resolutions² of November 2018 and October 2019.

The Secretariat-General has also coordinated the negotiations with co-legislators on the sectoral legislative proposals. By the end of 2019, the institutions had finalised at least partial negotiating mandates for a large majority of the sectoral legislative proposals. Common understandings had already been found between the co-legislators on the main features of many key programmes, covering strategically important issues such as research, defence, investment and the digital transformation. Their finalisation, as well as that of the remaining programmes, depends critically on a swift agreement on the multiannual financial framework.

² Resolution of 14 November 2018 on the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 and own resources – 'Parliament's position with a view to an agreement'.

Resolution of 10 October 2019 on the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 and own resources: 'Time to meet citizens' expectations'.

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

Cooperation and Verification Mechanism

*Cooperation and Verification Mechanism reports
(Specific objective B1 of the Secretariat-General's Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

In the area of Justice and Fundamental Rights, the Secretariat-General monitors the process of judicial reform and the fight against corruption in Bulgaria and Romania (under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism). In October 2019, the Commission adopted a report on the progress made by the two countries with regard to the recommendations issued in January 2017 and intended to finalise the reform process. Progress in Bulgaria has been assessed as sufficient to meet Bulgaria's commitments made at the time of its accession to the EU and to envisage concluding the mechanism once the European Parliament and the Council have submitted their observations. However, the political instability in Romania as well as backtracking on past achievements ruled out the conclusion of the mechanism by the end of the previous Commission's mandate. This work is increasingly taken forward in the context of the broader rule of law mechanism being set up under the new Political Guidelines.

1.3 General objective C: A Union of Democratic Change

Better regulation policy and stakeholder engagement

*Preparatory work on the adoption of the Commission Work Programme 2020
(Specific objective C1 of the Secretariat-General's Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

The Secretariat-General assisted the outgoing College in drafting a substantive contribution to the informal EU27 Leaders' meeting in Sibiu (9 May 2019), setting out policy recommendations on the future shape of the European Union in an increasingly multipolar and uncertain world. This contribution served as input to the EU's strategic agenda for 2019-2024 and fed into the preparation of President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines.

The Political Guidelines set out the major objectives of the new Commission for its entire mandate. On the basis of these, detailed further in the mission letters for the Members of the Commission, legislative work is planned every year in the Commission Work Programme. The Secretariat-General coordinated the preparation of the 2020 Work Programme within the Commission and contributed to exchanges with the European Parliament and the Council. As is typical for election years, the work programme was adopted at the end of January 2020, slightly later than in a non-election year. It identifies the key new initiatives of the Commission for 2020 and contains annexes on simplification and burden reduction initiatives for 2020 (REFIT Annex), a list of priority pending proposals to be considered for inclusion in the Joint Declaration, a list of pending proposals the Commission intends to withdraw, and a list of acts the Commission intends to repeal.

Stocktaking on better regulation

In the area of better regulation, the Secretariat-General is responsible for the policy development, oversees the implementation of better regulation across the Commission, and provides the secretariat of the independent Regulatory Scrutiny Board. In 2019, the Secretariat-General took stock of how well its better regulation approach has been working. For this purpose, the Secretariat-General consulted extensively both internally and externally. EU citizens, organisations, the European Parliament, the Council, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the REFIT Platform all had their say. It presented its findings in a Commission Communication³ published in April together with a staff working document⁴ summarising the results in more detail.

³ COM (2019) 178 final

⁴ SWD (2019) 156 final

The Secretariat-General continued to lead the communication campaign on better regulation by promoting the possibilities for citizens to contribute to the EU policy-making process. It also organised a full-day conference on better regulation on 29 April 2019 in Brussels to discuss the results of the better regulation stocktaking exercise and exchange views on possible ways forward. More than 350 participants attended the conference, which was also web streamed in all languages.

Revision of the European Citizens’ Initiative Regulation
(Specific objective C2 of the Secretariat-General’s Strategic Plan 2016-2020)

The European Citizens’ Initiative complements European representative democracy. It gives European citizens the right to submit a request directly to the Commission inviting it to submit a proposal for a legal act of the Union. For a citizens’ initiative to be successful, it needs to receive the support of one million citizens across the EU.

A new Regulation on the European Citizens’ Initiative was adopted in April 2019. The objective of the new rules that apply from 1 January 2020 is to address the difficulties in the implementation of this instrument since its launch in 2012, by making it more accessible, less burdensome and easier to use for organisers and supporters.



Lead the negotiations on the revision of the European political parties and foundations Regulation
(Specific objective C2 of the Secretariat-General’s Strategic Plan 2016-2020)

The Secretariat-General led the negotiations on the revision of the Regulation on European political parties and foundations. The aim was to minimise the impact of illegal data manipulation on the outcome of elections and therefore it was crucial that the changes were in place in time for the European elections.

Throughout the year, the Secretariat-General took note of several requests by political parties and other stakeholders for further amendments to the Regulation and is assessing them in light of the preparations for the upcoming general review of the Regulation in 2021.

The Secretariat-General also took the necessary steps to implement Article 11 (1) of the Regulation on the Committee of independent eminent persons, which requires that the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should each appoint two members to this Committee by 4 January 2020.

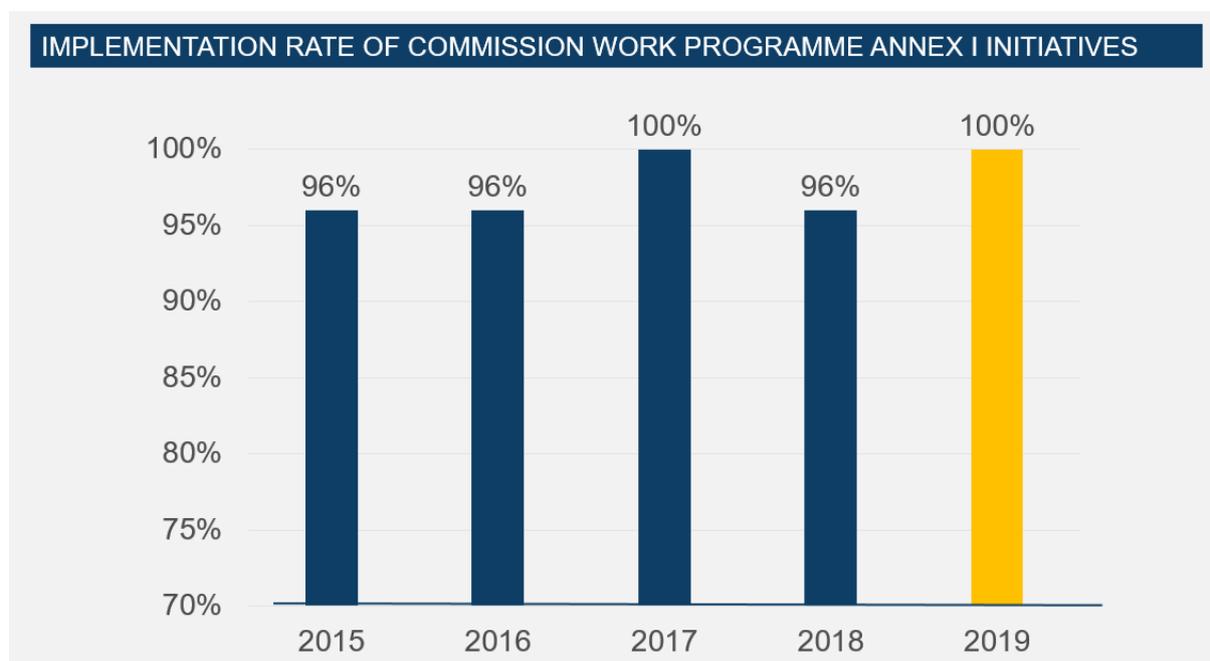
1.4 General objective D: To help achieve its overall political objectives, the Commission will effectively and efficiently manage and safeguard its assets and resources, and attract and develop the best talents

I. Policy coordination and political intelligence

The Secretariat-General plays an active role in shaping and coordinating the work of the Commission services on all the priority initiatives. It does this inter alia by chairing interservice groups, organising Commissioners' Group and project team meetings and through the production of briefings, which contributes to ensuring alignment between sectoral and overall political priorities. The structure and working methods of the von der Leyen Commission have enhanced the role of the Secretariat-General in policy coordination.

Key Performance Indicator 2 - Implementation rate of Commission Work Programme Annex I initiatives (KPI)

The graph below shows the delivery percentage of key initiatives announced in the Commission Work Programmes under the Juncker mandate:



Coordination of policies

The Secretariat-General's role is to ensure effective policy coordination for the delivery of all initiatives announced by the Commission. Work starts at the very early stages of policy planning and development and continues until adoption and implementation. Examples include:

- **Economic and Monetary Union**

The Secretariat-General coordinated Commission-wide work on the process towards a deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union. It chaired discussions at the level of Directorates-General and coordinated the technical and analytical input provided by the Commission services on publications throughout the year. The main areas of activity were economic and fiscal governance, the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union. In line with the priorities set by the Heads of State or Government at the Euro Summits, attention was primarily focused on the Budgetary Instrument for Convergence and Competitiveness, the reform of the European Stability Mechanism and the completion of the Banking Union. The Secretariat-General coordinated the preparation of Euro Summits and in that context prepared the Communication on "Deepening Europe's Economic and Monetary Union: taking stock four years after the Five Presidents' Report", which was adopted by

the College ahead of the Euro Summit of 21 June 2019.

- **European Labour Authority**

The Secretariat-General oversaw negotiations on the new European Labour Authority, which concluded in February 2019, allowing its establishment in July 2019 and the launch of the first activities in October 2019. Announced by President Juncker in his 2017 State of the Union address, the Authority represents a milestone in the area of free movement. It should remove obstacles to labour mobility for the 17.5 million citizens currently living or working in another Member State – twice as many as a decade ago. Following an assessment of the offers of Member States by the Secretariat-General and a decision of Member States in June 2019, the Authority will be the first decentralised EU agency to be located in Bratislava.



- **Migration, border management and humanitarian aid**

Migration, border management and humanitarian aid to refugees continued to be a policy priority requiring the mobilisation of a wide variety of tools and expertise among Commission services. The Secretariat-General supported this process with intensified coordination, covering action with partners outside the Union, at our external borders, and inside the Union. Action in all these areas is essential to tackling the root causes of irregular migration, to improve migration management, to combat migrant smuggling, and to ensure that people who do not have the right to stay in the Union can be safely returned. Migration management depends on strong external engagement and long-term partnerships: effective coordination of the different policy strands involved is a prerequisite for success. Throughout 2019, negotiations on previously tabled proposals continued, with the successful conclusion of interinstitutional negotiations on the Commission proposal on the European Border and Coast Guard, bringing further improvements to the asylum system, tackling loopholes in national systems and adding major support from the EU level.

- **Security Union**

In 2019, the Commission continued to pave the way towards a genuine Security Union. Interinstitutional negotiations on the Commission's proposals to close down the space in which terrorists and criminals operate, making it harder for them to access means and financing to carry out their activities, and to strengthen our defences against security threats through improved information exchange and operational cooperation were successfully concluded. The Commission continuously monitors and reports on the progress towards the effective implementation of a Security Union (progress reports adopted in March, July and October 2019). Under the new Commission, the Secretariat-General is taking an enhanced coordination role on the Security Union, following up on previous work of the Security Union Task Force.

The Commission also took decisive action in the area of cybersecurity, where the 5th generation (5G) of mobile network technologies has a particularly strategic importance as it provides the backbone of our increasingly digitalised societies and economies. In March 2019, after receiving the

support of the European Council, the Commission adopted a Recommendation on Cybersecurity of 5G networks calling on Member States to complete national risk assessments, review national measures and to work together at EU level on a coordinated risk assessment and a common toolbox of mitigating measures.

- **Defence**

The Secretariat-General's work in the areas of security and defence remained focused on coordination of policy development and implementation. As regards EU-NATO cooperation, the Secretariat-General coordinated the implementation of the 74 jointly agreed proposals for cooperation. On military mobility, in close cooperation with the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, the Secretariat-General coordinated the implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility. On countering hybrid threats, in close cooperation with the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, the Secretariat-General coordinated implementation within the Commission of the 2016 Joint Framework for Countering Hybrid Threats and the 2018 Joint Communication on Increasing Resilience and Bolstering Capabilities to Address Hybrid Threats. The Secretariat-General supported the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs in the implementation of the European Defence Industrial Development Programme, which will provide EUR 500 million of financial support during 2019 and 2020 for the multi-national development of new defence products and technologies. The Secretariat-General, together with the relevant services, took part in a series of exchanges with strategic partners, notably the US, on the conditions for third party access to projects funded under the future European Defence Fund. These exchanges helped mitigate tensions that threaten transatlantic unity and EU-NATO cooperation.

In support of the Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Compact to make civilian CSDP more capable, effective and responsive, the Secretariat-General worked in close cooperation with other Commission services and the European External Action Service on a Joint Action Plan to ensure the programme's full implementation by early summer 2023 at the latest. The Commission, through the Secretariat-General, maintained strong and active support for the proposal of the High Representative to establish a European Peace Facility designed to prevent conflicts, preserve peace and strengthen international security around the world – yet another measure intended to make the Union a stronger global actor.

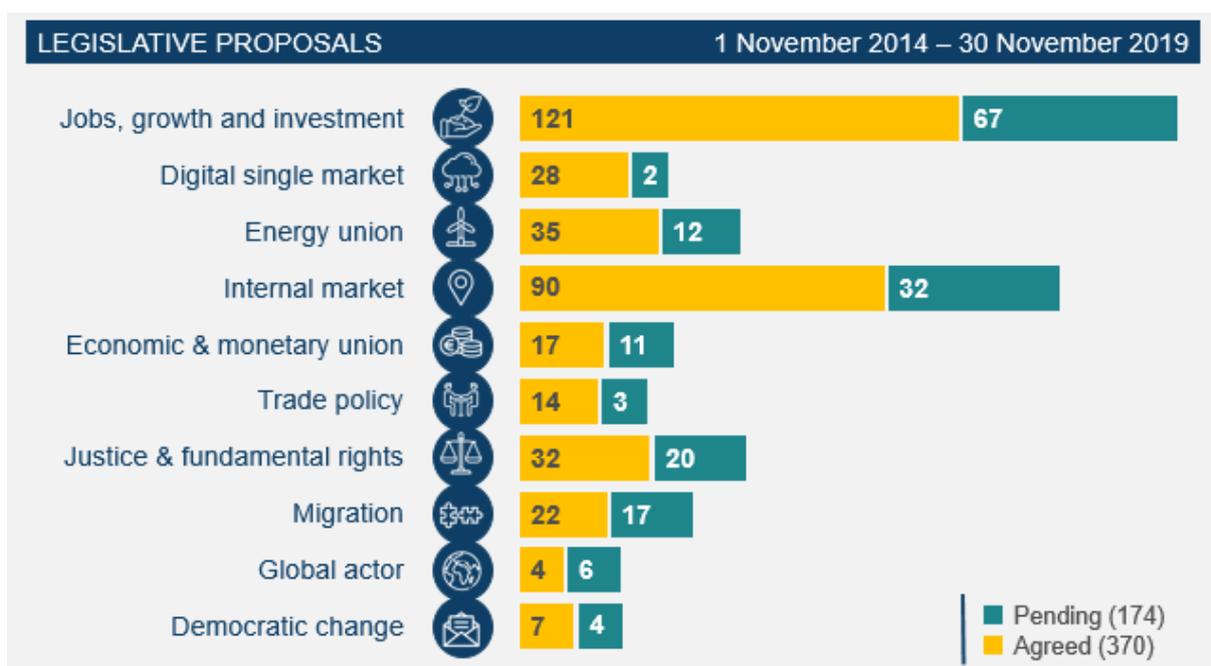
Political intelligence and interinstitutional relations

*Pending legislative proposals - Completing the delivery of the Juncker priorities
(Specific objective D2 of the Secretariat-General's Strategic Plan 2016-2020)*

By summer 2018, the Juncker Commission had tabled all of the legislative proposals it had committed to at the start of its mandate. In total, the Commission made 497 new legislative proposals and carried over an additional 47 presented by previous Commissions. Of these, 370 had been adopted or agreed by the European Parliament and the Council during the term of the Juncker Commission.

After making a proposal, the Commission engages with the European Parliament and the Council at every stage of their legislative deliberations and stands ready to help them reach agreement on a common text. The Secretariat-General monitors the full set of pending proposals and presents the latest data each week to the political level in the Interinstitutional Relations Group (a meeting of the Deputy Heads of Cabinet of all the Commissioners) and to the Heads of Cabinet preparing the weekly meeting of the Commissioners.

In the run up to the 2019 elections, legislative activity reached a peak. This required very close coordination with the Parliament and Council to ensure that the legislative process could proceed smoothly at a time when resources were at a premium.



II. Corporate policies and administrative coordination

Data Protection

Implementation of the Data Protection Officer's Work Programme for 2019 (Specific objective D11 of the Secretariat-General's Strategic Plan 2016-2020)

In December 2018, the new Data Protection Regulation for the EU institutions and bodies (Regulation (EU) 2018/1725) entered into force. The Data Protection Officer (DPO) of the Commission is responsible for revising the implementing rules to ensure that the Commission applies effectively and efficiently the new obligations. The revised rules are scheduled for adoption in spring 2020.

At corporate level, compliance with the new Regulation and the implementation of the action plan have been closely monitored by the Data Protection Officer and the Group of Resource Directors. Overall, Commission departments have achieved significant progress in ensuring and demonstrating compliance with the new data protection rules. However, certain issues require additional attention and recommendations for improving compliance with data protection rules will be submitted to the new College in early 2020.

Furthermore, structured collaboration with Commission departments continued to be carried out throughout the year. In addition, the DPO's office had also been involved in collaboration with relevant Commission services in the preparation of Commission decisions on restrictions of data subjects' rights cf. Article 25 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725, allowing for the swift adoption thereof once the new Regulation entered into force.

Foresight

As part of the Commission's commitment to strengthening its culture of preparedness and evidence-based policymaking, the Secretariat-General cooperated with the Joint Research Centre to make proposals for a Foresight Report concept and on the integration of foresight into the policy-making cycle. The proposals have been finalised under the guidance of Vice-President Sefcovic.

Preparations have also been made to launch the Commission Strategic Foresight Network in January 2020 to strengthen the Commission's foresight capabilities, focus them on the Commission's policy priorities and streamline best practices. A dedicated training programme for Commission staff and pilot sessions were delivered. The training will be further improved, integrating case studies of the use of foresight in policymaking.

1.5 Brexit preparedness

Throughout 2019, the EU continued its work, in close coordination with Member States, on preparedness⁵ at all levels for the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the Union. The Commission adopted three additional Communications⁶ which set out the Union's coordinated approach to preparedness and contingency and the state of play of EU level preparations.

In order to mitigate the consequences of a potential no-deal scenario for the EU27, the Commission adopted a number of unilateral contingency measures, including several legislative proposals in areas such as social security coordination, Erasmus+, the EU budget, and fishing authorisations. These legislative measures were complemented by around 60 non-legislative acts in various areas. Furthermore, the Commission published 102 notices to inform stakeholders about the consequences of the UK's withdrawal without a ratified agreement.

The Commission worked closely with Member States to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the Union approach and a large number of seminars with Member States were organised to allow for sectorial, technical discussions and help Member States prepare. Between January and March, Commission representatives visited all 27 EU Member States to make sure that national contingency planning was on track and to provide the necessary clarifications on preparedness and contingency actions. The Secretariat-General spearheaded the coordination of the preparations for all the scenarios with a unit dedicated entirely to this work.

1.6 Preparing the Commission for the institutional transition

The Commission, led at service level by the Secretariat-General, played a central role in ensuring a smooth transition to the new College. This process can be summarised under four broad categories of action:



TRANSITION TO A NEW COMMISSION

POLICY ACTION



- assistance with new political priorities
- prepare speeches and other policy inputs
- create coherent preparatory briefings for new Commission

GOVERNANCE ACTION



- prepare new working methods, decision on allocation of responsibilities of Commissioners and 'Omnibus', proposal on new Rules of Procedure
- ensure paperless College meetings, update decision-making IT tools
- manage *affaires courantes* and political discontinuity

INTERINSTITUTIONAL ACTION



- prepare hearings of Commissioners-designate by coordinating with all Directorate-Generals and the European Parliament
- coordinate preparation of declarations of interest

HAND-OVER ACTION



- prepare welcome package
- conduct training activities
- ensure procedural guidance for cabinets
- provide logistical support

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/brexit/brexit-preparedness_en

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/brexit/brexit-preparedness/other-preparedness-activities_en#communications-of-the-european-commission

1.7 Delivery under the von der Leyen Commission – the European Green Deal

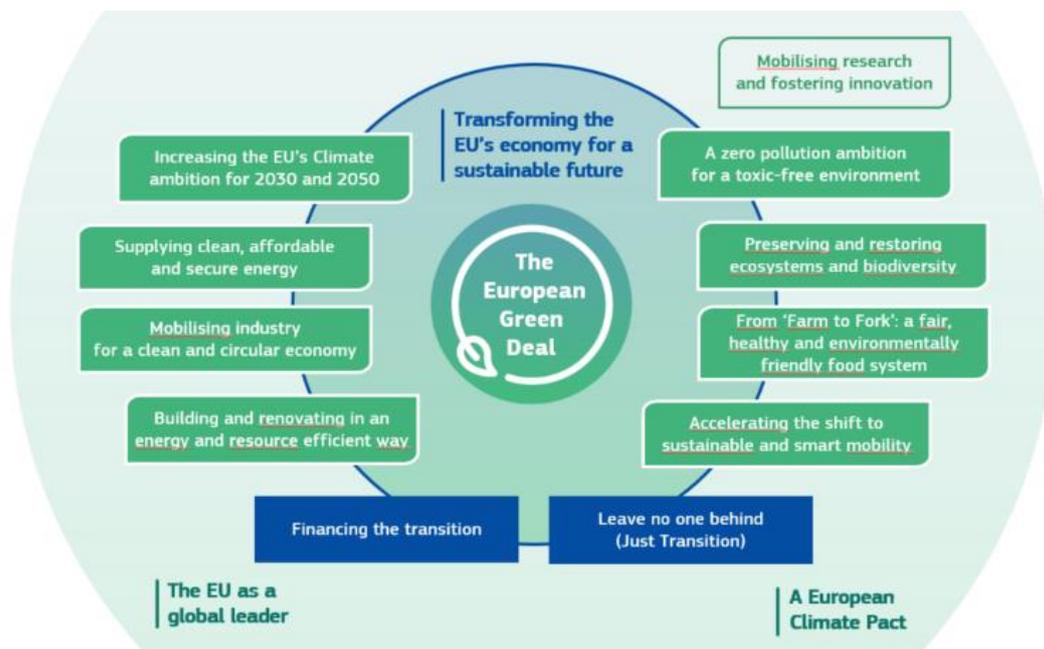


“We propose a green and inclusive transition to help improve people’s well-being and secure a healthy planet for generations to come.”

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission

The European Green Deal is a major political priority for President von der Leyen. Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans has received overall responsibility for delivering the many actions planned under the European Green Deal. The Secretariat-General led the Commission-wide work on the preparation of the European Green Deal and started to coordinate the work on the concrete follow-up initiatives.

On 11 December 2019, the European Commission adopted the European Green Deal Communication. The European Green Deal is Europe’s new growth strategy that sets out how to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, boosting the economy, improving people’s health and quality of life and caring for nature. It provides a roadmap with actions to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy. It identifies the investments needed and financing tools available, and explains how to ensure a just and inclusive transition that leaves no one behind.



2. ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL CONTROL

This section explains how the Secretariat-General delivered the achievements described in the previous section. It is divided into two subsections. The first subsection reports on the control results and all other relevant information that supports management assurance on the achievement of the financial management and internal control objectives⁷. It includes any additional information necessary to establish that the available evidence is reliable, complete and comprehensive. It covers all activities, programmes and management modes relevant to the Secretariat-General. The second subsection deals with the other components of organisational management: human resources, information management and external communication.

2.1 Financial management and internal control

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

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

- the reports by the Authorising Officers by sub-Delegation (AOSDs)
- the reports from Authorising Officers in other Directorates-General managing budget appropriations in cross-delegation;
- the contribution by the Directors in charge of Risk Management and Internal Control, including the results of internal control monitoring at the Secretariat-General level;
- the reports on recorded exceptions, non-compliance events and any cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (Art 92.3 of the Financial Regulation);
- the reports on ex-post supervision and/or audit results;
- the limited conclusion of the Internal Auditor on the state of internal control, and the observations and recommendations reported by the Internal Audit Service (IAS);
- the observations and the recommendations reported by the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

These reports result from a systematic analysis of the evidence available. This approach provides sufficient guarantees as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported and results in the complete coverage of the budget delegated to the Secretary-General.

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

2.1.1 Control results

This section is for reporting and assessing the elements identified by the management which support the assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives. The Secretariat-General's assurance building and materiality criteria are outlined in Annex 4. Annex 5 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.

⁷ Art 36.2 FR: a) effectiveness, efficiency and economy of operations; b) reliability of reporting; c) safeguarding of assets and information; d) prevention, detection, correction and follow-up of fraud and irregularities; and e) adequate management of risks relating to the legality and regularity of underlying transactions

The Secretariat-General uses the following definitions of a positive conclusion for the five Internal Control Objectives and their associated indicators:

- Residual Error Rate: below 2 %
- Cost-Effectiveness: error rates, time-to-pay and time to contract, and costs of controls lead to a positive conclusion on cost-effectiveness
- Anti-Fraud Strategy: the 2019 action plan is implemented and recommendations are accepted by management
- Safeguarding of assets: all pre-financing is correctly booked
- Reliability of Reporting: no material error and no reservations

The Secretariat-General has a low-risk profile in financial management mainly because of the small size of its budget and because almost all contracts entered into are against framework contracts. Furthermore, the Secretariat-General manages a single grant, exempt from the requirement to have a call for proposals.

At the Secretariat-General, financial operations relate to (payments under) direct budget management. More specifically, direct management includes expenditures for grants, procurement and administrative expenses.

The overall conclusion table below summarises all control results. The main benefit of controls is the achievement of the control objectives, for example error-free financial statements and legally compliant transactions. Some control objectives are explicitly provided for all Directorates-General such as time-to-pay (all), time-to-inform (grants) and time-to-contract (grants). The Secretariat-General considers that these controls are cost-effective if their costs are considered acceptable by the management compared to the error rate and the time-to indicators (including time to contract) and if these controls are reassessed periodically, as well as improved in order to be less costly and/or more risk differentiated. Some controls have to be exercised irrespective of their historic outcome; these controls are identified through periodic risk assessments. The details of the assurance obtained from the achievement of internal control objectives, related to the internal control system, are found in Annex 10. All transactions were included in the review while in addition operational agents and authorising officers in charge of the main expenditures were required to report explicitly on the five control objectives to increase the reliability of the assessment.

No (reputational) event or unmitigated risk has been identified by the management that could have a significant impact on assurance on the achievement of the internal control objectives. The Secretariat-General's management has supported the assurance on the achievement of each of the relevant internal control objectives and no reservation in section 2.1.4 is necessary.

Conclusion Table

In EUR million	Expenses	Revenues
Procurement and Administrative Expenses	6.1	-
Grant	2.5	0.9
Missions and experts (paid by PMO)	1.2	-
Total	9.8	0.9
Internal control objectives (5) for financial management and specific statements in the declaration of assurance - Conclusions	Positive	Positive
Negative opinion from auditors	No	No

Reservation	No	No
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- No cases of 'confirmation of instructions' (new Financial Regulation art 92.3)
- No cases of financing not linked to costs (new Financial Regulation art 125.3); no such cases
- No cases of Financial Framework Partnerships >4 years (new Financial Regulation art 130.4)
- No cases of flat rates >7% for indirect costs (new Financial Regulation art 181.6)
- No cases of "Derogations from the principle of non-retroactivity [of grants] pursuant to Art 193 of the Financial Regulation" (new Financial Regulation art 193.2)

1. Effectiveness = the control results and benefits

In order to be considered effective, controls are expected to meet the internal control objectives (detailed hereafter) and for each of those control objectives to result in benefits.

• Legality and regularity of the transactions

The Secretariat-General has set up internal control processes aimed at ensuring the adequate management of the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions, taking into account the multiannual character of programmes as well as the nature of the payments concerned. Based on control results and all other relevant information available, the Authorising Officer by Delegation can conclude that for each segment of expenditure with a given risk profile and subject to the same or a similar control system, no reservation should be made.

According to the materiality criteria (see Annex 4), the target error rate is 0 %⁸ for operations with low inherent risks (procurement and expenses of an administrative nature) and below 2 % for action grants with the reimbursed costs mechanism. The error rates achieved are measured through exceptions and non-compliance events (ex ante controls), complemented where necessary with the results of ex post controls and third-party assurance.

The Secretariat-General's control strategy for public procurement procedures is based on ex ante controls, which give a key role to the financial unit. Due to the nature of the activity, which is mainly based on procurement, there is relatively limited additional value in supervisory ex post controls. Furthermore, the absence of procurement procedures abandoned, the low number of subsequent amendments to contracts 'needed', and the absence of litigation related to procurement decisions provided an indication for the assessment of the 'quality' of the Secretariat-General's procurement procedures. This indicator provides a second-best alternative to establishing an estimate of the 'error rate'. Finally, as neither the Internal Audit Service nor the European Court of Auditors have found serious procedural procurement issues, the Secretariat-General concludes that there are no indications that the Secretariat-General's procurement procedures and payment transactions are not legal and regular. Therefore, the mandatory minimum error rate of 0.5 % for low-risk transactions will be set.

Based on the controls results and on the inherent risks of the various transactions, the error rates for each key segment (or sub-segment) are as follows:

- For the grant to the European University Institute: 1.5 %. The core of the grant's expenses is for personnel which belong to a dedicated administrative entity and whose costs are standardised. Furthermore, the audit conducted in 2017 by an external consultant showed that adequate control procedures are in place to identify the staff working on the action grant and to prevent double payments; supporting documents and related invoices for payments made; reliable beneficiary's accounts; and very minor non-eligible payment claims.
- For procurement and other administrative expenses: 0.5 %. Controls aim at systematically detecting and preventing breaches of legality and regularity; the first measure of the error rate is

⁸ The target is 0% while the actual error rate may be slightly over that target

therefore the one resulting from the analysis of the recording of exceptions: control overrides and non-compliant events. The analysis of these exceptions shows that 0.5% is the best estimate.

Given the materiality target threshold at the Secretariat-General of less than 2%, management concludes that no reservation is needed and that the internal control systems provide sufficient assurance to adequately manage the risks relating to the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

For the Secretariat-General, the estimated overall amount at risk at payment for the 2019 expenditure is EUR 0.07 million. This is the Authorising Officer by Delegation's best, conservative estimation of the amount of relevant expenditure during the year (EUR 9.7 million) not in conformity with the applicable contractual and regulatory provisions at the time the payment is made. This expenditure will not be subsequently subject to ex post controls to allow for a proportion of the underlying error to be detected and corrected in successive years. Consequently, the conservatively estimated future corrections for the 2019 expenditure are EUR 0 million. This is the amount of errors that the Secretariat-General conservatively estimates to identify and correct from controls that it will implement in successive years. The difference between the two measures leads to the estimated overall amount at risk at closure for the 2019 expenditure of EUR 0.07 million.

While based in part on the 7-year historic average of recoveries and financial corrections (ARC), which is the best available indication of the corrective capacity of the ex post control systems implemented by the Secretariat-General over the past years, the Authorising Officer by Delegation has adjusted this historic average. After deduction of the corrections before payment (received credit notes with newly issued invoices), the adjusted corrective capacity (0.6% for the period 2013-2019) equals 0%. Given the small size of the Secretariat-General's budget and the recurrent activities, this percentage is stable over time.

As stated above, this expenditure will not be subsequently subject to ex post controls, except for a periodical control of expenses relating to the Historical Archives. Such ex post controls would not be cost-effective given the amounts at play, which furthermore are estimates that could be significantly lower in reality.

In conclusion, legality and regularity controls are deemed effective.

Estimated overall amount at risk at closure⁹

Secretariat-General	"payments made" (FY; EUR million)	<i>minus</i> new pre-financing [<i>plus</i> retentions made*] (in FY; EUR million)	<i>plus</i> cleared pre-financing [<i>minus</i> retentions released* and deductions of expenditure made by MS] (in FY; EUR million)	= "relevant expenditure" (for the FY; EUR million)	Average Error Rate (<i>weighted</i> AER; %)	estimated overall amount at risk at payment (FY; EUR million)	Average Recoveries and Corrections (<i>adjusted</i> ARC ¹⁰ ; %)	estimated future corrections [and deductions] (for FY; EUR million)	estimated overall amount at risk at closure (EUR million)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Programme, Budget Line(s), or other relevant level	as per AAR annex 3, table 2	as per ABAC DWH BO report on pre-financing	as per ABAC DWH BO report on pre-financing	= (2) -/+ (3) +/- (4)	Detected error rates, or equivalent estimates	= (5) x (6)	H-ARC (as per ABAC DWH BO report on corrective capacity), <u>but adjusted</u>	= (5) x (8)	= (7) - (9)
Procurement and Administrative Expenses	6.1	-0.5	0.4	6.0	0.5 %	0.03	0 %	0	0.03
Grant	2.5	-2.1	2.1	2.5	1.5 %	0.04	0 %	0	0.04
Missions and Experts paid by PMO	1.2	-	-	1.2	0 %	0	0 %	0	0
Overall, total	9.8	-2.6	2.5	9.7	0.7 %	0.07	0 %	0	0.07

⁹ The Article 50 Task Force on the negotiations with the United Kingdom (TF50) and the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) have granted a co-delegation to the Secretariat-General on the administrative budget lines that form their global envelopes. In accordance with the Internal Rules, TF50 and SRSS should have also co-delegated to the Pay Master Office (PMO) the payments to be authorised for missions and experts, instead of co-delegating them first to the Secretariat-General (SG). Technically, the Directorate-General for Budget could only implement such an arrangement by showing the Pay Master Office as a local position with the Secretariat-General as fund management centre and not a co-delegated entity. As a result, the Directorate-General for Budget is unable to filter these expenses from the Secretariat-General's Annual Activity Report and assign them to the Pay Master Office. For the 2019 Annual Activity Report, this affects commitments as well.

The correct figures for Annex 3 Table 1 "Outturn on Commitment Appropriations" should show EUR 6 458 483.18 (and not EUR 7 921 374.58). This has an impact also on the corresponding commitment appropriations, as well as on Table 3 "Breakdown of commitments to be settled". The total correct amount for commitments is EUR 9 783 343.16 (and not EUR 11 246 234.56). The correct figures for Annex 3 Table 2 "Outturn on Payment Appropriations" should show EUR 6 041 827.93 (and not EUR 7 283 551.71). This has an impact also on the corresponding payment appropriations, as well as on Table 3 "Breakdown of commitments to be settled". The total correct amount for payments is EUR 8 586 393.90 (and not EUR 9 828 117.68).

¹⁰ Average percentage of corrections.

- **Fraud prevention, detection and correction**

The Secretariat-General has developed and implemented its own anti-fraud strategy (since 2014), on the basis of the methodology provided by OLAF. It is updated at a minimum every three years. It was last updated in 2019. In the period 2019-2021, the Secretariat-General will concentrate its efforts on three strategic objectives, namely:

1. Clearly assigning roles and responsibilities for anti-fraud issues within the Secretariat-General, taking the corporate and local level into account;
2. Enhancing detective controls to mitigate fraud risks with financial implications;
3. Developing an anti-fraud culture in the Secretariat-General.

In 2019, before the launch of a public procurement procedure related to the European Citizens' Initiative online collaborative platform (Forum), the previous procedure was extensively analysed. No weaknesses or deficiencies were identified in the procedures applied. Furthermore, OLAF and SG jointly organised an awareness raising session that targeted more specifically staff implementing the budget and newcomers. There were no OLAF financial recommendations. Anti-fraud indicators are assessed annually and are linked to internal control principle 8.

Implementation of the 2019 action plan – which is the main anti-fraud indicator – was successful. In conclusion, anti-fraud controls are deemed effective.

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

The Secretariat-General plays a key role in managing information in all its forms, from security, digital data to external relations. Information should be accurate and reliable and at the same time accessible and secure. The core principles are confidentiality on a "need to know" basis, integrity and availability.

Regarding safeguarding classified information, the Secretariat-General follows the rules elaborated by the Security Directorate of the European Commission. Documents containing classified information are stored in a secured area. Physical requirements and procedures are compliant with the Commission Decision 2015/444. Other special marked sensitive documents are kept in another protected area, which offers the satisfactory level of protection required by the legislation. As regards access to classified documents, the functions between Registry Control Officers and Local Security Officer have been clearly separated in 2018, which is a further improvement in the quality of the control. Security-cleared registry control officers are responsible for verifying whether Commission staff are authorised to have access to classified information documents. Supervision of the registry's work in terms of security is provided by the Local Security Officer. Access to classified documents is strictly limited on the basis of the 'need to know' principle.

The new Commission Decisions entered into force in December 2019 and give further guidance on documents' classification, their protection through the end of their lifecycle, classified meetings' organisation and handling EU classified information electronically.

During the induction day, the Secretariat-General's newcomers are informed about the main principles, rights and obligations under the Staff Regulation, with a particular focus on the obligation of discretion and the importance of mitigating information and documents' leakage.

The Secretariat-General takes the necessary measures to protect the security of its ICT systems and services - including the information and knowledge held on them - in order to safeguard its image, reputation and business interests.

Decide is the corporate IT tool for the decision-making process in the Commission for which the Secretariat-General is system owner. HERMES/ARES/NOMCOM is the corporate IT tool for document management in the Commission for which the Secretariat-General is system owner. The Central EU Classified Information Registry is the main point of entry and exit for classified information exchanges. Security Operating Procedures cover all technical interventions for handling the European Union classified information (EUCI) in the

Commission's Central EUCI Registry, managed by the Secretariat-General. These procedures are agreed by the Secretariat-General, Directorate-General for Informatics and Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security (Security Directorate) and include the Secretariat-General as business owner and digital solutions provider, as well as the Secretariat-General's Local Security Officer, and the Secretariat-General's Local Informatics Security Officer.

Safeguarding of assets is related to the pre-financing paid by the Secretariat-General to beneficiaries and contractors. Each pre-financing transaction has been adequately booked to show on the balance sheet. In conclusion, safeguarding of assets and information controls are deemed effective.

2. Efficiency = the Time-to-... indicators and other efficiency indicators

With respect to efficiency, four main indicators are used: time to pay; time to contract, time to inform and time to grant, if applicable. In 2019 the average time to pay with suspension was 11 days (12 days in 2018). The periods specified in Article 116(1) of the Financial Regulation were complied with and 1.4 % of the transactions were in excess of the time-limits (none with respect to target time limits). Monthly reports were provided to the operational units to adequately monitor un-committed and un-paid appropriations.

The average time to contract starting from receiving the offer and ending with the contract signed by both parties was 19 days. The use of eOrders, which allows contracts to be signed electronically within the same day is an essential element of this positive result.

The average time-to-inform, with the time period starting from receiving the estimated budget and ending with sending the draft grant agreement for signature, does not apply to the European University Institute specific grant agreements (SGA): there is no call for proposals and the grant is interinstitutional in nature. The average time-to-sign with the time period starting from sending the draft grant agreement for signature and ending with signing the grant agreement at Commission level does not apply either to the specific grant agreements. The grant starts on 1 January each year, but can only be formally signed once all contributions from all depositing institutions have been recovered.

In 2019, the Secretariat-General moved to eWorkflows and eTools such as eTed, eSubmission, eOrders, and others, the impact of which has been to rely heavily on standardised operating procedures coupled to related IT systems.

3. Economy = the cost of controls

The corporate methodology for the estimation, assessment and reporting on the cost-effectiveness of controls was revisited in September 2018 and November 2019 and applied to the 2018 and 2019 annual reporting.

Being a small spending Directorate-General, the Secretariat-General has a single indicator for the costs of controls per control system. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that the costs of all stages are included (even filing and archiving) but compared only to the payment stage amounts. The approach taken is to consider that transactions were subject at a given point in time to a procurement or grant procedure and that rather than comparing the costs associated to the call for tenders/proposals (or the specific contract/grant procedure) with the amount of these calls, an aggregate indicator will be used. This aggregate indicator will therefore be the costs of controls irrespective of whether these controls apply to a call, a contract, a commitment, a payment, etc.; these costs are then divided by the total payments made.

The costs of controls amount to EUR 1.3 million and are based on the ATLAS values for the staff involved in the ex-ante controls. These ATLAS activities form part of the compulsory reporting on the costs of controls further to instructions from the Directorate-General for Budget. They include financial management; programme management; budget and accounting; management; general coordination; and information and communications technology (ICT) depending on the persons involved. Based on professional judgement, other ATLAS activities were included in the total Full Time Equivalent calculation. These costs amount to 13 % of the total payments (13% in 2018). Such a number can be

explained by the scope of the ATLAS activities and the diversity of activities linked to the cost of controls (6 out of a total of 32 ATLAS generic activities); the number of operational units involved; and the low number and low magnitude of the financial transactions at the Secretariat-General.

4. Conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls

Based on the most relevant key indicators and control results, the Secretariat-General has assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the control system and reached a positive conclusion on the cost-effectiveness of controls for which it is responsible.

Three main indicators are used to determine the cost-effectiveness of controls: the error rate, the time-to-pay (and time-to-contract), and the costs of controls.

The respective indicators were 0.7% of error rates; 11 days on average to pay (and 19 days on average to contract); and costs of controls of 13% in percentage of the total payments. Given the stable control environment and control strategy and the fact that the Secretariat-General is a small spending Directorate-General, that error rates and time-to-pay are well within the acceptable margins and that the costs of controls are not excessively high, the conclusions on the control strategy (details of which are provided under Annex 10) and on the cost-effectiveness of controls are positive.

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.

Internal Audit Service

The Internal Audit Service's limited conclusion on the state of Secretariat-General's internal control is based on the audit work carried out in the period 2017-2019. The Internal Audit Service concludes that the internal control systems in place for the audited processes are effective.

At the time of reporting, the Secretariat-General has no open critical or very important recommendations from the Internal Audit Service.

Closed IAS Audits

The following Internal Audit Service audits with critical or very important recommendations were closed in 2019:

- Corporate IT Governance and Portfolio Management
- Governance and Oversight Arrangements concerning Risk Management
- Governance and Oversight Arrangements concerning Governance set-up
- Audit on Better Regulation and on the state of play of the main Better Regulation components

European Court of Auditors

In 2019, the Secretariat-General had no open critical or very important recommendations from the European Court of Auditors. No such recommendations were closed in 2019.

Taking into account the positive conclusion of the Internal Audit Service on the state of internal control, the existence of action plans for outstanding recommendations (submitted to the Internal Audit Service for acceptance), as well as the absence of related deficiencies, the management comes to a positive conclusion without weaknesses which may have a significant impact on the assurance.

Directorate-General for Budget

In 2019, the Directorate-General for Budget's team in charge of the validation of local systems conducted an audit in the Secretariat-General. The audit concluded that 'the Secretariat-General has put in place adequate processes and controls in order to produce accurate and complete information in a timely fashion, to prepare the annual accounts and produce reliable management and regulatory reports'. No critical or very important recommendation was issued.

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.

The Secretariat-General 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.

Assessment of the internal control systems

The key objective has been to assess the internal control system's ability, in its entirety, to manage meaningful risks to organisational objectives. Therefore, an appropriate balance between risk and the level of control was required to ensure objectives are met. The Secretariat-General has assessed its internal control system during the reporting year and has concluded that it is effective and that the components and principles are present and functioning as intended.

The assessment of the Secretariat-General's internal control system, conducted in 2019 is based on the following criteria:

- The use of the Comprehensive Assessment Model
- The internal control assessment survey.
- Reports by the operational units on the five internal control objectives
- Reports by the second line of defence¹¹ units on the values of the monitoring indicators
- Registry of non-compliance events and exceptions
- Reports by the authorising officers

The use of the Comprehensive Assessment Model

In 2019, the Secretariat-General used the Institute of Internal Auditors' Comprehensive Assessment Model, a methodology to assess its internal control framework. The control procedures that formed the building blocks of the framework were subject to a set of criteria to assess their qualities and identify possible gaps. These gaps were related to the various principles that are the backbone of the framework such as ethics, staff

¹¹ The Commission's internal control framework is based on the three lines of defence model (The Three Lines of Defence in Effective Risk Management and Control; Institute of Internal Auditors; Position Paper - January 2013). The second line of defence units are the horizontal units that design and oversee the control procedures at the Secretariat-General.

competence, risk management, etc. The maturity level of the framework is in direct relation to the state of these principles.

As a result of this exercise, additional internal control procedures were included in the Secretariat-General, in order to meet the system's three maturity levels: the principle is known by staff; the principle is present; and the principle is functioning (figure 1). The Secretariat-General's internal control framework focuses on staff having the necessary information, understanding what needs to be done (awareness) and taking the right steps (conscious application of the internal control framework and its procedures). The three-level structure enhances an advanced detection of possible limitations by the teams that apply the procedures.

At a second stage, the monitoring indicators were identified for each internal control procedure, with the baseline and their targets (how should we perform). The indicators were defined in bilateral discussions with teams / units of the Secretariat-General, in charge of the relevant subject area. The control procedures and the indicators were circulated for action to middle management and staff.

Main findings:

- The internal control assessment survey: no deficiencies were identified.
- Reports by the operational units on the five internal control objectives: all reports show full compliance with the requirements of the five internal control objectives.
- Reports by the second line of defence units on the values of the monitoring indicators: no deficiencies to be reported were identified.
- Registry of non-compliance events and exceptions: there were no non-compliance events or exceptions that would negatively affect the declaration.
- Reports by the authorising officers: authorising officers did not disclose elements that would negatively affect the declaration.

The Secretariat-General 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 as intended.

2.1.4 Conclusions on the assurance

This section reviews the assessment of the elements already reported above (in Sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3), and the sub-conclusions already reached. It draws an overall conclusion to support the declaration of assurance and whether it should be qualified with reservations.

The five internal control objectives for financial management were assessed for the whole budget delegated to the Secretary-General under section 2.1.1, complemented where necessary by sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3. The objectives of having resources used for their intended purpose and the non-omission of significant information were assessed on the basis of the reports from the authorising officers where this was explicitly spelled out. There is no element to be reported that would qualify the declaration of the Secretary-General.

Overall Conclusion

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

DECLARATION OF ASSURANCE

I, the undersigned,

Secretary-General,

In my capacity as authorising officer by delegation, declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view¹².

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

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of the self-assessment, ex post controls and the 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 Commission.

Brussels, 18 May 2020

[signed]

*Ilze Juhansone
Secretary-General*

¹² True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in the Secretariat-General.

2.2 Other organisational management dimensions

This section describes the progress made on organisational management aspects as presented in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and Management Plan 2019. Sections 2.2.1-2.2.3 refer only to the highlights of these organisational dimensions; for extensive reporting on the Secretariat-General's concrete actions in 2019, please refer to Annex 2.

Additionally, section 2.2 includes a short description of measures the Secretariat-General took in 2019 in order to improve its cost-effectiveness and efficiency. This is one of the numerous measures the Commission takes continuously in order to improve its functioning with a view to investing its resources in support of the most relevant objectives and in the most cost-effective and efficient manner.

2.2.1 Human resource management

2019 was the first full year for the Secretariat-General working in a new structure after the reorganisation of October 2018. To facilitate a smooth changeover to its new structure, the Secretariat-General focused on promoting strong teamwork. Managers received support from a coaching programme. In May 2019, the 'SG Vision and Reflection Day' took place and discussed the results of the 2018 Staff Survey. In 2019, half of the Secretariat-General units organised a team-building event. The Secretariat-General fully reorganised its office space in the Berlaymont to ensure strong collaboration and communication between teams.

In 2019, the Secretariat-General put strong emphasis on the efficient use of its human resources. This was achieved through simplification and efforts of the management team in good collaboration with the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security. Budget for external personnel was efficiently managed to help units cope with long-term absences and peaks in workload.

The Secretariat-General is working actively to promote female representation in management positions. Between 1 May 2017 and 31 December 2019, the Secretariat-General made seven first-time female appointments, thus surpassing its target of six. The overall female representation in middle management stayed at 32% which can be explained by the fact that more units were created in October 2018 as part of the reorganisation of the Secretariat-General. This resulted in more middle management positions, which were filled by both male and female managers. Among the deputy Heads of Unit the female representation increased in 2019 to 54%. In 2019, three staff members participated in the corporate Female Talent Management Programme.

Learning new skills and knowledge continued to be a priority for the Secretariat-General in 2019. Staff members benefitted from a broad learning and development offer. The offer included lunchtime conferences (seven SG talks), workshops and external training courses. In partnership with the Directorate-General for Translation, the Secretariat-General organised a 'Clear Writing' campaign throughout 2019. This included organising 24 training sessions attended by 700 staff members. The campaign involved targeted training, staff events, a dedicated website and creating a network of Clear Writing ambassadors. In December 2019, the Secretariat-General won the Commission's Clear Writing Award in the internal communication category.

In 2019, the Secretariat-General launched the professionalisation of policymaking under the EU Policymaking Hub. The EU Policymaking Hub is a platform for learning, collaboration and knowledge for future-proof policymaking. It offers a framework and a comprehensive learning programme for skills and competences relevant to EU policymaking and knowledge that policymakers will need at all stages of the policy cycle, besides offering a privileged network opportunity for policymakers.

The Hub aims to stimulate collaboration and co-creation of knowledge and resources relevant to policy-making. The initiative will seek to bring strategic foresight to the core of the policymaking process. In addition, improved communication and collaboration, collection of evidence, the use of innovative of policymaking tools and citizen engagement

throughout the policymaking process will be covered under the EU Policymaking Hub.

Finally, the Secretariat-General took steps towards a greener workplace. Staff awareness activities about environmentally friendly behaviour were organised. A major effort was made to reduce waste and the Secretariat-General became one of the first services in the Commission to use only modern waste sorting stations.

2.2.2 Information management aspects

Information and knowledge management

The Secretariat-General chairs the Information Management Steering Board that steers and monitors the progress of the Commission's data, information and knowledge management strategy. In that role, it led the development of a new work programme for the strategy's implementation in 2020-2021.

At corporate level, the Secretariat-General put in place the network of local data correspondents and developed with them a framework for data governance and data policies applicable to all DGs, services and executive agencies.

Within its own organisation, the Secretariat-General established a local data management team, acting as its local data correspondent, composed of experts from the Corporate Governance, Document Management, Digital Solutions and Decision-Making Process units to support the proper implementation of data governance and policies. The team's first mission was to contribute to the Commission's inventory of key data assets (relevant for decision-making processes across the organisation). This should allow information held by different services to be pooled in support of policy priorities, and improve cooperation across the Directorates-General through sharing and reuse of data.

The Secretariat-General worked actively on embedding knowledge management and collaborative work practices in its administrative and policy processes. For this purpose, workshops and pilot projects were organised, together with training (namely on Aresbridge) to ensure good application of document management rules for the information shared through these tools. The Secretariat-General participates in the One-Stop Shop for collaboration, the Commission's in-house consultancy, providing guidance on collaborative practices and knowledge management.

The reorganisation of the Secretariat-General offices space in Berlaymont has provided an opportunity to put in place a permanent inventory of the Secretariat-General's intermediate archives.

Publication of meetings and missions of the Commissioners

The Secretariat-General operates the Application for Transparent Meetings with Organisations and Self-employed individuals (ATMOS). The application supports the Commission's aim to be a transparent and modern public administration and reduces the administrative burden linked to the treatment of related, individual access-to-documents requests. The Juncker Commission published over 22 500 meetings organised between organisations or self-employed individuals and the Commissioners and their Members of Cabinet, as well as the expenses for 2 366 missions undertaken by the Commissioners. The von der Leyen Commission has appointed Ethics and Transparency Contact Points in each Cabinet in order to facilitate coordination.

Data protection

In addition to corporate responsibility for the data protection policy of the Commission, the Secretariat-General is also one of the most important data controllers in the institution. Consequently, in 2019 it also took major steps to improve its own compliance with the data protection rules that entered in force on 11 December 2018:

- Established a register of personal data breaches concerning the Secretariat-General's processing operations and managed swiftly the breaches found;

- Conducted awareness raising activities and provided training;
- Established a Deputy Data Protection Coordinator function in the Secretariat-General;
- Produced a comprehensive report on the Secretariat-General's implementation of the Commission's Data Protection Action Plan;
- Maintained a complete inventory of all data processing operations for which the Secretariat-General is data controller and established a register of personal data breaches concerning the Secretariat-General's processing operations
- Published or approved 25 records of processing, including clear, comprehensive and intelligible privacy statements; and
- Substantively revised the large majority of the Secretariat-General's processing operations and privacy statements.

These measures resulted in a significant increase of the Secretariat-General's compliance and improvement of the data subjects' information of the Secretariat-General processing operations.

2.2.3 External communication activities

During 2019, the Secretariat-General ensured timely and up-to-date information on the Europa website in its areas of responsibility, under three thematic areas of the Commission web presence:

- about the Commission (transparency, ethics for Commissioners, access to documents, data protection);
- law (law-making process, better regulation, REFIT Platform);
- strategy (decision-making, European Semester, strategic planning and programming and Sustainable Development Goals).

The Secretariat-General continued to lead the communication campaign on better regulation by promoting the possibilities for citizens to contribute to the EU policy-making via the 'Have Your Say' portal and other elements of the better regulation agenda.

The communication campaign on the European Citizens' Initiative launched in 2018 continued to raise awareness about this instrument and boost the level of participation.

The European Semester was the subject of three communication actions coordinated by the Secretariat-General, with the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN), the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), among several other partner Directorates-General.

Finally, in 2019, the Secretariat-General organised the European Sustainability Award and the event 'Delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe and the World – an EU review of progress' under the auspices of the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development.

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

Example(s) of economy and efficiency	Units
<p>Use of the corporate solution for electronic procurement (e-Procurement) procuring services in the domain of digital technologies.</p> <p>The Secretariat-General adopted the e-Invoicing and e-Request IT tools several years ago. In 2019, the shift to e-Procurement continued with the introduction of the e-Order and e-Fulfilment systems. E-Order supports the electronic exchange and signature of IT contracts, while e-Fulfilment enables the delivery of an electronic 'certified correct' for time & means IT contracts. These systems allowed us to replace paper-based procedures by lean digital workflows and to shorten the processing time substantially.</p> <p>During 2019, the Secretariat-General has also gradually introduced ABAC Assets Order and started establishing commitments and associated contracts with fully digital means.</p> <p>With the same goal in mind, the Secretariat-General has adopted the Advanced Gateway for Meetings IT system to facilitate the organisation of expert meetings and the processing of related costs and reimbursements.</p>	<p>SG.C3 SG.C5</p>
<p>Use of the corporate electronic tender procedure corporate solution (e-Tendering) for launching public tenders with publication.</p> <p>The usage of e-Tendering streamlines the tender procedures and reduces paper handling. In 2019, the Secretariat-General adopted the e-Tendering, e-Submission, e-Notices and the Public Procurement Management Tool. With e-Tendering, calls for tenders and questions from potential contractors are managed digitally. E-Submission serves as digital repository of all submitted tenders, while e-Notices allows for the electronic publication of award decisions. At a more general level, the Public Procurement Management Tool is an IT system to manage and monitor all procurement procedures.</p>	<p>SG.C3 SG.C5</p>
<p>Digitalisation of College proceedings (paperless Commission): introduction of e-College application</p> <p>In the context of the institutional transition and based on the President's commitment to drive "the full digitalisation of the Commission", a digital application named "e-College" has been introduced at the beginning of the Commission mandate, allowing a fully digitalised management of the weekly meetings of the college. Since 4 December 2019, its impact has been significant in terms of reducing paper consumption and supporting Commission proceedings from the Secretary-General and Cabinets' points of view.</p> <p>Following its positive welcome, the Registry has planned, in close cooperation with DIGIT, the full digitalisation of the entire oral procedure (notably "Hebdo" meetings and Special meetings of Cabinet members) in order to implement the political commitment taken, improve the quality of proceedings (e.g.: by providing co-editing capabilities and ensuring the confidentiality of College proceedings) and further reduce paper consumption.</p>	<p>SG.B1</p>
<p>Efficient handling of replies to parliamentary questions and to Ombudsman inquires (Decide Replies)</p> <p>The corporate IT-system Decide also covers since July 2019 the handling of answers to parliamentary questions and to Ombudsman inquiries. Replacing the former IT tool called "Basil", Decide "Replies" is user-friendly and allows for better traceability of the ongoing work. It aims at improving the efficiency of the decision-making process and at reducing deadlines. An important feature in this context is the warning highlighting urgent tasks and close deadlines. This new feature alone translated into a gain of time for the parliamentary questions coordinators within the services. Decide Replies also provides for simple and efficient follow-up lists or reports, avoiding time-consuming manual work.</p>	<p>SG.B4 SG.G1</p>

<p>Start the development of a new solution for the Secretariat-General's registers.</p> <p>A study on the future of the registers has been conducted in 2018. In 2019, a project was launched to implement the conclusions of the study and to offer a new solution for the registers. The Secretariat-General started revamping the Register of Commission Documents (RegDoc) as the single entry-point for the dissemination of documents. The new RegDoc will fit in seamlessly with the Europa site and serve as the main publication tool for documents drawn up by the Commission since 2001 that fulfil the criteria for release into the public domain.</p> <p>Moreover, the Secretariat-General started enlarging the scope of the Register of Delegated Acts. The new Register of Delegated and Implementing Acts will offer comprehensive information on all acts adopted on the basis of mandates given by the European Parliament and the Council to the Commission in legislative acts. The possible synergies between these registers should lead to a further rationalisation of the Secretariat-General's system portfolio and help reduce its maintenance costs.</p>	<p>SG.A1 SG.B4 SG.C1 SG.C5 SG.G4 SG.C5 SG.DPO</p>
<p>New digital solution for handling request for access to documents.</p> <p>Based on the results of the study on the electronic access to the Commission documents conducted in 2018, in 2019 the project team started the development of a new IT system for the electronic treatment of access-to-documents requests (EASE). The new IT system will consist of two parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a new online portal through which citizens will be able to submit access-to-document requests, have an overview of their previous requests, communicate electronically with the Commission, search for the previously disclosed documents etc. • a request-management back-end system to be used by the Commission staff. Among other things, this back-end system will automatise and improve the handling of requests, offer improved search, statistics and reporting functionalities, allow better deadline management, all whilst complying with the necessary personal data protection requirements. <p>This project will allow for a substantial reduction in the time and effort needed to treat requests for access to documents. The ultimate goal is to improve the transparency of the Commission, by pro-actively publishing previously disclosed documents on the future portal and by allowing the citizens to submit and track access-to-document requests in an electronic and user-friendly way.</p>	<p>SG.C1 SG.C5</p>
<p>Study on the IT equipment for the Next Commission in 2019.</p> <p>In cooperation with the Directorate-General for Informatics, the Digital Solutions & Process Efficiency unit of the Secretariat-General performed during the first half of 2019 a study on the digital working environment of the new Commission. In order to enhance the efficiency of the new Cabinets, to improve their work experience and in line with the goals of the workplace of the future project, the equipment and solutions offered support mobile and collaborative working and feature latest secure digital communication tools for instant messaging, audio- and videoconferencing.</p>	<p>SG.C5</p>
<p>Deployment of Unified Communication tools and integration of fixed telephony.</p> <p>The Secretariat-General has been amongst the early adopters of the corporate solution for Unified Communication. During 2019, the solution was extended to fixed telephony and a major part of the legacy telephony equipment was phased out. This results in savings on the maintenance of the telephony infrastructure. The new services offer an additional level of security by encrypting communications and integrate seamlessly with the other office automation tools.</p>	<p>SG.C5</p>
<p>Gradually extend access to the Interinstitutional Calendar for SG staff.</p> <p>The main purpose of the interinstitutional calendar is to aggregate in a single view the</p>	<p>SG.G SG.C5</p>

<p>most important events throughout the various EU institutions. The calendar was developed on the MyIntraComm SharePoint platform and is maintained collectively and efficiently by a group of contributors. The information is collected and managed centrally in a single location instead of being spread across multiple tables and other follow-up tools. It is made available online but also in printer-friendly views for periods of one, three or six months ahead. In 2019, the Secretariat-General has gradually extended the access to the Interinstitutional Calendar to all interested staff who can get a quick overview of key events with a high political profile. The calendar also serves as a planning instrument and knowledge management tool and gives easy access to agendas, minutes, relevant documents and links.</p>	
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