

European External Action Service



Follow-up report to the discharge for the financial year 2018

4 September 2020



Point B: Whereas it is essential to promote a common management culture within the European External Action Service (EEAS) by reinforcing the European character and ‘esprit de corps’ of diplomatic staff;

The EEAS continues its work towards fostering a common organisational culture, including at management level, by adopting new policy initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of the organisation and of its staff and by further professionalising the Service.

The values of equality, diversity and inclusion are fundamental to what the EEAS represents as an organisation and to what it stands for as a foreign and security policy actor. Under the guidance of the Secretary General, the Task Forces ‘Career Development and ‘Gender and Equal Opportunities’ established in 2017, ensure that the EEAS leads by example in these areas. The implementation of the Task Force recommendations has brought about considerable improvements to the working life of the diverse staff who form the EEAS, in Brussels and in around the world.

In this respect, the 2018 Staff opinion survey highlighted the improvements made so far within the service, with the staff engagement index at an all-time high of 78 %. The results also showed that the EEAS has a positive work environment characterised by good working relations and individual commitment.

The EEAS continues to invest considerably in creating a common management culture by setting standards in people-management skills and competences and promoting them through training and other means. Based on the EEAS competency framework for managers, the first-ever “EEAS Management Handbook” was published in 2019 and it included shared good management practices, tools and case studies collected throughout the organisation at Headquarters and in EU Delegations. A pilot department-wide “180 degree feedback” exercise for managers was launched for the Directorate General for Budget and Administration (DG BA) in 2019, requesting the anonymous input of all staff on the performance of their managers; this exercise was extended to other EEAS Managing Directorates in 2020. New compulsory training courses for managers at Headquarters and in EU Delegations were introduced in 2019, covering issues such as managing local agents in EU Delegations, dealing with poor performance and raising awareness about unconscious bias. These compulsory trainings will ensure that common management principles are upheld by all managers at Headquarters and in EU Delegations, including those recruited from the diplomatic services of Member States, thereby reinforcing the ‘esprit de corps’ in the EEAS.



The EEAS also actively promotes its anti-harassment policy and is committed to ensuring respect and dignity for everyone in the workplace. The first-ever EEAS training for managers on the subject was launched in 2020 and was part of a series of mandatory trainings foreseen for managers in the framework of their training maps. The work on the EEAS Disability Policy is well advanced and a disability roadmap was published in July 2020. The development of an EEAS Diversity and Inclusion strategy has also started: the EEAS is reviewing the existing diversity and inclusion strategies of other EU Institutions and Member States in order to collect best practices and incorporate them into the future EEAS policy. The EEAS is also collaborating closely with the European Commission in view of the launch of a first Diversity and Inclusion survey, which will allow the collection of data on diversity and inclusion of staff and will address inequalities in a constructive manner. The survey is also an opportunity to incorporate staff views into the upcoming Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

***Point 8:** Encourages the EEAS to possibly simplify the current budget nomenclature to allow for easier and more efficient management for the EEAS by progressively streamlining the 35 budget lines used to finance Commission staff operations in the delegations, reflecting geographical and various development instruments.*

As indicated in the follow-up report to the 2017 Discharge report for the EEAS¹, the EEAS has fully accepted the European Parliament's assessment that further simplification of the budget nomenclature will be beneficial, following the significant simplification achievements in the 2015 and 2016 budget procedures.

To this end, the EEAS made an ambitious proposal to the Commission in 2020. The discussion focused on reaching a common understanding of the extent to which the legal framework circumscribes the possibilities of achieving a significant simplification, and thereby reduces the number of budget lines in the EEAS budgetary follow-up. In parallel, the EEAS has worked on more advanced reporting, which is part of the proposed simplification. However, it should be noted that the disruption to the EU Delegation network's activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic makes it increasingly unlikely that a further simplification could be introduced at the same time as the post-2020 budget nomenclature under the 2021-

¹ Ref. Ares(2019)5620193.



2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

Point 9: Notes with appreciation the simplification of budget management with the entire financing of the common overhead costs relating to all delegations' offices in 2018, (rent, security, cleaning and other overheads), including European Development Fund delegations, from the budget lines of the EEAS for the third consecutive year; supports the EEAS efforts to modernise and simplify its administration through the "Innovative 2019" project, which includes 20 proposals under examination; asks the EEAS to report back to the Budgetary Control Committee on the proposals under examination.

Following the evaluation of the Regional Centre Europe, the EEAS launched an internal exercise in 2019 with the aim to further simplify and modernise working procedures and processes used to support EU Delegations. This in-depth review, named 'Innovative 2019', signalled the end of the pilot phase for the regionalisation project and demonstrated the efficiency of a centralised model for several processes performed in the Administration sections of the EU Delegations. A central treatment will not only alleviate some of the ever-increasing workload of EU Delegations but will also guarantee a more homogenous application of EEAS administrative rules in EU Delegations.

The following measures aimed at streamlining and simplifying the EEAS administration have been identified:

- Centralisation of call for tenders above the thresholds in the directive;
- Centralisation of the payment of entitlements stemming from the Staff Regulations, namely accommodation allowances, removal, and duty travel;
- The 'Regional Centre Europe' Division changed into 'Support to Delegations' Division with extended scope to support all EU Delegations;
- Deployment and harmonisation of payroll IT system in all EU Delegations;
- Central treasury.



***Point 12:** Notes the complexity of the building administration policy in the light of the mission of the EEAS; stresses the need for sufficient explanation to be provided by EEAS related to its building administration policy when buying, renting or managing buildings; calls on the EEAS to exercise constant vigilance on its building administration policy and, in particular, to ensure any suspected cases of fraud or corruption that may be detected when buying, renting or managing buildings are immediately addressed; calls on the EEAS to provide sufficient explanation on its tender procedures and the cost of the buildings in the remit of the discharge exercise.*

The EEAS exercises constant vigilance in the management of its building policy to attain the objectives of the EEAS Real Estate Policy and keep the costs balanced and in check. In line with the requirements outlined in the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the EU, the EEAS provides annual updates on its Real Estate Policy, via its Annual Working Document.

When presenting building files to the European Parliament's Budget Committee, the EEAS always provides detailed information on the tender procedures used and the budgetary aspects of planned rentals or purchases. Suspected cases of fraud or corruption have been addressed with due diligence. The EEAS is not aware of any new suspected cases in the management of its buildings.

***Point 13:** Stresses that good cooperation between Parliament and the EEAS is essential to manage and review building files; strongly encourages the EEAS to submit building files for approval in due time to allow time for a thorough review and follow-up questions; reiterates that files submitted to the budgetary authority only very close to critical due dates create unnecessary time constraints and force approvals by the budgetary authority without the possibility to extend the review period.*

The EEAS fully respects the provisions of the Financial Regulation. In addition, the EEAS will continue to submit its building files within the time window indicated in the calendar of the European Parliament's Budgetary Committee.



***Point 14:** Calls on the EEAS to commit for the next discharges to keep sending its Working Document on EEAS' Building Policy to the Budgetary Control Committee, including information explaining the context and coverage of the building costs; takes note of the exhaustive and detailed information about the EEAS' building policy provided through the written questionnaires.*

The EEAS will continue to submit its annual Working Document on its Building Policy to the European Parliament, explaining in full detail the context and coverage of the building costs.

***Point 16:** Notes that the Union is confronted with an increasingly challenging international environment, which has led to increasing demands on the Union to play a leading role on the international scene; highlights the central role of the EEAS in conducting the Union's foreign policy under the guidance of the High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission; notes that the enhanced role of the EEAS has not been underpinned by a corresponding staff increase; calls for sufficient human resources to be made available in order not to put at risk the Union's effectiveness as a global actor.*

In recent years, the role of the EEAS on the international scene has become considerably more important and has resulted in an increase of its responsibilities and tasks. In order to ensure that the EEAS has adequate resources to deliver the expected outcomes, concerted efforts are in place to ensure that new developments in the EU's foreign policy are systematically considered in the annual budget requests. Requests for additional resources are justified either by external factors beyond the EEAS' control, or by the clearly expressed positions of the legislator. Through this exercise, the EEAS aims to secure the support of the Budgetary Authority for staff increases linked to its role of defending and promoting the EU as a global actor.

***Point 17:** Notes that the EEAS carries a vital role to ensure the coherence of the Union's foreign policy; also highlights the need to provide necessary resources for a successful implementation of an efficient EU Common Security and Defence Policy.*

The implementation of an efficient Common Security and Defence Policy is one of the priorities of the EEAS. In light of the EEAS role and of the increasing challenges



in this area, the EEAS requested and was granted additional resources by the Budgetary Authority between 2018 and 2020. These resources have been allocated to Managing Directorate Common Security and Defence Policy and Crisis Response (MD CSDP-CR) structures. Reinforcements for MD CSDP-CR structures have also been included in the EEAS budget request for the year 2021.

***Point 18:** Recognises the difficult operational area of the EEAS in which Union delegations evolve, as political and socio-economic conditions are often complex, unstable and associated high risks with potential significant budgetary and costs consequences mainly for staff and infrastructures' security.*

The EEAS welcomes the recognition by the European Parliament of the difficult working environment of EU Delegations, where the economic, legal and security context often poses considerable operating challenges. The EEAS strives to respect its duty of care towards its staff all over the world.

The EEAS faces multiple security challenges due to its geographic dispersion and its particularly sensitive area of responsibility. In recent years, higher threat levels and more stringent security standards have given rise to a critical need to reinforce the security at Headquarters and in EU Delegations. In order to tackle the associated risks, high security and safety standards are applied, which come at a cost. In addition, wherever possible, the EEAS strives to apply EU standards in areas such as environmental policies and accessibility to persons of reduced mobility.

The EEAS highly appreciates the support from the European Parliament to this end and counts on its continued assistance in the future.

***Point 19:** Calls on the EEAS to create posts for local agents responsible for reporting on legislative work in countries of strategic interest, particularly accession countries and those of the Eastern Partnership, in order to increase the Union's understanding of the neighbourhood and its approximation to the acquis; calls on the EEAS to take action to resolve the problems leading to the procurement errors identified and to prevent future infringements of the relevant rules.*

Whilst only the EU Delegation to North Macedonia has a staff member dedicated to covering and reporting on the legislative issues of the country, other EU Delegations ensure the coverage of this field either from a sector specific perspective, or through ad hoc attributions to existing expat and local staff.



The EEAS continued working on the improvement of the procurement practices in 2019 including improvements on the trainings, templates, security contracts and the digitalisation of procurement procedures. This process resulted in April 2020 in the centralisation of the management of high-value procurement procedures for services and supplies and procedures relating to works where the value is higher than EUR 500,000. As a result, the Public Procurement, Contracts and Finance Division will manage centrally these procedures on behalf of the responsible authorising officers in order to prevent infringements of procurement law and rules.

Point 20: Notes that East Strat Com Task Force was granted EUR 1,1 million in 2018 for its work to address Russia's disinformation. In 2019, the budget increased to EUR 3 million; calls for a substantial increase in the budget in order for the Union to successfully counter-attack Russia's information war; calls for more information campaigns to better explain Union policies in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The EEAS Strategic Communications Task Forces (East, South, Western Balkans) have put in place numerous measures as foreseen in the four pillars of the EU Action Plan against Disinformation². These include to better detect, analyse and expose disinformation, and to raise awareness about its negative impact as well as to develop cooperation with national authorities, civil society, researchers, academia and online platforms on how to counter this threat.

The preparatory action has supported the work of the Task Forces in the detection analysis and exposing of disinformation. The Task Forces work with targeted and tailored media monitoring, big data analytics and bespoke analyses and reporting covering key EU languages, Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership languages and Arabic. Outputs and best practices are shared with key stakeholders including EU Member States, G7, NATO and other international partners via the Rapid Alert System.

Awareness-raising campaigns remain a stronghold of the Task Forces' work and are designed and rolled out in conjunction with key stakeholders. Examples include the successful delivery, in coordination with the European Parliament, of the campaign to raise awareness of the disinformation threat and to protect the EU's democratic

² https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/54866/action-plan-against-disinformation_en



Institutions and processes from foreign manipulative interference in the run up to the European Parliament elections of May 2019. Training and capacity building are also an important part of the work of the Task Forces. A strategic communication week was organised in Tbilisi, Georgia, the first of its kind in its scale and scope, bringing together strategic communication experts, EU officials, diplomats, young professionals, civil society and media from across the EU, the Eastern Partnership countries, Western Balkans and the Middle East and North Africa region. The EUvsDisinfo website³ houses an open-source database of 8,700 disinformation cases and serves as a rich source of timely information and analysis as well as readily accessible knowledge products and training materials, which will be made available in more languages in order to meet the demand from wider audiences.

Work with the EU Delegations will intensify, reflecting the need for localised efforts that address the specificities and threats faced by countries in the EU's Neighbourhood and across the Western Balkans. EU Delegations covering these areas play a key role in communicating deliverables that are credible, relevant and adapted to the local context. In conjunction with EEAS Headquarters, EU Delegations will also work in cooperation with Member States' Embassies and other local actors, including civil society and local media, to reinforce these messages in their own communication activities.

The preparatory action enters its final year in 2020 and more sustainable funding is needed under the new MFF to build on the work of the three Strategic Communications Task Forces. Staff reinforcements need to be made in EU Delegations and the Heads of Delegations will require the budgetary resources to implement activity plans on tackling manipulative interference at the local and regional level, in close coordination with EEAS Headquarters. Council Conclusions⁴ in 2019 recalled the importance of the continued implementation of the Action Plan against Disinformation, all four pillars of which shall be set out further under the future European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP) and reflected in the Digital Services Act. The Conclusions underlined the need for sufficient resources for the Task Forces and invited the EEAS to assess the needs and possibilities for reinforcing its strategic communication work in other geographical areas, such as sub-Saharan Africa. Future funding should reflect the positions of the European Parliament, which calls for the work of the Task Forces to address threats from Russia and other state

³ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>

⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/12/10/countering-hybrid-threats-council-calls-for-enhanced-common-action/>



and non-state actors, including China.

In partnership with the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), budget appropriations are requested under Chapter 15 20 04 03 "Information Policy and Strategic Communication for External Action", of the new MFF to ensure sustainable future funding at Headquarters and across EU Delegations.

Point 21: Acknowledges, in that context, that the structure of certain EEAS costs, such as infrastructure costs, might be more difficult to manage due to exchange rate fluctuations or local specific market conditions, making the management and planning at the delegations level more difficult.

The EEAS welcomes the recognition by the European Parliament of the difficulties in managing the infrastructure costs due to the worldwide coverage of its operations.

The budget of the EEAS is uniquely exposed to exchange rate fluctuations, which adds to the staggering complexity of managing the infrastructure costs around the world. The budgetary forecasting methods used by the EEAS are based on average historic execution and they cater as a rule for all but the most exceptional currency movements; extraordinary adjustments due to currency fluctuations should therefore remain highly exceptional. For instance, the EEAS budget for 2016 was extraordinarily reinforced due to the sudden and strong deterioration in the value of the EUR, and was analogously reduced in the 2019 budget procedure due to a similarly sudden appreciation.

In order to reduce the risk of exchange rate fluctuations as much as possible, the EEAS tries to fix rental prices in EUR, whenever possible.

Points 22 & 23: Notes that the Article 60 of the Financial Regulation provides for new arrangements for the delegation of budget implementation powers to the delegations, namely the possibility for deputy heads of delegation to act as subdelegated authorising officers and to implement the operational budget of the Commission in order to ensure business continuity; Welcomes in that context the EEAS adaptations of its internal rules accordingly but invites nevertheless the EEAS to carefully monitor such situations when this new provision will be used, namely in



small-sized delegations; invites the EEAS in the framework of its internal control strategy to pay particular attention to the related potential risks by proceeding to intensified remote operations control on the adequacy of the financial workflows and/or by providing increased temporary support with relevant ad hoc monitoring and reporting of these periods; recalls that the internal control standard 'Business continuity' was one of the weakest components of the EEAS internal control system for several years, especially for delegations.

Concerning the new arrangements of budget implementation powers in the EU Delegations, the European Commission is entitled to establish an Article 60 sub-delegation for Deputy Heads of Delegation without the prior consent from the EEAS. However, as the EEAS receives a formal notification from the European Commission, the EEAS keeps track and carefully monitors these sub-delegations in order to ensure business continuity in EU Delegations.

The EEAS is continuously working to address the challenges related to the 'Business Continuity' internal control standard and improve its institutional resilience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the EEAS succeeded in remaining fully operational, while ensuring its duty of care to its staff in Delegations around the world.

For Headquarters, the EEAS Headquarters Business Continuity Plan (BCP) was updated in October 2019. The updated BCP ensures that Headquarters has the personnel, procedures, infrastructure, tools (including IT) and budget to perform its critical and essential functions in the event of unexpected situations, which could lead to major disruptions of EEAS operations. The updated BCP minimises the impact of disruption on external stakeholders, whilst facilitating the identification and recovery of key business processes and systems within agreed time frames. It also helps to minimise, to the extent possible, financial, legal and reputational risks associated to business discontinuity. The BCP is an internal document, which is regularly updated following the evolution of HQ risk analysis and mitigation. It respects and complements existing EEAS rules and procedures on how to deal with critical incidents. By preparing the EEAS for possible disruption of its activities and by anticipating how it could respond to emergencies, the BCP increases the institutional resilience of the EEAS.

For EU Delegations, the EEAS is currently developing a comprehensive risk and contingency security-related IT portal, which will be the key tool to organise and monitor the business continuity plans of EU Delegations. In the meantime, a team



based at Headquarters and consisting of field security officers and geographical policy officers is analysing and reviewing the existing business continuity plans of EU Delegations, in order to see if they require update and/or revision. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the HQ team had regular meetings with EU Delegations in order to monitor the situation in their respective countries and to ensure and provide support to EU Delegations, which needed to take specific actions regarding business continuity.

Point 24: Considers as positive steps the creation of the risk assessment and management instrument with risks registers for headquarters and delegations as well as the adoption of a new internal control framework; invites however the EEAS to go beyond risk awareness as such by making sure that risk mitigation is effectively implemented and steadily reviewed.

The EEAS is aware that business continuity plans and analysis have to feed action and in particular specific risk mitigation actions. In order to support the transition from early warning to action, the EEAS launched in 2019 an online training on the new internal control framework, available to all staff at Headquarters and in EU Delegations. Furthermore, the EEAS is currently developing two specialised, interactive 'Beyond the Basics' trainings on risk analysis and risk mitigation to address country or region specific needs on risk mitigation. These trainings will contribute to create a common language and guidelines on risk in the EU Delegations and will facilitate the mainstreaming of risk mitigation at every level of EU Delegations' organisation.

Point 25: Takes note of a rate of anomalies detected in ex ante verifications of commitments and payments (respectively 209 errors out of 1041 and 258 of 1841); regrets the recurrent nature of the errors detected, i.e. mainly the unavailability of supporting documents when financial operations are presented to ex ante financial verification; invites the EEAS also to continue providing specific support for all value public procurement in delegations; welcomes the implementation of financial e-workflows at headquarters by the end of 2019 intended to contribute to a reduction of the level of errors in general terms.

On procurement, the EEAS continues to provide specialised support for public procurement in EU Delegations. This support includes a range of initiatives that



contribute to the further professionalisation of procurement practitioners in EU Delegations and includes, *inter alia*, specialised training for Heads of Administration, and specialised regional workshops for other staff in EU Delegations. Furthermore, the centralisation of procurement procedures (see point 19) is expected to significantly improve the quality of procurement procedures.

Regarding ex-ante verification of financial transactions in Headquarters, the implementation from January 2020 of a revised list of anomaly codes aims at better defining the error typology and increasing the awareness and the likelihood of further correction. The ex-ante verification of financial transactions is part of the internal control mechanism and aims to ensure that the transactions are legal and regular once approved by the Authorising Officer by Sub-delegation (AOSD).

Point 27: Reiterates the importance of providing a result-oriented support to delegations in all areas, namely for procurement support; considers that the experience, cooperation and outcomes of the Regional Centre Europe covering 27 delegations should be properly valued, in particular for the higher level of assurance provided, while possibly considering other equally effective means.

The EEAS provides result-oriented support to the EU Delegations. Following feedback from EU Delegations, the emphasis is progressively shifting to a modern customer-oriented vision based on pragmatic, constructive and operational advice, recommendations and solutions, while abiding by the legal framework in force.

Point 28: Calls on the EEAS to progressively reinforce its EEAS assurance chain in line with the new set of internal control standards putting more emphasis both on the individual competence and accountability for their role in materialising controls (as also reflected in the 2018 questionnaire on the implementation of the internal control principles namely in the area of control over technology a little less well scored) and on the risk of fraud.

The EEAS has continuously put emphasis on the analysis of the feedback received by all services at Headquarters and in EU Delegations with regard to the issues associated to the implementation of its internal controls. In 2019, the EEAS launched an online tool in order to better collect and analyse the data provided from the feedback, which examines in more detail the variables which make the



implementation of controls more or less effective or more or less impactful. The EEAS has reinforced its action in the field of assurance and anti-fraud, opting for a behavioural analysis approach. Following this approach, the EEAS has identified the need to develop training focusing on the detection of external fraud and is currently working towards the development of this with the aim of raising staff vigilance on possible fraud.

Point 31: Notes that only two delegations provided motivated reservations, i.e. the Delegation to Syria, as in 2017, and the Delegation to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg for non-compliance of implemented contracts with procurement rules; encourages the EEAS to continue the ongoing full review of all contracts to ensure compliance with the financial rules.

The EEAS continues its efforts to improve in all procurement related matters. In April 2020, the Public Procurement, Contracts and Finance Division adopted an enlarged mandate, which now includes the monitoring of on-going contracts. A dashboard enabling the full review of all contracts to ensure compliance with the financial rules is expected to be operational by the end of 2020.

The reservation in Syria relates to the impossibility of concluding a tender for security in the current climate and to problems replenishing the local bank accounts and with the income tax and remuneration of local agents. Should the political situation improve significantly, a tendering procedure for security could be envisaged, as well as solutions to the local bank accounts and tax issues. The same reservation was expressed by the Head of Delegation to Syria in his 2019 declaration of assurance.

In 2018, the Head of Delegation to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) expressed a reservation in relation to contracts. These concerns were successfully addressed in 2019, due to the support of the Regional Centre Europe, which conducted a review of all contracts as a corrective measure to ensure compliance with the financial rules.

Point 33: Remains concerned at continuing imbalances in the staffing profile of the EEAS as regards nationality; notes that at the end of 2017, Member State diplomats represented 32,83 % of the overall administrator staff of the EEAS (i.e. 307 persons), at the end of 2016, 31,7 % of the staff of the EEAS came from the Member



States compared to 32,9 % in 2015 in comparison to 33,8 % in 2014.

Recruitment to the EEAS is based on merit, whilst ensuring adequate geographical and gender balance. The EEAS monitors on a monthly basis the evolution of its staffing profile, including nationality, with the aim of ensuring a meaningful presence of nationals from all the Member States, as well as an adequate geographical balance.

The Human Resources Network of EU Member States is regularly informed of the EEAS staff composition. All EEAS management posts and 99% of the non-management administrator posts are published open to other Institutions and to national diplomatic services from the Member States.

The EEAS, through its formal and informal contacts with Member States, promotes national efforts to increase the number of candidates from Member States to published vacancy notices.

Point 34: *Stresses that the EEAS, despite repeated calls, still does not meet the requirements for geographical balance and is significantly disproportionate while having heads of delegation from Belgium (9), Germany (15), France (16), Italy (21), Poland (5), Czech Republic (2); notes, in particular, the increased number of Italian heads of delegation over the last two years.*

As stated in point 33, recruitment to the EEAS is based on merit, whilst ensuring adequate geographical and gender balance. All Head of Delegation posts are published open to other Institutions and to staff of national diplomatic services of EU Member States. The selection of Heads of Delegation is done with the involvement of the Consultative Committee on Appointments (CCA), which includes representatives of the Member States, the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council.

To improve the geographical balance, the EEAS informs Member States continuously of staff's geographic composition and particularly invites under represented Member States to send candidates.

Point 35: *Urges to enhance the geographical balance within the EEAS; reiterates the importance of appropriate and meaningful presence of nationals from all the Member States; stresses that the EEAS must ensure that all Member States are*



adequately represented while respecting the competences and merits of the candidates; therefore encourages the EEAS to carry on interacting with Member States to promote its posts among the national diplomat networks.

The EEAS operates under the principle that its staff shall comprise a meaningful presence of nationals from all of the Member States. As stated in points 33 and 34, the EEAS monitors on a monthly basis the evolution of its geographical representation and regularly informs the Member States.

Point 36: *Calls on the EEAS to implement gender budgeting in all public expenditure.*

The EEAS and the Commission, via its Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), have an important role in contributing to the achievement of gender budgeting as part of EU external action. With this aim, the following measures have been implemented:

- From a planning perspective, gender budgeting has been included in the FPI strategic plan, through a gender equality indicator to monitor its performance;
- From a payments and reporting perspective, FPI systematically reports on gender equality/sensitivity, through the use of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Gender Equality Policy Marker (G-marker). Confirmation that gender equality is properly considered in activities financed by FPI is an additional acceptance criteria for final payments.

The core tenet of gender budgeting – that a gender equality perspective should be actively considered in all phases of policy design and resource allocation – is strongly supported by the EEAS externally as well as internally. Although gender budgeting principles and methods are designed for public policy budgets with a direct impact on society, the EEAS has notably considered gender aspects when preparing staff policy decisions on work-life balance and family-friendly policies and in procurement. The EEAS has also allocated resources to strengthen gender awareness in the areas of training, networking and mentoring. In 2018, the roadmap of the recommendations of the Task Forces "Gender and Equal Opportunities" and "Career Development", was set up by the Secretary General of the EEAS and among other actions, three new peer-to-peer mentoring programmes were launched. In December 2018, the overall gender distribution was close to equal, with women



accounting for 47.4% of the EEAS staff, if yet more is still to be done to achieve gender balance at all levels.

Furthermore, the EU has a robust policy framework on Gender, and on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The EEAS is committed to ensuring consistent internal-external policy coherence on the main priorities regarding WPS. As an example, the EU Action Plan on WPS includes provisions for Member States to adopt and implement their own human rights'-based and gender-budgeted, National Action Plans on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. The outcome of the recent audit by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget to promote equality will also contribute to this process. This will improve gender mainstreaming in the budget process and increase the resource allocation to gender equality objectives.

In 2019, approximately 20% of all EU Mission staff members were trained on WPS related matters, and reported changes in their working methods. Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations systematically conduct training with a gender component. All civilian CSDP missions are instructed by the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) to gender mainstream all trainings, internal and external. A gender component was integrated into the trainings of EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUPOL COPPS, EUMM Georgia and EUCAP Somalia⁵ in 2019. Furthermore, the European Security and Defence College provides a variety of training courses on gender and human rights.

Point 37: Recalls that gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors involved in policy-making.

The EEAS fully agrees with the importance of gender mainstreaming into the EU's foreign and security policy. Gender equality is prominently included in EU political positions and dialogues with partner countries and international organisations. The creation of Gender Action Plans and a Gender Focal Points Network in EU Delegations highlight how the EU has mainstreamed gender effectively and

⁵ European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger, European Union Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories, European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia and European Union Capacity Building Mission in Somalia.



systematically into the EU's external action by integrating it into everyday project cycle management.

To ensure a better oversight of gender mainstreaming in internal policies, the EEAS established the Joint Committee on Equal Opportunities (COPEC) in 2020, in which staff representatives, together with the EEAS administration, work, *inter alia*, on gender and equal opportunities strategies.

Within the EEAS itself, for the last few years, the implementation of the recommendations by the Task Force 'Gender and Equal Opportunities' achieve gender balance and equal opportunities for all its staff, in all functions and at all levels of the EEAS has led to policy initiatives and to increased gender equality. Work is ongoing.

Point 38: Notes with satisfaction that the overall numerical gender balance almost reached parity in the overall number of posts occupied with 47,4 % being women; invites however the EEAS to continue to further reduce existing qualitative imbalances at all levels, functions and in different categories, especially for administrator positions with currently 34,92 % being occupied by women; encourages the EEAS to keep working on the array of measures taken to support gender balance and increase diversity, such as the network for women in pre-management posts and the dedicated trainings for women in management and those aspiring to management.

As mentioned in previous points, recruitment to the EEAS is based on merit but positive action towards an underrepresented gender or nationality can be employed in case of equal merit. The monthly monitoring of staff composition, including gender and geographical balance, is regularly shared with Member States

Furthermore, interview panels always include members of two genders and there is the option to extend a deadline for open vacancies, if the received applications are predominantly from one gender only. Concerning the competitions/vacancy notices, the EEAS ensures that the formulations are not implicitly or explicitly gender biased.

As one third of the EEAS staff comes from Member States' administrations, the EEAS, through its formal and informal contacts with the Member States, seeks to increase the number of female candidates from Member States to the published



vacancy notices. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda point for the meetings between state secretaries and secretaries-general from Member States. In addition, in 2019 the EEAS launched a thorough reflection with Member States on how to improve the conditions for spouse employment in EU Delegations and also strengthened its policy for dual postings, cf below.

In 2019, as a follow up to one of the recommendations of the Task Force on Career Development, the appointment of an EEAS Career Development Adviser and Talent Manager further enhanced the framework of career development in the EEAS. The Adviser supports all staff in Headquarters and Delegations, in close cooperation with the EEAS Career Advisory Service, and can inter alia guide and advise women towards management functions.

The EEAS also continues to offer dedicated trainings for women in management posts and in pre-management posts, including peer support training.

Point 39: Observes that gender and geographic balance should also be respected with regard to the EU special representatives, two out of eight EU special representatives being women; considers also that ethical standards have to be taken into account to avoid potential conflicts of interests; supports the EEAS' preparation on ethics guidelines, taking the specificities of work in delegation into account.

Only one out of the nine current EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) is a woman. The EEAS is dependent on the candidates proposed by Member States. Furthermore, the selection of EU SRs is the prerogative of the Council. However, the EEAS explicitly encourages Member States to put forward female candidates but the low number of female applicants remains a challenge.

The EEAS is also striving for a geographical balance at the level of EU SRs. Among the nine current EUSRs, eight nationalities are represented.

Point 40: Highlights the same situation in the staff overall distribution by gender in management posts, while noting a slight improvement in 2018 with 27,1 % compared to 24,5 % in 2017, representing 71 women, i.e. 60 out of 211 positions at middle management positions (or 28,4 % compared to 26 % in 2017) and 11 out of 51 senior management posts (or 21,57 % compared to 18 % in 2017).



In addition to explanations and principles mentioned under point 38, internally, the EEAS promotes female candidacies on management and pre-management positions

The EEAS continues to offer dedicated training for women and has established the Women Manager Mentoring Programme, a network for women in pre-management, and the WEEAS (women in EEAS) network. These networks provide peer support, mentoring and fast tracked training can be given. They also have the objective of identifying talented colleagues in pre-management positions.

***Point 41:** Calls for further efforts to address these imbalances; calls on the EEAS to update its gender and equal opportunities strategy in order to include concrete goals regarding the presence of women in management positions; highlights the fact that an improvement of the geographical and gender balance in the EEAS would contribute to improving Union ownership of external action.*

During his hearing in the European Parliament in October 2019, HR/VP Josep Borrell Fontelles stated that the goal is to ensure 40 percent women in management positions during his tenure. To reach this goal, the EEAS is continuing to develop talent-spotting and mentoring processes for women, and training and coaching for women in management positions and for women who aspire to join management positions, as developed under point 40.

***Point 42:** Notes that out of 135 posts of heads of delegation, 34 are held by women; regrets also the low percentage of women candidates for management positions in the annual rotation exercise for delegations which remains low at only 18 %; encourages the EEAS to continue its work with Member States to introduce more women candidates.*

The lack of female candidates to Head of Delegation post constitutes a challenge for the EEAS in its efforts to ensure adequate gender balance in these management positions. All Head of Delegation posts are published open to other Institutions and to the national diplomatic services of Member States. The selection of the Heads of Delegation is conducted with the involvement of the Consultative Committee on



Appointments (CCA), which includes representatives of the Member States, the Commission and the Secretariat of the Council.

Recruitment to the EEAS is based on merit and positive action may be used, i.e. opting for an underrepresented gender in case of equal merit. Member States are regularly informed of the staff composition and the EEAS actively and systematically promotes national efforts to increase the number of female candidates from Member States to the Head of Delegation vacancy notices. Internally, the EEAS actively promotes female candidacies to Head of Delegation posts in an effort towards an adequate gender balance and it offers dedicated mentoring for women who aspire to assume the role of Head of Delegation. The work on dual postings and spouse employment has also contributed to more candidates.

Point 43: Observes that the number of seconded national experts from Member States has been stabilised to 449 with the same number as 2017 and following a regular increase since 2011; notes that 87,31 % of seconded national experts are posted at EEAS headquarters with the rationale that they reply to very specialised needs within the EEAS structure; calls on also the EEAS to pay particular attention to the potential issue of conflict of interest in its recruitment policy for seconded national experts.

Following the concerns raised by the European Parliament in the 2017 discharge resolution, the EEAS has committed to gradually reducing the overall number of Seconded National Experts (SNEs). A new internal policy on SNEs was adopted in 2019 and several measures were taken to rebalance the share of the SNEs population, including the suppression of posts that have been vacant for more than 12 months and the conversion of existing SNEs posts into statutory posts depending on the resources granted by the Budgetary Authority. In addition, the creation of new SNEs posts has been limited to specialists in the structures of EU Military Staff, MD CSDP-CR and Strategic Communications, as foreseen in the Council Decision of 2010 establishing the EEAS. The EEAS systematically evaluates the profile and need for SNE posts outside the abovementioned structures. Lastly, with regard to the selection and recruitment process, all vacancy notices are published among the Member States. Through these measures, the EEAS foresees to gradually decrease the number of generalist SNEs in the near future.

Point 44: Recalls the importance of cooling-off periods for officials formerly



employed by the Union institutions or agencies as unaddressed conflict-of-interest situations may compromise the enforcement of high ethical standards throughout the European administration; underlines that Article 16 of the Staff Regulations enables Union institutions and agencies, including the EEAS, to turn down a former official's request to take a specific job if restrictions are not sufficient to protect the legitimate interests of the institutions; fears that it is often not possible to enforce conditions imposed upon post-public employment activities; encourages the EEAS, all other agencies and Union institutions, therefore, to consider the full range of tools made available under Article 16 of the Staff Regulations, in particular when they are notified of a transfer to an organisation or company which has registered in the transparency register in order to exclude any risk of former officials lobbying Union institutions within two years after their termination of office; further calls on all Union institutions and agencies, including the EEAS, to strictly publish their assessment of each case as required under Article 16 of the Staff Regulations.

The EEAS is committed to act within a strong and transparent framework of ethical principles and values, in order to improve the perception of its integrity and to ensure that its actions are in line with its intended purposes. The EEAS automatically imposes a lobbying and advocacy ban on former senior staff for the first 12 months of the two-years cooling-off period, in line with the relevant recommendations of the European Ombudsman. The EEAS policy is to ring-fence its authorisations with several conditions in order to ensure the interest of the Service, to protect its reputation and image, whilst respecting the fundamental right of former staff to work. The EEAS workflow ensures that the transparency register is duly checked and taken into account when handling cases under Article 16 of the Staff Regulations. The EEAS has started applying the relevant procedures and publishing information on the cases under Article 16.3 of Staff Regulations on senior officials. The previous years' cases (since 2014) will be published retroactively.

Point 45: *Considers the further pooling of experience in enforcement and supervision of Article 16 of the Staff Regulations and related ethics rules across all Union institutions necessary; welcomes the commitment of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for a Union ethics body common to the Union institutions.*

The EEAS considers ethical behaviour as a cornerstone of utmost importance. The EEAS aligns itself with this recommendation by the European Parliament. The EEAS welcomes the commitment of Commission President von der Leyen for an



independent Union ethics body, common to all Institutions, and supports that initiative.

Point 49: Requests that the EEAS ensure that co-location in their premises is open to all interested Union institutions and bodies, such as Parliament and the European Investment Bank, with the same conditions as the EEAS; highlights the economic benefits of co-location by reducing the costs for maintenance and operating costs as well as security; further reiterates that the EEAS shall ensure that the costs for leasing or buying property for its delegations is respecting the price range the representations of Member States have to follow; underlines that the EEAS shall incorporate appropriate security cost estimations in its calculations to avoid request for additional funding at later stages;

Sharing premises in third countries (co-location) contributes to rationalising the use of space, to reducing cost and to facilitating cooperation between EU Delegations, Member States, European Agencies and other EU Institutions. It also promotes an image of unity of the EU in third countries. The EEAS is a strong supporter of the co-location concept. In 2019, the EEAS concluded 17 new co-location arrangements and developed a new legal instrument (Service Level Agreement) to unify the legal basis for co-location and regularise the hosting of other Institutions in EU Delegations.

When selecting buildings as either Delegation offices or Residence, the EEAS prospects the local real estate market to ensure that the prices offered are in line with the local rental market and with the prices paid by the Member States present in the country.

The EEAS will actively pursue new opportunities for co-location in the future taking into account the legal and inter-institutional set up as reflected in the current EU Treaties. Regarding the European Parliament in particular, the preferred concept would therefore be that of a secondment of staff rather than a co-location arrangement.

Point 52: Reiterates that the Union took a step towards fair remuneration for all within its institutions; stresses that the EEAS should ensure its trainees in headquarters and in delegations to receive a decent remuneration for all types of



internships (Blue Book, Bruges and Other); welcomes the implementation of paid traineeships in delegations and the termination of offering unpaid traineeships on the Ombudsman's recommendations; notes that the number of trainees in delegations have more than quadrupled, from 26 in 2017 to 109 in 2018; however, regrets that out of the total 404 traineeships offered by the EEAS in 2018, 126 were not remunerated, as they were part of a compulsory training for students; calls on the EEAS to guarantee an appropriate allowance to all EEAS trainees in order to avoid the reinforcement of discrimination on economic grounds;

Following the European Ombudsman's recommendation in 2017 to pay all the trainees an appropriate allowance in order to avoid any form of discrimination, the EEAS restructured its trainee programmes and took a new decision on the rules related to traineeships. The new programme was launched in February 2018. To avoid any form of discrimination, only a small proportion of trainees who require a compulsory traineeship and are already residing and studying in the host country remain unpaid. The EEAS remains fully committed to continue implementing the Ombudsman's recommendation, as supported by the European Parliament.

As of 2020, the EEAS has 161 paid traineeship places, which is below the optimal number of paid traineeships (considered as 181 full-time places, since the first inclusion in the EEAS budget). This is in order to maintain the budget increases at a low level; however, this may be a potential issue for discussion with the Budgetary Authority in the future.

Point 53: *Considers useful to improve the management tools of workload alongside an action plan to attract and retain people taking into account various professional needs, experience and nationalities; welcomes the human resources report and invites the EEAS to clearly state its institutional needs (or new required expertise) and identify its workforce risks at corporate level that could hinder the EEAS achievement of policies objectives; supports the EEAS's measures undertaken to address the increasing workload because of the staff cuts.*

The EEAS Human Resources Report is an annual report, which summarises the main achievements, policies implemented and important new developments in human resources in EEAS Headquarters and EU Delegations. It provides detailed statistics on the EEAS population per category, gender, management, age and nationality. Together with the EEAS Annual Activity Report, it is an important



instrument for management accountability. Both reports are published on the EEAS website in order to ensure full transparency, including towards EU citizens.

The EEAS is committed to ensuring that its staff members pursue an adequate work-life balance. To this end, the EEAS encourages the wider use of flexible working arrangements at Headquarters and in EU Delegations, including flexible working hours (known as ‘flexitime’), part-time working and teleworking. In 2018, a pilot scheme of teleworking in 23 EU Delegations was gradually launched allowing for up to 60 days of teleworking per year. The assessment of the results of the pilot scheme will contribute to establishing a legal basis on teleworking for staff in EU Delegations by the end of 2020.

The EEAS, in cooperation with the European Commission, is also committed to reviewing the provisions on leave policy for staff posted abroad. The EEAS has already taken measures to partially compensate for the reduction of annual leave enacted by the reform of the Staff Regulations in 2014, but within the boundaries outlined in that reform. Additional leave days are already granted to facilitate removals, administrative formalities and medical check-ups.

The EEAS established a Social Policy Sector in September 2019 to cater for the needs of all staff. In addition to measures to improve work-life balance, the Sector ensures the consistency of existing measures and will develop new initiatives aimed at the further improvement of the work environment, social integration and reintegration, social support, and the enhancement of physical and leisure activities.

The EEAS equally fosters family-friendly policies, particularly in EU Delegations, with measures as follows:

- Supporting employment opportunities for spouses of staff members posted to EU Delegations. A Joint Action Plan for 2020 was adopted by the EEAS and national Ministries of Foreign Affairs, to "pool" efforts, in exchanging information on vacancies, coordinating with international organisations and addressing the host countries on work permits and protocol-related issues, including same-sex couples.
- Encouraging Heads of Delegation to engage with other diplomatic missions, international organisations and their host country in order to support employment possibilities for spouses of expatriate staff.
- Reviewing educational allowances when possible, in agreement with the European Commission. As a matter of principle, the EEAS advocates a



flexible interpretation of rules to accommodate individual cases. EU Delegations are also encouraged to negotiate on tuition fees with international schools locally.

Finally, the EEAS is participating in a reflection together with the other institutions on how to ensure a more diverse pipeline of candidates to take the entry exam at EPSO.

Point 54: Notes with concern the 135 mediation cases treated in delegations and headquarters in 2018 concerning either unsolved disagreements around rights and obligations or different kinds of conflict at work including alleged psychological and sexual harassment; calls on the EEAS, in particular the mediation service now reporting directly to the secretariat general, to continue giving the highest priority to this issue in the resource management; reiterates the importance of developing a culture of zero tolerance towards harassment with a strict following up on reported cases; welcomes the anti-harassment awareness raising initiative launched in 2018 by the EEAS Secretary General with the aim of providing more information on the EEAS anti-harassment policy.

The EEAS is unequivocally committed to promoting respect and dignity for all staff in the workplace. As part of its efforts to foster a culture of zero tolerance against harassment, the EEAS offers trainings on how to build a harassment-free work environment to managers at Headquarters and in EU Delegations. Presentations on the EEAS anti-harassment policy and the support structures in place continued to be delivered to EEAS staff at Headquarters and in the Delegations throughout 2019 and 2020, which increased the visibility of the mediation service, thereby resulting in more cases being brought forward.

In the framework of the actions taken to follow up on reported cases, the EEAS adopted a new Decision on the EEAS Mediation Service in 2020. Among other things, the new Decision strengthens the mechanisms in place to ensure that the EEAS Administration is informed about cases of serious or repeated allegations/incidents in order to be able to act as necessary. Aware of the fundamental role of its Mediation Service and based on budget availability, the EEAS further strengthened the Mediation Service in 2020 and is exploring various measures to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated in the future.



Point 55: Invites also, in this context, the EEAS to extend the network of confidential counsellors, currently representing 6 people, especially in the network of delegations by possibly increasing the number of trained volunteer counsellors in delegations; encourages the EEAS to foster the social dialogue regardless the origin of the staff and the different status of the staff.

One of the key objectives of the EEAS anti-harassment policy is to develop an organisational culture in which each staff member feels personally bound to respect and protect the dignity of their colleagues. This applies to all EEAS staff, regardless of their origin and employment status. The EEAS actively promotes its anti-harassment policy among all categories of staff and works constantly towards ensuring that the applicable rules are clear and well known.

The new Decision on the EEAS Mediation Service adopted in 2020 also includes European Commission staff posted in EU Delegations among the staff who can be assisted by the EEAS Mediation Service. As of July 2020, the EEAS network of confidential counsellors is composed of 12 trained volunteer counsellors. Almost half of them are posted in EU Delegations. They are coordinated by the EEAS Mediation Service and are able to attend on a regular basis training sessions given by specialised trainers together with the confidential counsellors of the European Commission.

Equal treatment of all staff remains the guiding principle of the EEAS contribution to the current update of the European Commission's Decision on preventing harassment of 2006⁶, which forms the foundation of the EEAS policy on the subject. The EEAS engages in regular dialogues with its staff representatives to discuss the topic and identify possible areas of improvement.

Point 57: Calls on the EEAS to indicate in its annual activity report the number of referred cases to European Anti-Fraud Office and ongoing investigations by the European Anti-Fraud Office related to potential conflict of interest in the EEAS.

The EEAS cannot assess before the conclusion of the investigations if the cases notified to OLAF refer to conflicts of interest or other sorts of wrongdoings and if

⁶ Commission Decision of 26th April 2006 on the European Commission policy on protecting the dignity of the person and preventing psychological harassment and sexual harassment, C(2006)1624/3.



facts are effectively proven. Furthermore, cases of potential conflict of interest can be notified to OLAF anonymously by other sources and not necessarily through the EEAS. For these reasons, the EEAS cannot provide an overall figure regarding the cases of conflicts of interest.

Point 58: Notes that in 2018 there was one reported case of alleged whistleblowing by an external person against a member of staff of the Commission in a Union delegation; asks the EEAS to provide Parliament with information concerning the policy and procedures it has in place, especially in delegations, when facing a case of whistleblowing.

The EEAS applies the Commission's Guidelines on Whistleblowing⁷ and makes them available to staff on the EEAS intranet. These guidelines apply to EEAS and Commission staff posted in EU Delegations. The guidelines explain to staff when and how to "blow the whistle" and where to seek guidance in case of doubt. They also highlight the protection offered to whistle-blowers acting in good faith, including measures to safeguard the confidentiality of the identity of the whistle-blower and to protect the whistle-blower against any form of prejudice as a result of their whistleblowing. The Staff Regulations (Articles 22a, 22b and 22c) require staff to report any information pointing to corruption, fraud and other serious irregularities that they discover in their line of duty.

Point 61: Takes note of the internal audit service's audit on 'EC-EEAS coordination' and notes with appreciation the audit conclusion that the coordination activities between the Commission services (DG DEVCO, DG NEAR and DG FPI) and the EEAS are overall effective and efficient; notes however the need for defining a non-fragmented view of the overall Union external assistance to a given country and the need to reinforce, in coordination with DG DEVCO and DG NEAR, risk assessment and management developing a common view on uncertainty and mitigating strategies.

The fragmented, instrument-driven approach to external assistance has been addressed through the new approach reflected in the proposed new external financing instrument for the 2021-2027 MFF: the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). In the next MFF, external assistance

⁷ SEC(2012)679 final.



and cooperation will be provided through one single instrument. Moreover, a non-fragmented view is provided by the 'policy first' approach. EU Delegations have prepared strategic assessments, which provide an overview of challenges in a given country, determine the interests of the EU, define the EU's objectives and describe ways to achieve these objectives. This first step of the pre-programming constitutes a key element towards coherent programming and avoidance of fragmentation caused by instrumental 'silos'.

These strategic assessments have been examined jointly through reinforced coordination by the EEAS and the European Commission (DG DEVCO, DG NEAR, FPI, and other relevant DGs), and form the basis for the next steps in the programming process. A joined-up approach towards the more detailed programming of EU external assistance will be embedded in various document formats, instructed jointly by the EEAS and the Commission. One such format is the EU Framework Document, which will form the basis for multiannual programming and take the form of Head of Missions reports. The EU Framework Document will consolidate the EU and Member States' strategic lines of engagement with partner countries across several policies and tools and will offer the possibility for EU Delegations and Member States' representations to further progress on effective joint programming.

Concerning the need to reinforce risk assessment, the EEAS and the Commission have put in place several tools to ensure that external assistance is implemented in line with the EU's objectives and values. Every year, the EEAS and the Commission work together with EU Delegations to produce the Risk Management Frameworks (RMFs), which analyse the most significant risks related to budget support programmes and ensure that they are implemented in line with the EEAS and Commission's guidelines on risk management. In line with the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Commission's Internal Audit Service, RMFs are now being prepared for all partner countries receiving EU financial assistance, hence providing a comparable geo-economic analysis that can inform decision making of all external instruments, including the new financial instruments. This comprehensive approach to risk management strengthens the cooperation among the Commission and the EEAS. It also provides a coherent tool for risk assessment, risk response and mitigation, and risk monitoring across all partner countries and instruments, in addition to other analytical and risk management tools used in external actions. Those include sector specific assessments such as conflict and resilience assessment (Conflict analysis, EU Conflict and Early Warning Systems,



Recovery and Peace Building Assessments, Post Disaster Needs Assessments), or programme risk assessments which are integrated in each project formulation cycle and complement country level risk assessments. Specific risk management and mitigation tools also exist for the European Fund for Sustainable Development Guarantees, which look at the risk of losses in projects, as well as others used by the European Investment Bank and other development financial institutions when implementing EU funds. Furthermore, the EEAS and Commission are committed to improving risk management for internal governance, human resource management, and other risks, notably through a joint assessment of the EU Delegations' Annual Management Plans.

Point 62: Draws attention to the findings and recommendations of the Special Report 15/2018 'Strengthening the capacity of the internal security forces in Niger and Mali: only limited and slow progress'; calls on the EEAS to (i) take measures to improve the operational efficiency of the missions by providing adequate practical guidance and enough support, (ii) improve the occupancy rate of staff posts in the missions, (iii) set mandates and budgets to match operations and devise a common, comprehensive exit strategy clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the winding-up of the common security and defence policy missions, (iv) increase the focus on sustainability aspects and (v) improve performance indicators and the EEAS impact assessments to adequately monitor and evaluate the achievement of tasks.

The EEAS has followed up the recommendations issued in the Special Report and continues to provide pertinent practical guidance and support to the Missions. Concrete measures are underway to implement the Court of Auditors' recommendations on operational and support functions. The reinforcement of the Mission Support Platform, the review of the selection procedures of international staff members and the priority given to seconded candidates are being implemented. Vacant international positions in the Missions are filled annually via three regular and additional extraordinary calls for contributions. The occupancy rate of international staff has shown some improvement since 2018 in particular in the case of EUCAP Sahel Niger, and continues to be closely monitored across all Missions.

On the operational side, the enhancement of 'train the trainers' approach and the reinforcement of evaluation capacities were underlined by the Council in its conclusions on 8 April 2019. The Council also took note of the upgrade of both Missions' advising and training activities that aims to follow counterparts through



mentoring, as well as the enhancement of train the trainers approach. Sustainability aspects as well as monitoring overall performance have been given particular attention.

***Point 65:** Welcomes the creation of the Rapid Alert System, set up among the Union institutions and Member States to facilitate the sharing of best practices related to disinformation campaigns and coordinate responses based on open-source information provided by academia, fact-checkers, online platforms and international partners; encourages the EEAS to develop a long-term vision for the rapid alert system and foster coordination with Members States and other key partners; further, encourages the EEAS to promote the EUvsDisinfo.eu website, which contains over 5,000 disinformation cases but generated only 1,2 million page views in 2018;*

The launch of the Rapid Alert System (RAS) ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections enabled swift and constant exchanges between relevant EU Institutions and EU Member States. After the initial structure of an online platform focusing on elections, the system has been re-structured following extensive consultations among all RAS Points of Contact about future priorities. This has enabled a comprehensive and sustainable set-up that covers all relevant aspects of the fight against disinformation. The RAS Points of Contact have met regularly since the launch. Some of the meetings were also open to international partners, such as NATO and the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism. A dedicated, separate collaboration space has been established on the RAS platform for the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, to facilitate the exchange of information and closer cooperation. The EUvsDisinfo.eu website contains over 8,700 disinformation cases and generated some 1.8 million page views during the first six months of 2020 (compared to 1.2 million page views in 2018).

The Joint Communication by the HR/VP and the European Commission on tackling COVID-19 disinformation of 10 June 2020⁸ acknowledges the importance of instruments that have been established to counter disinformation in a comprehensive manner, such as the RAS. Following calls to create an adequate connection between the RAS and the newly founded European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), discussions are currently underway to find a format that respects the independence of the EDMO and at the same time establishes synergies where possible. In a similar manner, discussions are ongoing about

⁸ JOIN(2020) 8 final



adequate cooperation between the RAS and civil society as well as the private sector.

Point 69: Welcomes new initiatives to improve the communication in relation with Union citizens concerning the importance of public diplomacy and strategic communications as an integral aspect of the Union's external relations; encourages the EEAS to invest in digital communications, through social media and its websites; commends that the EEAS starts engaging multipliers to run Europe-wide public-awareness campaigns; further encourages the use of free open-source self-hosted social network platforms having special regards to users data protection.

Today's world is marked by a multitude of state and non-state actors pushing their own narratives in an environment increasingly polluted by disinformation and where online communication has become of paramount importance. The Joint Communication on tackling COVID-19 Disinformation acknowledges the important role that proactive communication plays in countering disinformation. The EEAS is working with the Commission and the Council to streamline their efforts and provide better access to Member States of the communication's material provided by the EU.

In this context and in order to achieve the EU foreign policy's objectives, public diplomacy and communication are included in the full policymaking and programming cycles and the EU continues to engage with its partners and target audiences over the long term to improve their understanding of EU priorities, build trust and, ultimately, facilitate cooperation across policy areas.

To this end, the EEAS:

- Is working on a new communication strategy to fine-tune its approach and focus on its communication and public diplomacy priorities.
- Is contributing to shape the financial instruments under the next MFF (i.e. NDICI) in order to ensure that its programming gives the EU additional tools to implement its strategy.
- Is reinforcing the joined-up approach to public diplomacy and communication across EU services.
- Is building on its strong capacity to develop successful online/social media campaigns.
- Together with the Commission, has increased the fact-based



communication about the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU's response and international cooperation, through the campaign “#WeTakeYouHome” and on the EEAS internet homepage.

- Together with the Commission, has actively communicated reliable health information, informed citizens and third-country partners about the EU's activities to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and helped raise awareness of the risks of disinformation.
- Is providing guidance to EU Delegations to support them with the organisation of their online activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Continues fostering networks of multipliers to improve the ability to reach out to target audiences.
- Is assessing the opportunity of using new platforms and stakeholder management tools to improve its ability to understand target audiences and engage them better over the long term.

Point 70: Regrets that the EEAS does not yet have an environmental management system; notes that efforts were made to promote the use of video conference; however asks the EEAS to put in place a concrete action plan in order to lower its environmental footprint its headquarter and delegations.

In 2020, the EEAS established the Environmental Management System (EMS), with the aim of reducing the environmental footprint both in Headquarters and in EU Delegations. The establishment of the EMS was possible thanks to the allocation of dedicated resources in the 2020 budget, the first time since the establishment of the EEAS.

The EMS aim is to comply with full EMAS⁹ requirements for activities and buildings at Headquarters, while implementing a light coordination and management system for EU Delegations, to be gradually improved and extended according to the different local possibilities. Based on the experience of other Institutions, implementation should take approximately three years.

Point 71: Welcomes the short-term secondment programme between the EEAS and Parliament; highlights its role in enhancing the mutual understanding of each

⁹ EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme.



institution's structures and working methods and thereby improving the cooperation between the two institutions; encourages the EEAS to promote this programme more actively among its staff in order to boost the number of participants; recommends further to expand the Diplomatic Exchange and Secondment Programme between the EEAS and the Member States' diplomatic services that is aimed at contributing to the evolution of a shared diplomatic culture.

The EEAS welcomes the European Parliament's recommendation and it is pleased to have in place both the Exchange Programme with the Parliament and the Diplomatic Exchange and Secondment Programme (DEPS) between the EEAS and the Member States. Both programmes are launched on an annual basis and are promoted among the Member States, as well as internally among EEAS staff.

In 2018, the short-term secondment programme between the Parliament and the EEAS reached its fifth edition. It gave an opportunity to staff to get an insight into the respective priorities and working methods and to develop closer professional links, thus strengthening ties between the two Institutions. While the absolute figures of exchanges are relatively low in both programmes, the EEAS welcomes this enriching opportunity shared with the Parliament's staff.