

2019 Discharge to the Commission

WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO COMMISSION SECRETARY GENERAL ILZE JUHANSONE

Hearing on 6 January 2021

Question related to major achievements

1. Name three major achievements you have made in 2019?

Commission's answer:

1. Managing the institutional transition

2019 was a year of transition for the European Commission. Under the leadership of the President, the Secretariat-General steered and coordinated work first to complete the delivery of the priorities of the Juncker Commission and then on all aspects of the transition and the preparation for the arrival of the von der Leyen Commission.

The Secretariat-General ensured that the combined expertise of the Commission services assisted the new political leadership in identifying and defining the policy priorities for the new mandate. This involved steering, coordinating and synthesising inputs on strategic priorities from all Commission departments as well as collecting input from all relevant stakeholders.

The Secretariat-General led the preparations for the hearings of the nominees for the new Commission following the Political Guidelines of President-elect von der Leyen. This required extensive coordination among Commission services, between Commission services and Commissioners-designate, and between the Commission and the European Parliament. Clear processes were designed and monitored by the Secretariat-General to ensure that an efficient and high-quality service was provided.

The Secretariat-General also prepared the adoption of President von der Leyen's Communication on the Commission's new working methods to implement the College's priorities. This included a number of innovations, such as the empowerment of Vice-Presidents to steer and coordinate each of the Commission's priorities. In order to ensure better synergies between the internal and external nexus a new collegial preparatory body, the Group for External Coordination, was set up. The Secretariat-General prepared and coordinated the adoption of the first Commission Work Programme of the von der Leyen Commission.

Finally, the Secretariat-General oversaw, in close cooperation with other central services, the practical aspects of the transition, including IT, office space, logistics, staff moves, and training of the teams of new College Members.

2. Launching the new priorities

From the beginning of its mandate, the green and digital transitions have been key political priorities of the von der Leyen Commission. Work began immediately and the first results and achievements are already visible. The Secretariat-General supported the Executive Vice-Presidents and the work of the services in these and other priority areas to ensure high quality and timely delivery of priority initiatives.

The European Green Deal was launched within the first month of the new Commission, laying out a strategy and an array of initiatives to transform the EU into a climate neutral and resource efficient economy by 2050. These initiatives, which have been rolled out over the first year of the mandate, include a proposal for a new climate law and the new target of a net 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for 2030, as recently agreed by the European Council. The Commission has also published strategies for biodiversity, sustainable food systems, the circular economy, sustainable chemicals, modernising energy systems, and smart and sustainable transport. These will be followed by concrete proposals.

Within the first hundred days of the mandate, the Commission also delivered a new digital strategy setting out the key pillars of EU-level action in this area. The strategy in particular underlined the need to strengthen digital capacities in strategic areas, such as artificial intelligence and the data economy, as well as to clarify and strengthen the responsibilities of online platform providers. The Commission also adopted a White Paper on Artificial Intelligence and launched a broad public consultation. In the European Data Strategy, the Commission set out a number of measures which aim to increase the demand for, and the use of, data and data-enabled products and services. The Commission recently adopted proposals for a Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act aiming to update rules on the responsibilities of online platforms in Europe and to establish a new regulatory framework to ensure fair conditions on and contestability of digital markets.

3. The Digital College

President von der Leyen made the modernisation and digitalisation of the Commission's administration a high priority. A leading example of this has been the introduction of paperless College meetings – named e-College – from the very beginning of the mandate. This process was managed by the Secretariat-General in close cooperation with other services. The system is interconnected and fed by other corporate tools currently used by the Registry. Appropriate hardware (tablets) has been provided to all Commissioners and the other key stakeholders involved. Ad-hoc personalised training was also given to the Members of the College, their Cabinets and the Commission staff involved.

The feedback on the use of e-College at Commission meetings has been very positive and additional features have been requested from key users and implemented subsequently. Moreover, considering President von der Leyen's commitment to digitalise the Commission proceedings and the added-value that this digital transformation has provided so far, the Registry anticipated the need to extend the scope of the project to preparatory meetings such as the weekly meetings of Heads of Cabinet and Special Meetings of Members of Cabinet, and

to protected documents. This will be progressively implemented.

Questions concerning the Commission

2. Following the arrival of the new College of Commissioners, organisational changes were necessary within the Commission's structures. Can you please present what extra costs were incurred relating to that – especially with respect to personnel/workforce and logistics?

Commission's answer:

The arrival of the new College of Commissioners was planned well in advance by the Commission services to ensure that the new College became fully operational from the first day. The process of organisational changes involved close coordination of central services dealing with recruitment, mobility, organisation charts, IT and logistics. Based on the Political Guidelines of the President, the College decided to reallocate human resources within the Commission to new policy priorities and to create dedicated structures where such structures did not previously exist, setting up two new departments, namely the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (its mission is to provide and coordinate technical support to Member States for the preparation and implementation of structural reforms) and the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DEFIS). No additional human and financial resources were required for these operations.

3. Could you please provide us with an overview of the participation of each Commissioner in the meetings of the college of Commissioners in 2019?

Commission's answer:

Statistics of attendance at the 40 weekly meetings of the Juncker Commission in 2019 (9 January 2019 – 26 November 2019)

	<i>Attendance out of a total of 40 meetings</i>	<i>% of attendance</i>
M. le PRESIDENT	39	98
M. TIMMERMANS	36	90
Mme MOGHERINI	28	70
M. ANSIP	37	93
M. ŠEF OVI	34	85
M. DOMBROVSKIS	36	90
M. KATAINEN	34	85
M. OETTINGER	35	88
M. HAHN	29	73
Mme MALMSTRÖM	34	85
M. MIMICA	32	80
M. ARIAS CAÑETE	37	93
M. VELLA	36	90
M. ANDRIUKAITIS	34	85
M. AVRAMOPOULOS	33	83
Mme THYSSEN	35	88

M. MOSCOVICI	30	75
M. STYLIANIDES	38	95
M. HOGAN	38	95
Mme BULC	37	93
Mme BIE KOWSKA	33	83
Mme JOUROVÁ	34	85
M. NAVRACSICS	33	83
Mme CRE U	31	78
Mme VESTAGER	34	85
M. MOEDAS	31	78
Sir Julian KING	37	93
Mme GABRIEL	30	75
Average attendance of a total of 40 meetings	34	85

There were three meetings of the von der Leyen Commission in December 2019, with an average attendance rate by Members of the Commission of 98%.

4. What has been made to reduce the member's transportation and travel cost? What about the use of video technology?

Commission's answer:

To implement the objectives of the European Green Deal as an organisation and an employer, the Commission is developing an action plan on greening the Commission. This plan will include measures for reducing CO₂-equivalent emissions across all relevant areas. This should allow the Commission to reach its target of becoming climate neutral by 2030.

For example, as regards professional travel, a significant effort is already being made to incorporate in the Commission's car fleet more environmentally friendly vehicles, including plug-in hybrid cars for Commissioners as the preferred option.

Moreover, building on the lessons of the Covid-19 crisis, the aim across the Commission is to continue promoting where possible virtual or hybrid meetings and events instead of physical meetings. The Commission has invested in new technologies to facilitate this. President von der Leyen's decision to hold paperless College meetings paved the way for the transition to virtual meetings. For virtual and hybrid meetings, the College uses Skype for Business, which is running in the Commission's own data centres and is available to all staff.

At the same time, environmental and cost considerations need to be weighed against the mandate of the Members of the Commission to engage with all Europeans. This will continue to include close and direct contacts with citizens, national parliaments and stakeholders in the Member States and international partner countries.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Members of the Commission publish every two months an overview of their mission expenses on their Europa webpages.

Questions related to revolving doors - a generalised practice at the Commission

5. Has the Commission assessed the cases of post-employment activities of outgoing Commissioners and their Directors Generals, particularly in the context of preventing the "revolving-door" practices?

A recent investigative report of the Corporate Europe Observatory showed that the rules¹ allowing civil servants to switch from high-level jobs in the European institutions to jobs as private lobbyists are almost never implemented.

During the last reform of these rules in 2013, the European Parliament was particularly harsh on the Commission, forcing it to add a ban on lobbying for senior officials and an additional layer of transparency for these roles.

The numbers speak for themselves: In 2019, the European Commission rejected only 3 out of 363 applications from former EU officials for permission to take up a post in the private sector.

For jobs during an unpaid annual leave at the European Commission, there were 594 requests and only 3 refusals.

Commission's answer:

The rules in place for both Members² of the Commission and staff members³ are strong and effectively implemented.

With regard to moves of staff members between the Commission and the private sector, the Staff Regulations⁴ were reinforced with the 2014 reform. Most importantly, the rules concerning the occupational activities of senior management leaving the service have been strengthened: under Article 16(3) of the Staff Regulations, former senior managers are forbidden to engage in lobbying or advocacy activities during the 12 months after leaving the service, vis-à-vis staff of their former institution for their business, clients or employers on matters for which they were responsible during the last three years in the service. All cases assessed in this context by the Commission are published in the Annual

¹ Article 16 of the EU staff regulation establishes the procedure for EU officials who wish to take up a new job - paid or unpaid - within two years of leaving. During this period, officials must seek authorization from an Appointing Authority within their institution before accepting a new post. If this activity is linked to the work that the official had undertaken during the previous three years and could lead to a conflict with the legitimate interests of the institutions, then the appointing authority may either prohibit the official from exercising this activity or approve it under certain conditions.

² Article 245 TFEU and the Commission's Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission, OJ C 65, 21.2.2018, p. 7.

³ Article 16 of Regulation No 31 (EEC), 11 (EAEC) laying down the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community; Commission Decision C(2018) 4048 final of 29.6.2018 on outside activities and assignments and on occupational activities after leaving the Service.

⁴ Regulation No 31 (EEC), 11 (EAEC), laying down the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community.

Report on the application of this prohibition, which is available on the Europa website⁵.

The majority of Commission staff engaging in a new professional activity after leaving the service are temporary and contract agents whose contracts come to an end and who then have to find work outside the Commission. In 2019, these were approximately 60% of all cases. This dynamic is related to the composition of staff in the Commission, to the recruitment needs of the Commission, and to the career choices of generally highly skilled professionals at the beginning or in the middle of their career.

The vast majority of new activities of former senior managers, who are usually permanent officials and who are well aware of their obligations under the Staff Regulations, do not present a risk of lobbying. Activities that are carried out as speakers in conferences, in academia, research in think tanks or for administrations of Member States do not pose particular risks in the context of lobbying or advocacy. The report published this year on the requests assessed in 2019 will contain statistics on the types of activities associated with the requests.

However, when risks could not be ruled out even if the core of the requested activities was not lobbying or advocacy, the Commission imposed a ban on any lobbying engagement while adding additional strict restrictions, which include the prohibition to work on certain matters or to have professional contacts with the former service or the Commission as a whole. Each decision is taken on a case-by-case basis, within the framework of the applicable rules, against specific risks linked to the work carried out while in active service in the last three years and with due respect to the principle of proportionality.

Therefore, the fact that an activity is not prohibited does not mean that it is authorised without strict conditions if a potential conflict of interest is identified (even a perceived one) to prevent any undue influence. Prohibitions can only be imposed in cases where adequate mitigating measures cannot be put in place to alleviate the risk of conflict of interest, in line with the principle of proportionality. Finally, it needs to be taken into account that the institution has a constant dialogue with its staff members on rules and possible future options, and those who received the advice that the activity they contemplated was likely to be prohibited, did not submit a formal request after receiving guidance from the ethics service.

The Commission would like to recall that on 28 February 2019, the European Ombudsman issued a closing Decision following its inquiry into how the Commission manages ‘revolving doors’ situations concerning former staff members. The Ombudsman found no maladministration in how the Commission manages such cases. While acknowledging that the Commission has generally high standards in the areas of ethics and transparency, the European Ombudsman made suggestions in order to render the rules more effective. Most of the suggestions put forward by the Ombudsman have already been implemented. The report on the ethical framework of the EU institutions published in July 2019 by the European Court of Auditors confirmed that, to a large extent, the audited

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/ethics-and-good-administration/staff-and-ethics_en

institutions have established adequate ethical frameworks that are in line with the main requirements of the OECD guidelines and other criteria. In particular, the audit observed that the rules and systems for dealing with the post-EU employment of staff address the risk areas and meet the criteria for acceptable activities, reporting and authorisation procedures and it did not make any specific recommendation as regards the ethical framework for post service activities.

As regards former Members of the Commission, the Commission has put in place an exemplary system as regards post-mandate activities of former public office holders.

Article 245 TFEU establishes that former Members of the Commission, after their term of office, shall respect the obligations arising therefrom and in particular their duty to behave with integrity and discretion as regards the acceptance, after they have ceased to hold office, of certain appointments or benefits.

The Commission has adopted a Code of Conduct to implement this obligation in more detail⁶. Article 11 of the Code sets out that 'Former Members shall inform the Commission with a minimum of two months' notice of their intention to engage in a professional activity during a period of two years after they have ceased to hold office.' For a former President, this period is three years.

The Commission examines the compatibility of the planned activity with Article 245 TFEU, and if the planned activity is related to the portfolio of the former Member, it decides only after having consulted an Independent Ethical Committee.

This Committee is composed of external, highly-respected personalities who deliver their opinions in full independence (a former Member and Vice-President of the European Parliament, a former Judge of the European Court of Justice and a retired Director-General of the Commission).

Both the decisions of the Commission and the opinions of the Committee set out the factual elements and the analysis which form the basis for their respective conclusions. All decisions and related opinions of the Committee are published and easily accessible to the public⁷. It should be noted that each former Member of the Commission has a right to withdraw a notification in view of an expected negative opinion or decision. In such cases, no decision is taken and no publication is made.

6. Can the SG of the Commission comment the findings of the above-mentioned report? Especially, the cases of Mr Krueger and Ms Salla?

Commission's answer:

The reply to this question will be transmitted as confidential under the provisions

⁶ OJ C 65, 21.2.2018, p.7.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/ethics-and-good-administration/commissioners-and-ethics/former-european-commissioners-authorised-occupations_en.

of Annex II 3.2.1 of the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission.

7. What concrete steps the Commission plans to make to address reluctance observed within the Commission to fully implement the Staff Regulations for EU officials and seriously consider rejection if a risk of conflict of interest is identified?

Commission's answer:

The Commission does not share the view that there is reluctance within the Commission to implement the Staff Regulations. The Commission is bound by EU law and obliged and committed to pursue the general interest of the Union while duly taking into account the rights of those affected by its decisions.

The Commission pursues an active policy in this regard and implements rigorously the rules on conflict of interests provided in the Staff Regulations, and in particular the new provisions that entered into force in 2014 explicitly addressing the issue of lobbying and advocacy during leave on personal grounds or after having left the Institution.

To this effect the Commission has also adopted a set of implementing provisions⁸. The Commission Decision on outside activities and assignments and occupational activities after leaving the service was last revised in 2018 and provides more clarity on the criteria to be taken into account to assess each case.

Each move of a staff member between the Commission and the private sector is carefully examined in view of the public interests potentially affected by this move. All decisions taken by the Commission are measured strictly against the standard of proportionality, taking into account that individuals have a right to work.

There is no reluctance to reject requests for occupational activities that do not meet the criteria to avoid the risk of conflict of interests or would create reputational damage to the institutions.

The fact that only a small number of requests are refused does not mean that the Commission is not assessing conflicts of interest properly. First, it needs to be taken into account that the institution has a constant dialogue with its staff members on rules and possible future options, and when they face the risk of a prohibition, they often withdraw their request or do not submit it formally after receiving guidance from the ethics service. Second, the engagement of former staff members in new professional activities cannot be assessed based on a mere statistic of refused activities. The majority of requests for outside activities while on leave on personal grounds and post service activities would usually either not raise conflict of interest issues at all or the risks, if any, can be mitigated with conditions. Typical examples of post service activities include academia, public

⁸ Commission Decision C(2018) 4048 final of 29.6.2018 on outside activities and assignments and on occupational activities after leaving the Service.

international and national administrations, speaking engagements, NGOs, foundations and think tanks.

The fact that an activity is not prohibited does not mean that it is authorised without strict conditions if a potential conflict of interest is identified (even a perceived one) to prevent any undue influence. These restrictions can be very strict, such as a ban on professional contacts with former Commission staff for up to two years or the prohibition to work on specific files to avoid any conflict of interest. The Appointing Authority has to define an appropriate balance between the need to ensure integrity through temporary prohibitions and restrictions and the need to respect the former staff member's right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation. As the assessment is made on a case-by-case basis, prohibitions or restrictions must be well reasoned and proportionate. Prohibitions are imposed only in cases where adequate mitigating measures cannot be put in place to alleviate the risk of conflict of interest, in line with the principle of proportionality.

Question related to Special Advisors

8. How many Special Advisors the Commission had in 2019? How many Special Advisors each Commissioners had and how many the President had? What procedure is applied in the selection procedure leading to becoming a Special Adviser, what is the final decision based on? What is the length of a typical Special Adviser contract?

Commission's answer:

The Commission had 65 Special Advisors in 2019. The information is in a table which will be transmitted as confidential under the provisions of Annex II 3.2.1 of the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The procedure applied for the designation and appointment of a Special Adviser is laid down in the Commission's Rules on Special Advisors⁹.

The Decisions are available on Europa¹⁰.

Typically, Special Advisors work for less than 20 days per year; the contracts are concluded on an annual basis.

⁹ Commission Decision C(2007)6655 of 19/12/2007 as amended by Decision C(2014)541 of 6/02/2014.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/special-advisers_en.

Question related to reporting on performance

9. In the context of reporting on performance, does the Secretary General envisages to give instructions for a particular emphasis on the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy within the Directorates General AAR for 2020 and the 2020 Annual Management and Performance report, given that 2020 is the latest year of validity of this Strategy, as well as the continuing importance of many of its priorities and objectives?

Commission's answer:

2020 was the first year of a new strategic planning and programming cycle in the Commission. Following the publication of new multiannual strategic plans for all Commission services¹¹, the Annual Activity Reports for 2020 will be the first opportunity for services to report on progress towards the achievement of the new specific objectives and on how they will contribute to the Commission's headline ambitions.

The objectives set by the services reflect the new political priorities and in particular the Union's new growth strategy – the European Green Deal. As set out in the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy¹², the Green Deal aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a resource-efficient and competitive economy. This is fully in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the crucial importance of competitive sustainability to Europe's future. The economic response to the crisis, including through the new multiannual financial framework, NextGenerationEU and in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility, offers a unique opportunity to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable, modern and resilient economy.

There is a high degree of thematic convergence between Europe 2020 and the new growth strategy. The headline objectives of Europe 2020, for example in the areas of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency, boosting employment, investing in research and innovation, fighting poverty and social exclusion, and supporting education, remain vitally important today. Many of the headline indicators of the Europe 2020 strategy will therefore continue to be used as impact indicators for the new strategic planning cycle, updated to reflect the new context and the new level of ambition in many of these areas.

Questions related to inter institutions relations etc.

10. To which extent has the expansive and bureaucratic practice of the experts groups replaced the consultation within European Economic and Social Committee?

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/strategic-plans-2020-2024_en

¹² COM(2020) 575 final

Commission's answer:

Expert groups assisting the Commission or its departments and the European Economic and Social Committee have different and complementary functions.

Expert groups created by the Commission or its departments provide the Commission with technical advice and assistance in relation to:

- the preparation of legislative proposals and policy initiatives;
- the preparation of delegated acts;
- the implementation of Union legislation, programmes and policies, and the coordination with Member States and stakeholders in that regard; and
- the early preparation of implementing acts.

Depending on the needs, each expert group is created to provide advice in a specific area, and they are created for different durations. Expert groups may also comprise different types of members, including Member States' authorities and other public entities. The composition of each expert group varies, depending on the type of advice sought by them. The deep technical expertise of the members of these groups enriches the quality of the Commission's proposals.

The European Economic and Social Committee is a permanent body established by the Treaty on European Union. It is consulted by the institutions on the Commission's published legislative proposals where the Treaties provide for that and may be consulted in other cases. The Committee provides the institutions with the combined views of the social partners and organised civil society, reflecting their concerns and expectations.

The Committee offers the Commission valuable input for its work programme, as well as feedback on Commission strategies and communications. It cooperates with the Commission in communication and outreach activities to social partners and civil society. The Commission counts on its strong involvement in the European Climate Pact and the Conference on the Future of Europe.

11. What is the added value of the inter institutional relations between the Commission and the European Ombudsman? Could you enumerate and depict the three main achievements of this relationship in 2019?

Commission's answer:

The Commission has a constructive relationship with the European Ombudsman which bears fruit in the quality of dialogue in the framework of the various procedures and contributes to promoting good administration at all levels.

The three achievements described below illustrate the recognition by the Ombudsman of the work done by the Commission and underline the spirit of very good cooperation.

1. Acceptance rate by the Commission of Ombudsman's solutions: the 'Putting it

Right?’ report gives an account of how the EU institutions responded to the Ombudsman in cases closed in 2019¹³. This report gives the annual acceptance rate which is the percentage of positive replies relative to the total number of proposals (solutions, recommendations and suggestions) made by the Ombudsman. The Commission, which accounts for most of the cases in which the Ombudsman made proposals, due to the size of its administration and its large spectrum of competences, had an acceptance rate of 75% in 2019. This is an increase of approximately 5% compared to 2018. Out of a total of 71 of proposals for solution, suggestions for improvement and recommendations, the Commission responded in a satisfactory manner to 53. The fact that the Commission has no legal obligation to do so demonstrates the constructive character of the relationship.

A specific example of how the Ombudsman’s work has led to improvements in Commission procedures concerned how the European Commission assesses academic qualifications when it selects its trainees. The Commission had rejected a complainant’s application due to ‘inadequate academic qualifications’ as he had obtained his bachelor’s degree in two years instead of three. The Commission explained that it rejected all applicants with less than three years of studies. In the course of the Ombudsman’s inquiry, the Commission admitted the complainant to the selection procedure for the traineeship programme. The Commission also changed its practice for assessing academic qualifications. It now accepts all applicants who have a three-year degree obtained in less than three years. The Ombudsman closed the case in 2019 as settled and welcomed the Commission’s decision to change its practice. She suggested to the Commission that it update its traineeship website to reflect better the new practice for assessing academic qualifications¹⁴.

2. ‘Ombudsman commends EU record on Brexit transparency’: closing a two-year strategic initiative on the negotiations on the UK withdrawal from the European Union, the Ombudsman noted with great satisfaction the high level of transparency of the Commission. The Commission’s Brexit Taskforce dealt with 70 access to documents requests, which led to the publication of over 100 negotiating documents, and replied to about 10 000 messages from the public¹⁵.

3. The Ombudsman’s Award for Good Administration: the award recognises actions by the EU public administration that have a visible, direct and positive impact on the lives of citizens. In June 2019, the Ombudsman hosted the prize-giving ceremony for the second round of the Award for Good Administration. Among 54 projects selected from the main EU institutions, bodies and agencies, the overall Award for Good Administration went to teams from the European Commission (DG ENV and DG GROW) that worked on the EU initiative to reduce plastic pollution and raise awareness about the problem.

The Ombudsman also awarded prizes to projects in 6 thematic categories. The Commission’s services received 3 of the 6 awards: ‘Excellence in citizen-focused

¹³ <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/fr/annual/en/135909>

¹⁴ <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/decision/en/120028> and https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/ethics-and-good-administration/good-administration/relations-european-ombudsman_en#striving-for-good-administration.

¹⁵ <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press-release/en/109859>

services delivery' (DG EAC), 'Excellence in open administration' (DG REGIO) and 'Excellence in communications' (joint winners, DG JUST with the European Parliament)¹⁶.

Question concerning national parliaments and the Commission

12. What has been the major achievement of the cooperation between the national parliaments and the Commission in 2019?

Commission's answer:

In 2019, the Commission continued its intensive dialogue with national Parliaments, including 55 visits of Members of the Commission to national Parliaments, even though the number of their opinions fell significantly due to the sharp decrease in the number of new legislative proposals in the transition year. Helped by an adaptation of its internal procedures, the Commission was able to respond to national Parliaments' opinions in the vast majority of cases within the self-set deadline of 12 weeks.

The Commission implemented the measures it had announced in two Communications in October 2018 and April 2019 to facilitate national Parliaments' subsidiarity scrutiny of Commission legislative proposals¹⁷, thus following up on the recommendations issued by the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing less more efficiently'¹⁸. For example:

-) The Commission since December 2019 no longer counts the period between 20 December and 10 January when setting the eight-week period for national Parliaments to send reasoned opinions.
-) The Commission is prepared to give public aggregated responses when a significant number of national Parliaments send reasoned opinions, without reaching the yellow card threshold, thus giving improved visibility to national Parliaments' concerns.
-) The Commission incorporated in its better regulation guidance the common 'assessment grid' proposed by the Task Force for assessing subsidiarity and proportionality in impact assessments and explanatory memoranda accompanying proposals.
-) The Commission adapted its IT systems for public consultations to allow national Parliaments to identify themselves more easily and thus to enhance the visibility of their resolutions when giving input to

¹⁶ <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press-release/en/115766>

¹⁷ COM(2018) 703 on 'The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking' and COM(2019)178 on 'Better regulation: taking stock and sustaining our commitment'.

¹⁸ For more on the work of this Task Force, see https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/democratic-change/better-regulation/task-force-subsidiarity-proportionality-and-doing-less-more-efficiently_en

consultations.

Comprehensive information on relations with national Parliaments is available in the Annual Report 2019 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and of proportionality and on relations with national Parliaments¹⁹.

Question related to antifraud strategy

13. In its AAR the Secretariat-General mentions the development and implementation of its own antifraud strategy 2018-2021. What have been the successes and weaknesses of the programme detected in 2019 and 2020?

Commission's answer:

As regards the new Anti-Fraud Strategy 2018-2021, the Secretariat-General concentrated its efforts on three strategic objectives, namely:

-) assigning roles and responsibilities for anti-fraud issues within the Secretariat-General, taking the corporate and local level into account;
-) enhancing detective controls to mitigate fraud risks with financial implications;
-) developing an anti-fraud culture in the Secretariat-General.

In 2019, as part of developing the anti-fraud culture, awareness-raising sessions organised by OLAF were conducted at the Secretariat-General. The sessions targeted staff implementing the budget and newcomers, i.e. the most relevant population. In 2020, similar sessions were organised remotely.

To counteract potential reputational risks, the Secretariat-General will continue ethics-related training and awareness-raising activities to maintain the highest standards of professional integrity. While in general the Secretariat-General has a low-risk profile in financial management as it has a small size budget, anti-fraud culture remains in focus and is promoted on a continuous basis.

The Secretariat-General also contributes to one of the two main axes of the Commission's Corporate Anti-Fraud Strategy, which is to enhance the governance of anti-fraud policy. Specifically, the Secretariat-General supports the oversight, by the Corporate Management Board of the follow-up given to OLAF recommendations. To this end, the Secretariat-General has been organising regular monitoring meetings, with all relevant horizontal services, to assess to what extent services have given effect to OLAF's financial recommendations.

¹⁹ COM (2020) 272

Question related to studies paid by the Secretariat General

14. Could the Commission provide a list of all studies paid for by the Secretariat-General in 2019 and in 2018 and the total cost of each study?

Commission's answer:

In 2018 and 2019, the Secretariat-General signed the following contracts related to studies as listed in the table below.

2018 - Title	Contractor	Amount
STUDY ON INTERVIEWS FOR THE TESTING OF THE USER INTERFACE OF THEMIS/INFRINGEMENTS AND UPDATES ON THE VISUAL STYLE GUIDE	EVERIS SPAIN SL	13.653,77
EVALUATION STUDY ON COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES ON BETTER REGULATION	ERNST & YOUNG SPECIAL BUSINESS SERVICES	59.662,50
STUDY ON SECURITY FOR THE TRANSPARENCY REGISTER INFORMATION SYSTEM	UNI SYSTEMS SYSTMATA PLIROFORIKIS	57.406,00
2019 - Title	Contractor	Amount
SECURITY STUDY FOR THEMIS EU PILOT AND THEMIS INFRINGEMENTS	DELOITTE CONSULTING & ADVISORY	79.817,15
EASING THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN: A STUDY OF POSSIBLE EFFICIENCY GAINS IN DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNIQUES	DELOITTE CONSULTING & ADVISORY	165.785,38
STUDY TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DATA GOVERNANCE AND DATA POLICIES AT THE SG	DELOITTE CONSULTING & ADVISORY	148.607,07