

2020 Discharge to the Commission

**WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO COMMISSION
SECRETARY GENERAL ILZE JUHANSONE**

Hearing on 9 November 2021

Questions related to the college of Commissioners:

1. Could you please provide us with an overview of the participation of each Commissioner in the meetings of the college of Commissioners in 2020?

Commission's answer:

Commission von der Leyen Statistics - Participation of College members in Commission weekly meetings [42 meetings between 08/01/2020 (2320th meeting) and 15/12/2020 (2361st meeting)]

	Participation in College meetings out of a total of 42 in 2020	% participation
Mme la PRESIDENTE	40	95
M. TIMMERMANS	41	98
Mme VESTAGER	40	95
M. DOMBROVSKIS	39	93
M. BORRELL i FONTELLES	37	88
M. ŠEFČOVIČ	41	98
Mme JOUROVÁ	42	100
Mme ŠUICA	42	100
M. SCHINAS	39	93
M. HAHN	39	93
Mme GABRIEL	33	79
M. SCHMIT	39	93
M. GENTILONI	42	100
M. WOJCIECHOWSKI	40	95
M. BRETON	41	98
Mme FERREIRA	40	95
Mme KYRIAKIDES	37	88
M. REYNDERS	41	98
Mme DALLI	40	95
Mme JOHANSSON	40	95
M. LENARČIČ	34	81
Mme VÁLEAN	41	98
M. VÁRHELYI	35	83
Mme URPILAINEN	36	86
Mme SIMSON	40	95
M. SINKEVIČIUS	38	90
<i>Average participation per member (total 42 meetings)</i>	38	90
Mme McGUINNESS	8 (out of total of 9 meetings)	89

2. Could you please provide information on transportation and travel costs savings of the Commissioners related to the pandemic and increased use of video-technologies?

Commission's answer:

The pandemic and the associated restrictive measures resulted in a sharp decline in travel by Commissioners and increased use of video technologies to ensure that Commissioners were able to continue to fulfil their political duties. See figures below:

Year	Number of missions	Total costs in EUR
2019	1372	3.058.158,40
2020	568	1.032.378,66
2021 (up to 27/10/2021)	547	1.501.623,30

In terms of professional travel (missions) and in the context of its greening, the Commission is developing an action plan to reduce its emissions due to this type of travel. The principal action will be to build on the lessons learned from the working methods during the COVID-19 crisis and to continue promoting, where possible, virtual or hybrid meetings and events instead of physical meetings. The reduction of mission travel would decrease the Commission's greenhouse gas emissions, which is in line with its climate neutrality target by 2030.

It is important to emphasise however that 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.

3. What is the Commission doing to achieve the sustainable mobility of the college of Commissioners?

Commission's answer:

To implement the objectives of the European Green Deal as an organisation and an employer, the Commission will issue, in early 2022, a Communication on Greening the Commission, accompanied by an action plan. The action plan will include measures for reducing greenhouse emissions across all relevant areas. This should allow the Commission to reach its target of becoming climate neutral by 2030.

As regards professional travel, a significant effort is already being made to incorporate in the Commission's car fleet more environmentally friendly vehicles, including electric or plug-in hybrid cars for Commissioners as the preferred option. To date, 72% of the College's car fleet is electric or plug-in hybrid. For comparison, this percentage was 28% at the end of 2019 and 41% at the end of 2020. The Commission replaces the vehicles with 100% electric and/or plug-in hybrid model whenever possible, or at the latest from the moment a

Commissioner's service vehicle rental contracts expire. Charging stations have been installed at the Berlaymont building and the Commissioners' drivers are trained in eco-driving and electric driving.

Moreover, the Commission is making increased use of virtual or hybrid meetings and events instead of physical meetings. To make this possible, the Commission is upgrading meeting rooms across the organisation.

A new mission guide will set the rules on how to reduce emissions from business travel and how to achieve sustainable mobility during such travels. The guide will be applicable to Commissioners and to all staff.

4. Is the Commission aware of any breaches of the Code of Conduct for Commissioners in 2020?

Commission's answer:

The Commission has not established in 2020 any behaviour of a Member or a former Member which would have required any action other than a reminder or a clarification of the rules for the future. In this regard, more information and references can be found in the annual report on the application of the Code of Conduct for the Members of the Commission that was published in July 2021 (SEC(2021) 299) on the Commission's Europa website entitled 'Ethics and integrity for EU Commissioners'.

5. How many Special Advisers the Commission had in 2020 in comparison to 2019?
- a. How many Special Advisers each Commissioners had and how many the President had?
 - b. What procedure is applied in the selection procedure leading to becoming a Special Adviser, what is the final decision based on?

Commission's answer:

The Commission had 41 Special Advisers to Commissioners plus 7 Medical Special Advisers in 2020. The table shows the repartition of the Special Advisers per Cabinet, including the President.

There are two types of special adviser: non-institutional advisers that provide direct assistance to the President, Vice-Presidents and the Commissioners; and institutional advisers that assist the institutional bodies of the Commission. Hence, the Commissioners with portfolios including those institutional bodies have a relatively high number of advisers. For example, Commissioner Hahn has 6 institutional special advisers: three Special Advisers as External Members of the Audit Progress Committee, the Chair of the Disciplinary Board and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Panel referred to in Article 143 of the Financial Regulation (the EDES panel). Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis has 5 advisers constituting the European Fiscal Board: the Chair and 4 members of that Board.

Member of the Commission	Number of Special Advisers
VON DER LEYEN	1
TIMMERMANS	3
DOMBROVSKIS	6*
BORRELL	4
SEFCOVIC	3
JOUROVA	1
SCHINAS	1
HAHN	9*
HOGAN	2
SCHMIT	3
GENTILONI	1
WOJCIECHOWSKI	1
FERREIRA	3
REYNDERS	1
VALEAN	1
SINKEVICIUS	1
TOTAL	41

* See explanations above

The procedure applied for the designation and appointment of a Special Adviser is laid down in the Rules on Special Advisers in Commission Decision C(2007)6655 of 9/12/2007 as amended by Decision C(2014)541 of 6/02/2014. The Decisions are available on Europa at [Special advisers to the European Commission | European Commission \(europa.eu\) at https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/special-advisers_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/special-advisers_en).

6. How does the Commission monitor and enforce compliance with the conditions it has imposed on the follow-up professional activities of outgoing staff, former officials and Commissioners?

Commission's answer:

Former staff members must respect their obligations arising from the Staff Regulations and the Appointing Authority's decisions concerning them individually. Information on the obligations after leaving the service is made available to all staff, including through training sessions. Staff members who leave the Commission receive an explicit reminder and information about those obligations.

The Commission expects that, where necessary, its former staff members duly inform their new employers or clients about the restrictions applicable to their post-service occupational activities. Moreover, in some cases, former officials can be required to consult the Appointing Authority in case of doubts as to whether they should accept some specific clients.

In parallel, once adopted, an Appointing Authority's decision is communicated on a need-to-know basis to the former staff member's service of origin in order to ensure proper enforcement of the restrictions. This is particularly important in case of a ban on professional contacts or on lobbying vis-à-vis the former DG or the Institution.

In terms of monitoring of the respect of obligations, the Commission services follow publicly available information, notably in the media, and ask former staff members for more information, where necessary. In case of questions, complaints or notifications from third parties, the Commission thoroughly examines them and follows up on them whenever necessary.

In addition, in line with Article 16(4) of the Staff Regulations, every year, the Commission publishes a report on the implementation of the decisions relating to the application of the one-year ban on lobbying and advocacy imposed on former senior managers. This report contributes to greater transparency and accountability of the decisions taken by the Commission, by making the information available for scrutiny by citizens, civil society organisations and the media.

Former *Commissioners* must abide by the restrictions and conditions imposed by the decisions adopted by the Commission regarding their post-mandate activities. Before leaving the Commission, Commissioners receive explicit information about their ongoing obligations and in particular the obligations with regard to post term of office activities. Former Commissioners can contact the Commission in this regard at all times.

As regards monitoring and enforcement, the Commission follows publicly available information and seeks more information whenever necessary. In case of questions, complaints or notifications from third parties, the Commission thoroughly examines them and follows up on them whenever necessary. Former Commissioners' post mandate activities are under regular public scrutiny. The fact that the Commission publishes all authorisation decisions allows the public and all stakeholders concerned to know which activities are authorised and what the related conditions and restrictions are.

In the specific case of the authorised establishment of a consultancy company, the Commission decisions require former Commissioners to report regularly to the Commission on their new clients and contracts. In most cases, Commission decisions recall explicitly that former Commissioners should inform the Commission in case of doubt with regard to the application of the Code of Conduct or the application of the Commission's decisions, before acting on the matter relating to which the doubts arise. In some cases, the Commission has explicitly asked former Commissioners to inform the entity with which they intended to engage about the conditions and restrictions.

See also the response to question 7.

7. In cases where the Commission becomes aware of a former official or Commissioner not adhering to the conditions imposed on his/her follow-up occupation, what action was taken?

Commission's answer:

When the Commission becomes aware of potential breaches of the conditions and/or restrictions imposed in an Appointing Authority's decision on *occupational activities after leaving the service*, the Investigation and Disciplinary Office of the Commission (IDOC) has the power to investigate further and impose disciplinary sanctions, where appropriate.

If there are doubts with regard to the respect of conditions or restrictions by *former Commissioners*, the Commission will clarify the facts. Former Commissioners can be subject to the procedure set out in Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and to the possibility to be addressed a reprimand by the Commission in case of an infringement of the rules.

Question related to the main achievements of the Secretariat-General:

8. What are the three main SG achievements in 2020?

Commission's answer:

- 1) Multiannual Financial Framework, NextGenerationEU and in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility

In 2020, the Secretariat-General steered and coordinated, together with the Directorate-General for Budget, the negotiation of the **2021-2027 multiannual financial framework**, which was adopted in December 2020, and **NextGenerationEU**, a temporary instrument designed to boost the economic recovery and support the green and digital transitions. Together, the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 and NextGenerationEU form the largest package ever financed through the EU budget, worth around EUR 1.8 trillion (in 2018 prices).

The Secretariat-General also began to play a central role in the implementation of the centrepiece of NextGenerationEU, the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**. The newly created Recovery and Resilience Taskforce in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs supports Member States in the elaboration of their Recovery and Resilience Plans, making sure these comply with regulatory requirements and that the proposed investments and reforms will provide strong support to a sustainable economic recovery and to the green and digital transitions. This role continued in 2021 with the formal assessment of the draft plans, the preparation of the legal measures for their approval, and monitoring of implementation. The work of the taskforce helped to ensure a highly coordinated approach across the Commission services.

- 2) Coordination of the European response to the pandemic, including the vaccine

strategy

The Secretariat-General coordinated the European response (internally and externally) to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020. This encompassed the economic and social aspects (as depicted under point 1), but also a number of other areas, in particular in the field of health policy.

From the early stages of the pandemic, the Secretariat-General led the work of **the COVID-19 Clearing House**, which was created on 1 April 2020 to facilitate the swift delivery of the medical supplies needed to fight the virus and overcome the public health crisis in the European Union. The Clearing House worked with Member States and industry to ascertain overall demand for the most critically needed medical equipment in Member States, and to match this with supply. It also worked to address technical and regulatory obstacles and bottlenecks in the supply chain, to increase supply of these products to Member States at this critical time.

The Secretariat-General also coordinated the cross-Commission work to establish a vehicle whereby the EU could provide **funding to speed up the development and manufacture of promising COVID-19 vaccines, and ensure access for all Member States to those vaccines** if they prove successful. This resulted in the creation of the successful EU Vaccine Strategy, which was put forward in a Communication on 17 June 2020, and which was subsequently joined by all 27 EU Member States. In turn, that has resulted in EU Member States getting equal access to COVID-19 vaccines at the scale needed and on the best possible terms and conditions. After its adoption, the coordination of the **Vaccine Strategy** passed to DG SANTE.

3) Business continuity and staff wellbeing

A major challenge for the Secretariat-General in 2020 was ensuring **the continuity of the Commission's operations** in an exceptionally challenging environment. The continuity of operations of the College and services was demonstrated by the number of COVID-19 related decisions adopted by the College (more than 2350 from 12 March by the end of October 2021) while at the same time delivering on the Commission Work Programme and other policy priorities.

The Secretariat-General introduced procedural flexibilities immediately after the introduction of restriction measures by the host country. The decision-making procedures were facilitated as much as possible to ensure the adoption of urgent decisions. For example, it has been possible to implement applicable sanitary measures to College proceedings without hampering the Commission decision-making process in any significant way. Throughout the pandemic, the Commission was therefore able to meet according to the pre-planned schedule of meetings, debate and adopt decisions, as would have been the case in normal circumstances.

Further digitalisation of working methods also supported the continuity of operations. The use of digital collaborative tools has significantly increased, notably to enable seamless remote work. Regarding procedures, for example, the

handling of written, empowerment and delegation adoption procedures became fully electronic, both at service and at Cabinet level. These elements allowed the Commission to play a full role in all aspects of the crisis response, adopting in total 9872 decisions (9255 in 2019).

These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication and adaptability of the SG's staff, who continued to perform to a very high level under challenging circumstances. To support them throughout this period, various measures were put in place, working in close cooperation with other central services, such as Fit@Work, and physiological support for when it was needed, as well as other health at work related issues (e.g. providing office equipment to work at home). This has been key to ensuring continuity of operations in the Secretariat-General. Jointly, a large online corporate learning and development offer was developed by the EU Policymaking Hub, having more than 15.000 participants.

Questions related to the AMPR, accounting, auditing and anti-fraud:

9. What are the key measures implemented by your institution in 2020 to improve its internal management and administration?

Commission's answer:

In 2020, the single most consequential change was the acceleration of the organisation's digitalisation to ensure business continuity even during the COVID-19 crisis. Urgent information technology investments were made to handle the massive switch to teleworking and videoconferences. Thanks to the availability of the IT teleworking infrastructure, collaboration solutions including videoconferencing and the introduction of new solutions (such as M365 services), staff have access to all IT systems necessary to execute their daily tasks.

Both staff and managers showed resilience and adapted quickly to new ways of working, which resulted in the continued efficient delivery of the Commission's priorities.

See also the response to question 8.

10. What is the view of the Secretary-General as regards the role of the Annual Management and Performance Report (AMPR) in the managerial and financial governance of the European Commission?

Commission's answer:

The Secretary-General considers the Annual Management and Performance Report a key instrument for the Commission to ensure accountability and communicate on the achievements of the EU budget.

By adopting this report, the College assumes its political responsibility for the management of the EU budget, including accountability for the work of its

departments and services.

The AMPR covers both the performance of EU programmes and management of the EU budget by the Commission. It explains how the budget supports the EU's political priorities and describes the results achieved with EU spending programmes at the end of the financial year as well as the role of the Commission in ensuring the highest standards of public financial management.

This report is the final step in the accountability chain of the Commission, constituting the Commission's main contribution to the annual discharge procedure by which the European Parliament and the Council scrutinise the implementation of the EU budget.

11. What is the mission of the EC Secretary General services in the preparation of the AMPR?

Commission's answer:

The preparation of the Annual Management and Performance Report is coordinated by the Secretariat-General and DG Budget, who also lead the drafting together. The Secretariat-General is involved in all stages of this process and ensures that the AMPR reflects the progress on the overarching political priorities defined by the President, for example the European Green Deal and the digital transition.

The report is compiled based on oversight and guidance provided by the Corporate Management Board, which is chaired by the Secretary-General and supported by a secretariat in the Secretariat-General. The cabinets of the President and of the Commissioner responsible for the Budget are represented in the Corporate Management Board.

The annual activity reports produced by all Commission services are a key source of the reporting in the AMPR. Together with the Directorate-General for Budget, the Secretariat-General provides the instructions for and carries out the quality review of the draft Annual Activity Reports. This is a structured process involving extensive contacts between central services and the line DGs. With the support of other services, the SG and DG Budget check the compliance with the instructions, the quality of the information provided, and the consistency of the assessment made with underlying information. The Secretariat-General and the Directorate-General for Budget chair the peer review meetings during which the draft annual activity reports are discussed. This process ensures that the information contained in the Annual Activity Reports is a relevant and reliable source for the AMPR.

Finally, the Secretariat-General manages the collegial decision-making process ensuring that collegiality is respected and that the views of all services and cabinets are properly reflected. The Secretariat-General prepares, together with the Directorate-General for Budget, information notes circulated under the authority of the President and Commissioner Hahn highlighting to the College the most important elements in the Annual Activity Reports and of the preparation of

the Annual Management and Performance Report.

12. Does the Secretary-General consider that financial accounting reliability is an important dimension of the democratic legitimacy of the European institutions?

Commission's answer:

The Commission attaches the highest priority to the reliability of its financial accounting. It follows the highest available international standards on accounting for public entities, the International Public Sector Accounting Standards or IPSAS, for the preparation of the EU accounts, as do all EU institutions and agencies.

Furthermore, the Commission operates a robust financial accounting system based on internationally renowned software to keep up to date with technological advances in this area. In addition, it is in the middle of the implementation of a state of the art new system due to go live in 2024.

The Commission's commitment to reliable financial accounting is demonstrated by the fact that it has received 14 consecutive clean opinions on the EU annual accounts from the European Court of Auditors. This should provide a high level of trust in the EU finances, and transparency, to all stakeholders, in particular EU citizens.

13. Could the Commission provide a description of the auditing process regarding the Secretariat-General, including the institutions involved, possibly with a timeline?

Commission's answer:

With regard to the internal auditing process, the Internal Audit Service of the Commission audits the management and control systems in the Secretariat-General, providing independent and objective assurance on their adequacy and effectiveness. With a view to contributing to the Commission's performance-based culture and greater focus on value for money, the Internal Audit Service also carries out performance audits, for example on data protection, corporate governance, and the Commission's strategy for data, information and knowledge management.

The Secretariat-General also carries out (directly or through an independent contractor) an ex-post control of the accounts and control systems of the beneficiary of the grant for the historical archives (European University Institute) every three years. The next ex-post control is planned for the end of 2021 / beginning of 2022 (the pandemic has delayed the ex-post control planned in 2020).

Concerning the external auditing process by the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the Secretariat-General is closely involved in the work on the ECA's Annual Report, in particular on performance issues. The Secretariat-General has

also been among the auditees on a number of important Special Reports, for example on the European Semester and EU agencies, and has been closely involved in work on reviews such as the ECA's reviews on the EU's contribution to the economic and public health response to COVID-19.

14. How does the Secretary General consider that the contradictory procedure with the ECA could be improved and become more transparent?

Commission's answer:

The Commission considers that the contradictory procedure between the ECA and the auditee offers a very important opportunity to discuss the observations, conclusions and recommendations stemming from the audit. The Commission participates actively and constructively in the contradictory procedures for the annual report and special reports, entailing a significant investment of resources.

The Commission will continue doing its utmost to ensure an efficient and effective collaboration and cooperation with the ECA. The Commission considers it particularly important to maintain open and transparent communication with the audit teams throughout each audit engagement, and to operate a 'no surprises' approach to the greatest extent possible. This should ensure that contradictory procedures are able to focus on the key issues arising from the audit.

Subsequent to the contradictory procedure, the replies resulting from this process are formally endorsed by the Commission. It is important that these replies are published by the ECA in its annual and special reports in a transparent manner, to provide the reader with a balanced picture of the views of the auditor and auditee.

15. As regards the new Anti-Fraud Strategy 2018-2021, can the Secretariat-General give a general overview of the major change in 2020?

Commission's answer:

The 2019 Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS) was adopted in April 2019 with an accompanying action plan. Significant progress was achieved in 2020. As a result, two thirds of the 63 actions were implemented across the Commission by May 2021, as reported in the 2020 Report on the Protection of the Financial Interests (PIF Report). The remaining actions are ongoing and near-full implementation is foreseen by early 2022.

In view of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, OLAF and Commission services reflected on the need to update the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy action plan. It was concluded that the two main objectives of the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (data collection and analysis, and reinforced anti-fraud governance) as well as the action plan remained valid. Notably, OLAF has performed an analysis of COVID-19 related fraud risks, of risks and vulnerabilities related to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and supports the fraud prevention efforts of Commission services in line with the objectives of the Commission Anti-Fraud

Strategy.

Fraud related risks were also discussed with all Commission services as part of a COVID-19 risk assessment exercise initiated by the Corporate Management Board. The results of this exercise were communicated to all services by the Secretariat-General and DG Budget. All services were asked to remain highly vigilant, to implement the necessary mitigating measures, and to cooperate closely with OLAF.

16. In its AAR Secretary-General mentions that its own anti-fraud strategy was last updated in 2020 and that all necessary actions, except the ex post control of the European University Institute have been implemented. The implementation of the missing action is expected to be completed by the end of 2021 or the beginning of 2022. Could you please comment if ex post control of the European University has been already completed and if not at what stage you are with this task?

Commission's answer:

We have received from the European University Institute all information and documentation in respect of the annual accounts and financial statements. Due to the pandemic, the ex-post control is planned for the end of this year or the beginning of next year.

17. Have you discovered and reported new fraudulent behaviour or money misuses in 2020?

Commission's answer:

No fraudulent behaviour or misuse of funds has been identified or reported.

Questions related the NextGenerationEU and the REFIT programme:

18. The Secretariat-General began to play a central role in the implementation of the centrepiece of NextGenerationEU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility. On 24 July 2020, the College decided to set up a new Recovery and Resilience Task Force (RECOVER) in the Secretariat-General. The taskforce, which reports to the President, coordinates the analysis of draft national plans submitted under the new Recovery and Resilience Facility. What is your experience so far?

Commission's answer:

SG RECOVER has played an essential role, together with DG ECFIN, in bringing together competences and expertise from across the relevant Commission services to implement a new instrument that requires innovative solutions. SG RECOVER in cooperation with DG ECFIN has supported national authorities with the development of plans that are on the one hand very broad in scope with a strong focus on green, digital and social measures, and on the other hand very large in terms of impact.

The decision-making process was based on the principle of collegiality, with the strong involvement of Commission DGs, under the political control of the Steering Board (composed of the President, the three Executive Vice-Presidents and the Commissioner in charge of the economy) and the College. The adoption of positive assessments on 22 out of 26 plans submitted is testimony that the organisational structure delivered the expected results. While the priority continues to be to work towards the adoption of the five remaining plans, the work is now shifting towards supporting Member States with the implementation of their plans while ensuring proper monitoring.

19. The Secretariat-General is also responsible for the better regulation agenda, and the REFIT programme. This includes the new ‘One In, One Out’ approach introduced by President von der Leyen, to simplify and reduce the bureaucratic burden for people and businesses at EU level. How would you rate the success of the new approach? The Secretariat-General developed an internal tool to support the implementation of the One In-One Out approach to enable coherent and systematic collection, aggregation and reporting of information on cost balances per policy area. Has the information system been deployed across the Commission by now?

Commission's answer:

The Better Regulation Communication¹ has announced how the Commission intends to implement the One In-One Out approach. Impact assessments will present compliance costs, quantified where feasible and proportionate. The compliance costs are scrutinised by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board assessing the quality of estimates. Administrative costs are offset in the same policy area. The focus of the Commission must now be on implementing this major change starting with the 2022 Commission Work Programme.

To test the approach and make sure it is deployed to best effect, in 2021, the Commission has initiated a pilot project. The pilot is testing the methodology and the on-line One In-One Out tool that the Commission has developed for calculating and encoding administrative costs to be offset. The 2021 Annual Burden Survey will report on the outcome of the pilot testing, both regarding the methodology and the functioning of the on-line tool.

The Commission will shortly publish its better regulation guidelines and toolbox, which provide the technical details in relation to the cost calculations and the overall approach.

Question related to studies paid by the Secretariat-General:

¹ COM(2021)219 final; available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/better_regulation_joining_forces_to_make_better_laws_en_0.pdf.

20. Could the Commission provide a list of all studies paid for by the Secretariat-General in 2020 and in 2019 and the total cost of each study?

Commission's answer:

In the area of IT (Information Technology), the Secretariat-General concluded several contracts for studies under the inter-institutional framework contract for Advice, Benchmarking and Consulting services for Information and Communication Technology. This framework contract should be used by Commission Directorates-General (as well as the participating European institutions) whenever it suits their needs, rather than launching a new procurement procedure. Framework contracts with their tightly controlled procedures provide the best safeguards in respect of sound financial management. An overview of specific contracts concluded by the Secretariat-General is provided below.

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
2020 - title	Contractor	Amount
STUDY "MARKET ANALYSIS FOR IT APPLICATIONS IN THE FIELD OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND CRISIS COORDINATION"	DELOITTE CONSULTING & ADVISORY	87 947,00

Question related to the Transparency Register:

21. In December 2020, the Commission reached a final political agreement with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on a mandatory Transparency Register. What are the main challenges in the implementation of the new inter-institutional agreement?

Commission's answer:

The Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on a mandatory transparency register entered into force on 1 July 2021.

The signatory institutions have already taken the following steps to implement the new agreement:

- (i) on 1 July 2021, the Secretariat released a revised version of the website of the Transparency Register to adjust to the new framework and communicate the related changes to stakeholders;
- (ii) on 20 September 2021, the Secretariat published a new registration form adapting to new information requirements and new guidelines for applicants and registrants on the website of the Transparency Register. A new workflow was introduced in the back-office to allow the ex ante validation of new applications for registration in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement. This entails that new applications for registration are validated and entered in the register only under the condition that the information therein is deemed to be sufficient and rising to the requisite quality standards.

The first meeting of the Management Board of the Transparency Register, consisting of the Secretaries-General of the signatory institutions, took place on 24 September 2021. The Management Board determined the annual priorities for the Transparency Register in 2022 as well as the budget estimates and share required for the implementation of those priorities.

Certain challenges remain. Registrants must amend their registration to satisfy the new requirements resulting from the Interinstitutional Agreement by 20 March 2022 in order to remain on the Transparency Register. The Secretariat must monitor the transition of almost 13 000 registrants to the new form while also providing continuous helpdesk support and addressing any technical issues arising during this process. The Secretariat will start performing quality checks on the amended registrations in early 2022 with the aim of achieving an optimal level of data quality in the Transparency Register. Certain modifications to the back-office IT tool and technical solutions to support that large-scale data quality exercise and to improve the security of the system need to be developed in the course of 2022. In addition, the tripartite Secretariat will need to harmonise further the new workflows and procedures to address any residual challenges in the implementation of the new framework.

Finally, it is important to note that the overall data quality in the register had already significantly improved following the joint Secretariat's screening of all registrations entered in the register prior to the entry into force of the new Interinstitutional Agreement. For example, in 2020 the joint Secretariat carried out quality checks on 4973 registrations. As a result of this monitoring, 43% of registrants examined were found to have provided satisfactory information, 30% were contacted and provided satisfactory updates, and 27% were removed from the register due to their ineligibility or failure to update. Moreover, in 2021, following an alert filed by MEP Freund, the Secretariat performed additional quality checks on a total of 859 cases: 339 entries were found correct, 318 entries were updated for their quality and 202 registrations were removed from the Transparency Register.

Question related to access to documents:

22. How many access to documents' requests has the institution received, fully replied, only partially granted and how many were rejected? What were the main grounds for those rejected?

Commission's answer:

In 2020, the Commission received 8.001 initial and 309 confirmatory applications.

These figures are particularly impressive, in light of the fact that a single request may cover several (if not hundreds of) documents.

This is the highest recorded annual number of requests for access to documents since the entry into force of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001. The Commission is the institution which receives by far the highest number of requests.

The requests were fully or partially granted in 81% of the initial cases. Wider or even full access was further granted in more than 37% of the cases reviewed at confirmatory stage under the Regulation.

The main grounds for refusing partial/any access to the requested documents were mostly based upon three of the exceptions provided under Article 4 of the Regulation, namely the exceptions providing for the protection of respectively (1) privacy and integrity of the individual; (2) commercial interests and (3) the purpose of investigations.

Questions related to the cooperation with national parliaments:

23. What has been the major achievement of the cooperation between the national Parliaments and the Commission in 2020?

Commission's answer:

After the transition year 2019, the Commission in 2020 again intensified its relations with national Parliaments, despite the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the Commission had 101 visits to/from national Parliaments (55 in 2019), and participated in a greater number of inter-parliamentary meetings, including the participation of the Commission President in a COSAC meeting.

The number of opinions received from national Parliaments also rose again to 255 opinions, compared to 159 in 2019. The majority of opinions (61%) concerned non-legislative Commission initiatives or were own-initiative opinions, which shows the interest of some national Parliaments in being actors in EU policymaking not only in the subsidiarity control exercise, but also earlier on and at other stages of the policy process, and by providing forward-looking political input.

24. Was the cooperation between the national parliaments and the Commission affected due to pandemics? How this problem was addressed?

Commission's answer:

Despite the adverse effects of the pandemic, which led to the cancellation of most physical meetings, there was closer cooperation with national Parliaments in 2020 than during the institutional transition year 2019 (see reply to question 23). This was due to the intensive use of the possibilities offered by videoconferencing, which allowed for an increased participation of Members of the Commission in ordinary interparliamentary meetings as well as the organisation of extraordinary COSAC Chairpersons meetings and of presentations to national Parliaments' representatives in Brussels (23 in 2020) on various topical issues.

The Commission also facilitated national Parliaments' exercise of their subsidiarity control right. In a letter to national Parliaments of 8 April 2020, which was also sent to the President of the European Parliament and to the President in office of the Council, Vice-President Šefčovič acknowledged that, due to the pandemic, it was difficult for national Parliaments to check the compliance of legislative proposals with the subsidiarity principle within the eight weeks set in Protocol No 2 to the Treaties and committed to facilitating this control in two ways: 1) by bringing to the attention of the relevant Commissioners and replying in substance to reasoned opinions that were for that reason received after the expiration of the scrutiny period (three national Parliaments took advantage of this flexibility); 2) by informing national Parliaments instantly when adopting a legislative proposal aimed at mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the adoption of which by the European Parliament and the Council might need to take place within less than eight weeks (it sent such alerts to national Parliaments on seven occasions in 2020). Moreover, the Commission, after having informed the European Parliament and the Council of this intention, started excluding by default the Christmas/New Year period between 20 December and 10 January when calculating the eight-week scrutiny period, for the first time over Christmas/New Year 2019-2020 and again for 2020-2021.

Question related to sustainability:

25. What is the state of the action plan on greening the Commission?

Commission's answer:

To implement the objectives of the European Green Deal as an organisation and an employer, the Commission will issue a Communication on Greening the Commission, accompanied by an action plan, in early 2022. The action plan will include measures for reducing greenhouse emissions across all relevant areas. This should allow the Commission to reach its target of becoming climate neutral by 2030.

Preparatory work is well advanced. The Commission services expect to launch a Commission internal consultation before the end of 2021. This should be followed by the adoption procedure during the first quarter of 2022. A progress review is planned in 2024.

26. Climate change and sustainable development are priorities for the Union. What is the sustainable development strategy (plastic, transport, travel, heating etc.) for its own institution in 2020?

Commission's answer:

Under the leadership of President von der Leyen, the Commission has presented an ambitious policy programme to deliver on sustainability in the EU and beyond. Sustainability is mainstreamed into all aspects of the Commission's work, both in terms of policy design and the sustainability of the Commission's own administration.

As a contribution to the European Green Deal, the European Commission demonstrates its commitment to sustainable development and sound environmental practice by ensuring that it reduces the impact of its day-to-day activities in a manner consistent with the policies that it has developed for Europe.

Sustainability aspects are fully integrated in the Commission's environmental management and audit scheme (EMAS) with the objective to reduce continuously the Commission's environmental impact. 2020 priority actions were identified in a Global Annual Action Plan, in line with the objectives of a multi-annual planning. Between 2014 and 2020, these actions contributed to the following significant reductions for the various core indicators:

- Buildings energy consumption (per capita): -23 %
- Buildings CO2 emissions (per capita): - 32%
- Water consumption (per capita): - 36%
- Paper use reduction (per capita): - 79 %
- Non hazardous waste (per capita): - 59 %

Looking forward, the Communication on Greening the Commission and the accompanying action plan (see reply to Q25) will address the main causes for greenhouse gas emissions, including buildings and professional travel.

27. Can you give a timeline by when the Commission intends to fully integrate sustainability reporting into its reporting cycle?

Commission's answer:

The Commission reports on sustainability issues in a number of reports, reflecting the different aspects of sustainability.

For example, the European Semester is being refocused to integrate the SDGs and to advance competitive sustainability. In 2020, the country reports included, for the first time, a dedicated chapter on environmental sustainability. As regards SDG monitoring, the Eurostat annual report and its associated website² and communication package represent a global reference. In addition, EU Agencies, such as the European Environment Agency or the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, provide targeted information on topics closely related to the SDGs.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/sdi>

The Commission also reports in the programme statements accompanying the annual budget and in the Annual Management and Performance Report on the contribution of the EU budget to the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to the Union's ambitious targets on climate and biodiversity.

The Communication on Better Regulation³ of 29 April 2021 explains how sustainable development goals (SDGs) will be mainstreamed across all policies, and commits to identifying relevant SDGs for each proposal and examining in impact assessments and evaluations how the respective initiatives will support their achievement.

As regards the Commission's own sustainability, detailed information is included in the Commission's annual Environmental Statements under the EMAS Regulation, as well as in the Commission's Annual Activity Reports (in the section on sound environmental management). The Commission is open to exploring how sustainability reporting could be strengthened further, but the approach should be proportionate and not entail excessive administrative burdens.

28. Which elements will the Commission address in its sustainability reports? Can you share this format, elaborating for example on the particular environmental and social elements of procurement that will be included in the Commission's sustainability report?

Commission's answer:

The annual Environmental Statement shows the wide scope of EMAS, which covers inter alia more efficient use of natural resources, reducing the organisation's carbon footprint, improving waste management, protecting biodiversity and promoting green public procurement.

The Commission services will also continue to report in their annual activity reports on key aspects of their environmental management, including their contribution to implementing the forthcoming greening action plan.

See also the reply to question 27.

29. Does Commission have an internal strategy to achieve a 'zero paper' situation? If yes, what is the state of that strategy?

Commission's answer:

In the context of its EMAS management, the Commission has set annual and multi-annual targets for paper reduction for many years. Between 2014 and 2020, the Commission achieved a pro-capita paper reduction of 79%. Further reduction targets are set until 2030. These are regularly monitored and will be updated in line with the continued digitalisation of Commission workflows.

The introduction of the qualified electronic signature in the Commission's records

management system Hermes-Ares-NomCom, has made completely paperless document management workflows at the Commission possible. The main exception concerns relatively rare cases where legal requirements still require a handwritten signature.

Since March 2020, the full electronic e-signatory in Ares is the default option for all internal Commission documents created by the Secretariat-General. Exceptions are:

- documents legally requiring a handwritten signature;
- documents that cannot be imported in Ares due to a handling restriction or format (e.g. book, brochure, CD);

The use of the full electronic signatory is continuously monitored. Statistics show that all SG managers and staff adapted their individual behaviour at work by using the electronic validation workflow more pro-actively in daily work.

The Secretariat-General has also put in place a Network for Paperless Initiative and Process Automation, to explore new projects for digitalisation and increased efficiency.

Questions related to the European Ombudsman:

30. What cases did the European Ombudsman handle in 2020 concerning the Commission? What measures were taken to respond to the Ombudsman's recommendations?

Commission's answer:

The Ombudsman opened 370 inquiries in 2020 (compared to 458 inquiries in 2019) of which 210 for the Commission (compared to 274 in 2019). The Commission remains the main addressee of the Ombudsman's inquiries, although in a lesser measure: 56.8% (compared to 59.7% in 2019), which, as the Ombudsman acknowledges, is normal given that it is the biggest EU institution having also the biggest impact on the EU citizens, companies and organisations.

The Commission's acceptance rate with the Ombudsman's proposals remains high and has increased by 4%: 75% in 2019 (compared to 70.9% in 2018) given that the Commission is by far the main addressee of inquiries, that in particular in relation to the implementation of the budget strict rules apply, and that there is no obligation for an institution to accept the Ombudsman's proposals (the acceptance rate for 2020 will be published at the end of 2021 in the annual Ombudsman's 'Putting it Right Report').

The number of inquiries closed with a final decision of maladministration is very low: 1.5%. This is due to the fact that in most of the cases, the Commission implements the solution proposals, suggestions for improvement and recommendations issued by the Ombudsman.

Highlighted inquiries in 2020 launched against the Commission concerned a variety of topics, including COVID-19, ethical issues, fundamental rights, transparency in environmental decision-making process, accountability in decision making, lobbying transparency and access to documents.

31. What is the state of the Ombudsman's inquiry into Commission handling of staff 'revolving doors' cases?

Commission's answer:

The Commission has been fully cooperating with the European Ombudsman on her strategic inquiry on 'revolving doors' launched in February 2021. The European Ombudsman's inquiry team is currently inspecting the files transmitted by the Commission. A meeting is scheduled in early December between the Commission's services and the European Ombudsman's inquiry team in the framework of the present inspection.