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COMMUNICATION FROM THE PRESIDENT TO THE COMMISSION

The Working Methods of the European Commission

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE PRESIDENT TO THE COMMISSION THE WORKING METHODS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

INTRODUCTION

EU citizens expressed a clear choice through their ballots during the European elections this year. A choice to be bold in our ambition and sovereign in our action, working with our partners around the world. A choice to be clear-eyed and realistic about the world and the threats around us. And a choice to defend and secure our unique democratic system and forces.

I want this Commission to reflect that choice. I want this Commission to clearly show that we have heard our citizens' aspirations, and that we will do everything in our power to deliver on our commitments for more prosperity, more democracy and more security.

The Political Guidelines are our roadmap, with clear and concrete targets in priority areas. These objectives are cross-cutting, intertwined and together form a coherent whole. Achieving results will require that we all work together, as one team, beyond traditional policy borders and with only one objective in mind: serve our citizens and our common European project to the best of our ability and capacity.

The Working Methods set out the Commission's internal organisation and procedures to ensure that we function as a modern, transparent and performance-oriented institution. Our internal organisation and the way we work together will reflect our overarching ambition: a Union that is faster and simpler, more focused and more united.

On that basis, the Working Methods introduce a number of novelties to the way the Commission works, such as: the new SME and competitiveness check to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens; the dialogues on implementation with stakeholders; the annual reports on enforcement and implementation to European Parliament committees and Council formations; the structured dialogues with European Parliament committees on Article 225 TFEU resolutions and Article 122 TFEU initiatives; the annual Youth Policy Dialogues; the yearly follow-up to European Citizens' Panels' recommendations; and the extension to all Commission managers of the obligations pertaining to the Transparency Register.

I look forward to working with each of you in the next five years and to collectively live up to the legacy of our past, to deliver for the present, and to prepare a stronger Union for the future.

Ursula von der Leyen

I. COLLEGIAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

1) Collegiality

The principle of collegiality, enshrined in Article 17(6) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), guides all of the work of the European Commission (Commission), both at political and administrative levels.

On that basis, the College of Commissioners takes decisions collectively. All Members of the Commission are equal when making decisions and equally accountable for these decisions. They must collectively take ownership of, promote and support Commission decisions. Any position diverging from the position originally adopted by the Commission needs a formal endorsement by the College.

Responsibility for the coherence and quality of the Commission proposals is shared throughout the cycle from policy planning to adoption. Members of the Commission assume full political ownership for the work done by the services under their responsibility.

All acts adopted by the Commission must be aligned with the Political Guidelines and the priorities agreed by the College. The mission letters, the Commission Work Programme, the Multiannual Financial Framework and the annual Budget provide the frame in which the Commission gives effect to the Political Guidelines.

Members of the Commission may recommend to the President the insertion of new initiatives in the Commission Work Programme that are coherent and consistent with the Political Guidelines.

2) College meetings

The **weekly meetings of the College** are the primary means for the Members of the Commission to come together, discuss political issues and take decisions collegially.

It is part of the duties of the Members of the Commission to be **present** at all meetings of the College. Only the President may decide to release Members from the obligation to be present, in duly justified cases and following a written request. Absence from the meetings of the College should be restricted to exceptional and justified circumstances, such as interinstitutional obligations or requirements of external representation of the EU. Members of the Commission cannot be replaced in College meetings.

The President sets the dates and the **agenda of College meetings**¹. The Secretariat-General assists the President in the agenda planning process. This is done on the basis of the indicative ‘liste des points prévus’ (LPP), which is regularly updated and which contains tentative items to be put on the agenda for the coming months. This list is made available to the public.

The College may hold **orientation** debates, which are used to frame the political parameters within which services should develop a proposal, to discuss sensitive issues requiring the direct input of the College, or to develop a common approach to general political developments.

The **quorum** for College decisions is the majority of its Members. Decisions in the

¹ Commission Rules of Procedure.

College are in general taken in a consensual manner. The President or any Member of the Commission nonetheless have the possibility to request that a vote be taken on any matter for adoption. In this case, a majority of Members voting in favour is required for any proposal to be adopted. Each Commissioner has one vote, and Commissioners can only vote in person. The President draws the conclusions of College meetings, which are recorded in the **minutes**, prepared by the Secretary-General, and approved in one of the subsequent meetings of the College.

The deliberations of the College are **strictly confidential** to ensure open and genuine exchanges and protect the principle of collegiality in the College decision-making process.

The College will make full use of state-of-the-art digital methods and tools to ensure the highest efficiency of its decision-making process.

3) Preparation of the College meetings

The meetings of the College require careful **preparation**: this is the main purpose of the weekly meeting of Heads of Cabinet (Hebdo) which is preceded by meetings of the preparatory bodies: the **special meetings of Cabinets (RSCC)**², the ‘**Groupe des Relations Inter-institutionnelles**’ (GRI) and the ‘**Group for External Coordination (EXCO)**’.

	Thursday	Friday	Sa/Su	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
When the College meets in Brussels	RSCC(s) RSCC(s)	GRI		HEBDO (pm)		College (am) EXCO
When the College meets in Strasbourg (12 x/year)		GRI				
	RSCC(s)	HEBDO (pm)			College (pm)	EXCO

The purpose of the sequence of preparatory meetings is to address outstanding questions and identify sensitive aspects at each stage of the process, so that College meetings can focus on key political issues. At these preparatory meetings, Cabinets should express the view of their respective Member of the Commission. Items closed at one of these meetings should not be reopened at a subsequent stage.

The RSCC, GRI and EXCO conclusions, recommendations and unresolved issues are referred to the Heads of Cabinet for their weekly ‘Hebdo’ meeting, in preparation for the meeting of the College. Hebdo in turn proposes which points should be open for discussion at the College.

To facilitate collegial discussions, documents for preparation of the College should be made available in good time, in respect of applicable deadlines set out in the Commission Rules of Procedure. Clear, concise documents help to ensure a focused debate. The content of these documents should be approved prior to circulation by the responsible Executive Vice-President(s), the High Representative/Vice-President, and Member(s) of the Commission.

² See also the section on Interinstitutional Responsibilities.

Members of the Commission, their Cabinet, and Commission staff are required to protect the collegial decision-making process by not disclosing any information on the discussions held at the meetings, nor on the content of the documents, in accordance with Article 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Article 17 of the Staff Regulations, and Article 67 of the Commission Rules of Procedure. The Secretary-General is mandated to rigorously enforce these rules.

II. Structure of the College

The President has empowered five Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President to steer and coordinate each of the Commission's priorities in the fields of: (1) Clean, Just and Competitive Transition; (2) Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy; (3) Prosperity and Industrial Strategy; (4) Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; (5) Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness; and (6) Cohesion and Reforms.

The High Representative/Vice-President supports the President in coordinating the external dimension of all Commissioners' work. She provides a weekly update on foreign policy and external relations to the College.

The Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President promote a proactive and coordinated approach to the follow-up, implementation and communication of the Commission's priority policies across the Union and externally.

III. Better, simpler and more focused regulation

EU rules must be clear and accessible to EU citizens, targeted to the needs of EU businesses, and conducive to both economic growth and societal progress.

1) Better regulation

The Commission's Better Regulation rules aim to ensure that EU legislation and policies are of high quality, effective, and deliver the intended benefits to citizens and businesses.

The Better Regulation guidelines and the Better Regulation toolbox set out the principles that must be followed when preparing new initiatives, as well as managing and evaluating existing legislation. The key instruments of Better Regulation include forward planning and political validation, stakeholder consultation, evaluation and fitness checks, impact assessments, quality control and compliance.

Members of the Commission should strictly adhere to the Better Regulation guidelines and toolbox in the preparation of new initiatives likely to have a significant impact, including delegated and implementing acts.

Specifically, all initiatives likely to have significant direct economic, social or environmental impacts should be accompanied by an impact assessment and a positive opinion from the Regulatory Scrutiny Board. The explanatory memorandum will present the better law-making dimension and how the Commission plans to address the burdens added or reduced for business and citizens. This comprises the new SME and competitiveness check to help avoid unnecessary administrative burdens for small

businesses, as well as the expected digital implications for citizens and businesses. Should the College choose not to undertake an impact assessment, the related reasons should be given in the explanatory memorandum. These principles also apply to the Commission's follow-up to requests under Articles 225 and 241 TFEU, as well as to delegated and implementing acts expected to have significant impacts. Impact assessments should draw on the findings of **evaluations** looking at what can be learnt from experience to date. The Commissioner for Implementation and Simplification will validate exemptions from impact assessments, stakeholders' consultations 'and the evaluate first principle' on the basis of the **Better Regulation guidelines**. He will also approve the launch of the interservice consultation on any initiative that would have been subject to a second negative opinion by the Regulatory Scrutiny Board before the College decides whether or not to go ahead with the initiative.

2) **Simplification**

Members of the Commission will each review existing rules in their respective fields of action to make sure that they are fit-for-purpose, and with a view to both reducing administrative burdens and simplifying implementation.

They will stress-test the EU acquis in their field of action and make proposals to simplify, consolidate and codify legislation to eliminate any overlaps and contradictions.

The Commission will continue to apply the 'one in, one out' principle. Every legislative proposal creating new administrative burdens should relieve people and business of an existing equivalent burden at EU-level in the same policy area.

The Commissioner for Implementation and Simplification will oversee the coordination of these tasks and ensure that they are conducted coherently across the Commission.

3) **Implementation and enforcement**

Members of the Commission will each be responsible for the delivery of the policy objectives and targets within their field of action, making use of all instruments at their disposal, including infringement proceedings, to achieve full and uniform implementation of EU law. They will also, with the Commissioner for Implementation and Simplification who oversees the coordination and ensures coherence across the Commission:

Hold regular dialogues on implementation with stakeholders in their respective fields of action to discuss how to best align implementation with realities on the ground.

Present annual progress reports on enforcement and implementation to their respective European Parliament committee(s) and Council formation(s).

IV. **Interinstitutional and External Relations**

An important aspect of collegiality is that all Members of the Commission fulfil their responsibilities in terms of attendance to the European Parliament, both in plenary debates, Committee meetings and trilogues, and the Council meetings through participation in the relevant Council formations.

The Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President should assume interinstitutional obligations which are of a crosscutting nature (e.g. strategic

discussions in Council meetings), or which could be assumed by the President (e.g. plenary sessions of the European Parliament). Commissioners should deal with the daily interinstitutional activities in Parliament and Council (e.g. structural dialogue with parliamentary committees, discussions on specific files in Council meetings, trilogues on legislative initiatives).

The Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President are responsible, where necessary in consultation with the Secretariat-General and the President's Cabinet, for ensuring that the Commission is always duly represented in Council configurations falling within the scope of their respective portfolio. The Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency represents the Commission at the General Affairs Council and is responsible for ensuring additional Commission representation if necessary. In Council meetings, for each agenda item, the Commission should be represented by only one Member of the Commission who will represent the coordinated Commission position.

All Members of the Commission must also meet their obligations towards other Union institutions and bodies, such as the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Ombudsman. Under the coordination of the Commissioner for Interinstitutional Relations and Transparency, Members of the Commission are expected to be politically active in the Member States and to make themselves available to present and explain important proposals and initiatives in national Parliaments. They should particularly focus on engagement with national and regional actors from Member States other than the one from which they originate.

The Commission will continue to deliver on its commitment to respond to European Parliament Article 225 TFEU resolutions with legislative proposals, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. In addition, Members of the Commission will also take part in structured dialogues on these resolutions with the relevant parliamentary committees falling within their field of action.

The Commission will also provide detailed explanation and justification to the relevant parliamentary committees where it relies on Article 122 TFEU as a legal basis.

Members of the Commission will fully comply with the Framework Agreement on the relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making³.

Responding in time and in an appropriate manner to parliamentary questions is part of the interinstitutional obligations of the Commission. They are answered by the competent Member of the Commission on behalf of the Commission, following endorsement by the College. The President's Cabinet and the Spokesperson's Service must be informed of all incoming sensitive parliamentary questions and of responses given to them.

Members of the Commission will regularly and genuinely engage with civil society and stakeholders, notably through Youth Policy Dialogues. They will also take part in Citizens' Dialogues across the Union and the Commission will, every year, follow up on selected proposals and recommendations from European Citizens' Panels. The Commission will also continue to support the network of local councilors together with the Committee of the Regions.

The Commission ensures the external representation of the Union, with the exception

³ OJ L 304, 20.11.2010, p.47 and OJ L45, 17.2.2018, p.46.

of the common foreign and security policy and other cases provided for in the Treaties. The President attends Summits with Heads of State or Government of third countries, on behalf of the EU, and is responsible for coordinating the Commission's external representation in all other international fora. **Members of the Commission** attend Ministerial, or other meetings, with external counterparts in the areas of their competence, including in the G7 and G20 context.

V. Relations with the Commission services

The President will be supported by the Secretariat-General, the Legal Service, the Directorate-General for Communication, including the Spokesperson's Service (SPP), and Policy Planning Staff. The President will establish a close relationship with the Directors-General of the Commission, and will rely on their expertise to deliver on the Political Guidelines.

Each Member of the Commission will have services reporting directly to them. They assume full political responsibility for the work done by the services that report to them. They will each have offices on the premises of the services reporting directly to them. This is aimed at fostering further engagement with management and staff.

The Secretariat-General, as a Presidential service, will provide targeted support to the Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President in the performance of their crosscutting tasks involving other Members of the Commission and associated services, in order to ensure collegiality, consistency and full coherence with the Political Guidelines. Via the Secretariat-General, the Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President will be able to rely on the Commission services relevant to their mission, in consultation with the Member(s) of the Commission concerned.

The President will, upon proposal by the Secretariat-General, set up Project Groups to ensure the coordination of key crosscutting initiatives and horizontal policies. The purpose of the Project group is to ensure preparation and political steer in the delivery of an initiative from conception to implementation.

The President decision to set up the Project Group will determine the mandate, the composition, the duration and the working methods of the group, and will appoint the Member(s) to lead the group. The President decision will be prepared by the Secretariat-General in consultation with the lead Member of the Commission. The lead Member of the Commission will chair the Project Group and will work with the Secretariat-General to coordinate the meetings, including invitations, agenda-setting, and ensure appropriate follow-up. The Project Groups will include Executive Vice-Presidents, the High Representative/Vice-President, and other Members of the Commission, as well as relevant Commission services as appropriate. The Cabinets of the President and of the relevant Executive Vice-Presidents and/or the High Representative/Vice-President, as well as the Secretariat-General, Legal Service and Directorate-General for Communication will, as a rule, be invited to each meeting.

As a rule, a strategic 'Jour Fixe' should be organised regularly, bringing together the relevant Executive Vice-President(s), the High Representative/Vice-President and Commissioners, and the senior management of their services. The purpose of the strategic 'Jour Fixe' should be to provide political steer, monitor progress of and ensure appropriate follow-up to the overarching Vice-Presidential mission. The Secretariat-General will be in charge of coordinating the meetings, including agenda-setting. The Cabinet of the President and the Secretariat-General will be invited to each

meeting.

In addition, a regular ‘Jour Fixe’ meeting between a Member of the Commission and the senior management of their service should be organised regularly to ensure political steer. The ‘Jour Fixe’ should include updates on all relevant matters, including acts prepared or under preparation by the relevant service(s) and implementation-related issues. This should allow for an early warning of the collegial preparatory bodies, and of the College, where appropriate.

The principles governing the relations between Members of the Commission, their Cabinets and the associated services are set out in Annex 2.

The President’s Cabinet and the Secretariat-General will be the guardians of collegiality, objectivity and efficiency in the relationship between the Executive Vice-Presidents, the High Representative/Vice-President and Commissioners.

In light of the current Multiannual Financial Framework and constant staffing obligations, the Commission will manage human resources in the most rational, efficient and agile manner, taking due account and making the most of staff’s individual skills and aspirations.

All Members of the Commission will both actively work with their services to identify efficiencies and re-prioritise resources internally, and proactively contribute to corporate redeployment efforts across the Commission.

All Members of the Commission will also ensure – both individually and collectively – that the Commission is and remains an inclusive, respectful and safe workplace, which champions diversity, equality and trust. The composition of their Cabinets should reflect the diversity of the European Union as far as possible, drawing on a wide range of professional expertise and ensuring geographic and gender balance.

To that end, each Member of the Commission designates in their Cabinet an ‘equality contact point’. Cabinet members can cumulate several such contact-point responsibilities.

VI. Ethics

Integrity, impartiality and exemplary ethical conduct are the foundation of EU citizens’ trust in their institutions. The Commission will therefore continue to abide by the highest possible ethical standards as set out in the Treaties, the Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission⁴, the Commission Rules of Procedure, the Staff Regulations, and all related implementing acts.

This includes securing the Commission’s impartiality – both actual and perceived – in all legislative and non-legislative activities. Specifically, the Commission must be able to show that, in the context of administrative procedures, it has acted in a way that allows to exclude any legitimate doubt as to possible bias. A lack of impartiality could notably arise where Members of the Commission are in charge of the preparation and/or adoption of individual decisions concerning matters in which they were involved in their previous functions (e.g., in functions in central, regional or local government, in companies, or in other organisations).

⁴ Commission Decision of 31 January 2018 on a Code of Conduct for the Members of the European Commission (OJ C 65, 21.02.2018).

Members of the Commission are therefore expected to inform the President whenever they cannot exclude that a legitimate doubt on their impartiality could arise and must refrain from acting in the procedure concerned until the President decides whether such legitimate doubt effectively exists or not.

Each Member of the Commission designates a Cabinet member as an 'Ethics contact point'. Cabinet members can cumulate several contact-point responsibilities.

VII. Transparency

Members of the Commission are expected to fully adhere to all applicable ethical rules and to reinforce the Commission's openness and transparency towards civil society, including by strictly observing the terms of Regulation 1049/2001 on access to documents.

Contacts with stakeholders should be conducted with transparency and Members of the Commission should seek to ensure an appropriate balance and representativeness in the stakeholders they meet. Transparency is of particular importance where specific interests related to the Commission's work on legislative initiatives or financial matters are discussed with professional organisations or individuals.

On that basis, Members of the Commission and their Cabinets will meet only with professional organisations or self-employed individuals that are duly registered on the Transparency Register pursuant to the interinstitutional agreement of 20 May 2021 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. They will also make public any such meetings, and publish resulting minutes, unless compelling reasons of public interest, such as those provided for in Article 4 of Regulation 1049/2001 on access to documents, require confidentiality⁵.

Separately, the Commission will strengthen its transparency system by extending the requirements of the Transparency Register to all managers.

Each Member of the Commission designates a Cabinet member as a 'transparency contact point'. Cabinet members can cumulate several such responsibilities.

VIII. Security

The Commission will continue to develop a security culture and abide by the highest standards of resilience, business continuity and security.

Members of the Commission, their Cabinets, and Commission staff will strive to apply the highest degree of vigilance towards cyber and hybrid threats. They must always use secure channels of communication, when handling sensitive information in full compliance with the security rules in force. Cabinet personnel and Commission staff are required to obtain appropriate security clearance to access certain classified documents. Failure for Cabinet personnel to obtain security clearance might result in dismissal from the Cabinet.

Commission staff must undergo in-depth security training and in-depth cybersecurity training upon taking up their functions and regularly thereafter.

Unauthorised disclosure inside and outside the Commission, in whichever form, of any information of an internal, sensitive or classified nature is subject to the sanctions laid

⁵ Commission Decision of 25.11.2014 (C(2014)9051).

down in the legal provisions in force.

Each Member of the Commission designates in their Cabinet a 'security & cybersecurity contact point'. Cabinet members can cumulate several such responsibilities.

IX. Digital transformation

Commission services will implement the Commission Digital Strategy to optimise processes, streamline and automatise workflows, and use digital technologies to increase productivity. The College will lead by example by holding paperless meetings supported by an e-College tool.

The Commission will continue to digitalise the working processes underpinning its policymaking, including its management of documents (Decide, Hermes and EdiT). The Commission will also harness the potential of innovative technologies and Artificial Intelligence to simplify, streamline and automate the Commission's working processes, while guaranteeing efficiency, security and legal soundness.

All Commission staff will be equipped with the necessary tools to embrace a collaborative way of working. Quick access to reliable data is essential for effective policymaking and efforts will be stepped up to implement the Information, Data and Knowledge Management Strategy across the organisation, in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

X. A green Commission

The Commission will build on its current efforts and launch new initiatives to improve the environmental impact of its activities also through its Environmental Management System (EMAS), namely in the area of energy, water and paper consumption, waste management, and CO2 emissions. It will apply enhanced implementation of circular economy principles in green public procurement. It will also further strengthen staff's ability to adopt ecological behaviour.

XI. Communication

1) The communication activities of the Commission

The communication activities of the Commission should provide clear, consistent and transparent information to citizens, explaining the Commission's priorities, policies and initiatives and the concrete benefits that derive therefrom. Communication should also reach out beyond the traditional media circles of Brussels, Luxembourg, Strasbourg and the capitals of the Member States to engage citizens on the ground, in their communities and regions and in a language that they understand.

The Commission services should support the Members of the Commission in their communication activities. Their success in terms of media and public perception depends on their ability to communicate convincingly on a large number of issues in all Member States and to be seen as a strong team, contributing positively to the achievement of the key objectives and priorities of the Commission as a whole.

2) Structures

The Directorate-General for Communication, under the authority of the President, leads the European Commission's communication effort and ensures coherence and coordination in external communication across the Commission.

The Spokesperson's Service (SPP), which is part of the Directorate-General for Communication, supports the President and Commissioners to communicate effectively to the press. Each Member of the Commission has a dedicated Communication Adviser to assist him/her in his/her communication activities, to help prepare 'Lines to Take', interviews, press points and press conferences. In all these activities, Communication Advisers shall keep the SPP informed, and where appropriate, involved.

The Commission's Representations and regional offices in the Member States, which are part of the Directorate-General for Communication, serve the institution as a whole.

To ensure collegial preparation of and follow-up to all communication activities of the Commission, the Chief Spokesperson of the Commission, together with the Executive Communication Adviser in SPP and in coordination with the President's Communication Adviser, chairs a weekly meeting with the Communication Advisers, the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication and to which the Commission Representations are linked up by video-conference, to frame the media activities for the forthcoming week, as well as longer-term communication actions. Press Officers in the SPP ensure the daily effective liaison between Cabinets and spokespersons. For this purpose, they are invited to attend all Cabinet meetings, together with the relevant teams in Directorate-General for Communication, when necessary. Communication Advisers should also keep the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication and Representations informed of planned media and outreach activities by Commissioners in the Member States.

ANNEX I: PRINCIPLES GOVERNING WORKING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION, THEIR CABINETS AND THE SERVICES OF THE COMMISSION

This annex sets out the principles for sound cooperation between the Members of the Commission, the Cabinets and the Commission services. It applies to relations within the same portfolio and covers other relations that are necessary for the good functioning of the institution.

The principles set out below can be supplemented by practical arrangements.

1. PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION AND RESPECTIVE ROLES

1.1. Principles of cooperation

The Members of the Commission, the Cabinets and the services are collectively responsible for working closely together in order to ensure effective implementation of the Political Guidelines and the College's priorities. They establish working relations based on loyalty, trust, transparency and the mutual provision of information, in keeping with the principles set out in the Working Methods.

Cooperation is established primarily between the Member of the Commission and the Director(s)-General reporting to him or her and must be supplemented by a close relationship between the Cabinet and the services, following an inclusive leadership and work culture, with less hierarchies and more working together.

The Members of the Commission should establish working arrangements with the Commission services which work under their guidance, for good cooperation and access to information. These working arrangements shall be shared with the Secretariat-General and the President's Cabinet.

1.2. Executive Vice-Presidents

Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President must give their political validation in the corresponding IT system (*Decide*) at all stages of the decision-making process (planning, interservice consultation and decision) for all acts politically sensitive and/or important within their remit.

1.3. Members of the Commission and Director-General

A close relationship based on trust and the mutual provision of information must be established between each Member of the Commission and the Director(s)-General concerned. The Member of the Commission issues general guidelines or gives instructions to the Director-General, in accordance with the College's priorities. The Director-General, for his/her part, advises the Member of the Commission on the files relating to his/her portfolio and informs him/her of any subjects of relevance to the implementation of the priorities or the management of his/her services. He/she is accountable to the Member of the Commission and the College for proper implementation.

The Member of the Commission ensures that contacts are maintained with the staff of the services under his/her authority and organises at least one annual meeting with them, as well as regular contacts with the management of the services under his/her authority.

In order to ensure full political ownership and control, the Members of the Commission are responsible, together with the relevant Director-General and whenever needed, in close cooperation with the relevant Executive Vice-President(s) and the High Representative/Vice-President, for the identification at planning stage of all acts to be adopted by the Commission in their area of competence, as well as for the assessment of their political sensitivity and/or importance.

Together, they will assess the political sensitivity in accordance with the Political Guidelines and the priorities of the College and in light of the political context and the potential impacts of the acts, notably if they are likely to be controversial with Member States or with the European Parliament, attract significant public interest, cause reputational damage to the Commission or the European Union, or have major financial implications.

As a result of this assessment, which could be done during the regular 'Jour Fixe', the Director-General will become fully responsible for the flagging of the political sensitivity and/or importance of acts in *Decide* as from the start of the decision-making process (i.e. at planning stage).

The modalities for the identification and assessment of acts should be set out in the working arrangements concluded between both. These working arrangements, defined in line with the Mission Letter of the relevant Member of the Commission, should clearly establish the respective roles and responsibilities, notably by identifying the categories of acts which would not need systematic political scrutiny because of their intrinsic routine, repetitive and administrative nature.

Acts not flagged as politically sensitive and/or important, will require the explicit validation of the Director-General in *Decide* at planning, interservice consultation and decision stage, except where they are of a repetitive and/or routine nature.

1.4. Cooperation between Cabinet and services

In addition to the direct relationship between a Member of the Commission and the Director(s)-General concerned, there should be daily cooperation between the Cabinet and the services. They work together in a spirit of loyalty and mutual assistance, in keeping with their respective roles and responsibilities.

As a matter of principle, the Cabinet is represented by the Head of Cabinet or the Deputy Head of Cabinet, and the Commission services are represented by the Director-General, a member of the senior management or his/her assistant. The assistant(s) to the Director-General act(s) on behalf of the Director-General as the main interface between the Cabinet and the Commission services. The Cabinet and the Commission services establish by common accord their respective points of contact and describe how any specific existing or new coordination or liaison structures function.

1.5. Responsibilities of Cabinets

A Cabinet is at the direct service of a Member of the Commission and works in the general interest of the institution. It plays an essential role in the proper functioning of the collegiate

system. The Cabinet is actively involved in the process of preparing the meetings of the College. During preparatory meetings, it expresses the points of view of the Member of the Commission on the various points on which decisions are to be taken.

As regards sound cooperation between Cabinets and services, it is important to stress that:

- The Cabinet relies as much as necessary on the assistance of the services under the authority of the Member of the Commission. The Cabinets of the Executive Vice-Presidents in their crosscutting role are able to rely on any service in the Commission whose work is relevant for delivering on their mission via the Secretariat-General, in consultation with the Member(s) of the Commission concerned and the President's Cabinet. The Secretariat-General will facilitate the cooperation between services necessary to deliver on the Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President's requests;
- The Cabinet informs the relevant Commission services of the College's work, especially when it has a direct impact on their activities, and of the decisions taken by the Commission;
- The Cabinet may not represent the Member of the Commission in relation to the Member's formal institutional responsibilities. Apart from formal institutional responsibilities, whenever the Member of the Commission is unable to attend an event, he/she asks the Director-General or another senior member of the service to represent him/her; exceptions to this rule require the prior agreement of the President's Cabinet;
- The Cabinet does not involve itself in the direct management of the services, which is the exclusive responsibility of the Director-General;
- A representative from the Cabinet of the responsible Executive Vice-Presidents or the High Representative/Vice-President will be invited to the 'Jour Fixe' meetings.

Where appropriate, the Member of the Commission or his/her Cabinet may ask the Secretariat-General, the Legal Service or the Directorate-General for Communication, including the SPP, to attend a 'Jour Fixe' or other strategy or information meetings, especially when they consider topics relating to major and/or general policy, legal or communication issues.

1.6. Responsibilities of services

The President decides on the organisation of the responsibilities of the Members of the Commission and the Commission services supporting them. The services are responsible for implementing the Political Guidelines and the priorities decided by the Commission and developed by the Member of the Commission and – to this end – are actively involved in drawing up the institution's policies and initiatives. The services have a responsibility to work together in good faith. When relevant, in consultation with the relevant Commissioner and via the Secretariat-General, they will support the Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President in their cross-cutting tasks. The services are coordinated by the Secretariat-General on behalf of the President. To this end, the services apply the guidelines and instructions issued by the President, via her Cabinet or the Secretariat-General.

In this context, it is important to emphasise that:

- The Director-General is fully responsible for the management of the services under his/her authority, and for the effective implementation of the guidelines and decisions adopted by the Member of the Commission. He/she is accountable to the Member of the Commission and the College for his/her management;
- The Director-General will be responsible, together with the lead Commissioners (and whenever needed in close cooperation with the relevant Executive Vice-Presidents or the High Representative/Vice-President), for **the identification of all acts** to be adopted by the Commission as well as all staff working documents, and **the assessment of their political sensitivity and/or importance** in accordance with the Political Guidelines and the priorities of the College;
- If the act is not considered as politically sensitive and/or important, the validation of the Director-General will be requested in *Decide*, so that full responsibility is taken;
- The services keep the Cabinet regularly informed of progress in the files and activities of its services, including on external relations and interinstitutional issues;
- The services also inform the Member of the Commission of relevant documents, especially key reports drawn up by the various monitoring authorities (see point 6.2 and 6.4);
- In principle, the positions of the services are passed on to the Cabinet by the Director-General or his/her representative. The services inform their Cabinet of any direct contact with other Cabinets.

1.7. Exchanges of information/communication

There must be a continuous, transparent and smooth exchange of information between the Member of the Commission and the services, on the basis of the following principles:

- Exchanges and meetings on policy priorities, their implementation and the methods of cooperation between the Cabinet and the services are regularly organised between the Member of the Commission and the Director-General. Good coordination between Cabinets and services is ensured by a regular ‘Jour Fixe’ meeting. For discussions on specific files, teams working on those files should be invited to the meetings;
- In principle, instructions from the Cabinet to the services are sent in writing, directly by the Head of Cabinet or his/her Deputy to the Director-General and his/her assistant on behalf of the Member of the Commission. If, in exceptional cases, the Cabinet has to communicate directly with the services, it informs the Director-General thereof via his/her assistant;
- Requests for input from services other than those reporting directly to the Member of the Commission in question must be sent through the responsible Cabinet, which transfers the request to the assistant of the Director-General of the service concerned;
- The positions of the services are sent to the Cabinet by the Director-General, or by a representative of the hierarchy or his/her assistant. Any information notified to the Cabinet by the services is deemed to have been provided to the Member of the Commission. Routine replies on a known and established position of the service may be

provided directly by a head of unit or a director to the Member of the Cabinet responsible for the file, with a copy being sent to the Director-General's assistant for information purposes;

- Replies that require the adoption of a new position or a change in position, and replies on sensitive topics, are sent by the Director-General to the Member of the Commission via his/her Head of Cabinet.

The specific principles governing cooperation agreed by common accord between the services and the Cabinets are to be set out in practical arrangements governing working relations between Members of the Commission, Cabinets and services, to be agreed by the Members of the Commission and the Directors-General concerned.

2. POLICY SHAPING

2.1. Strategic planning cycle

The identification and delivery of the political priorities of the Commission are carried out in the context of the Strategic Planning and Programming (SPP) cycles. The Strategic Planning and Programming cycle encompasses the setting of objectives, allocation of resources according to these objectives, risk management, regular monitoring and reporting on whether the objectives have been reached as well as regular evaluations. The services are responsible for implementing the priorities adopted.

All acts to be adopted by the Commission in oral, written, empowerment and delegation procedures will be entered in *Decide* at planning stage. The only exceptions to this 'all-in' principle would be acts which cannot be planned by nature, e.g. linked to crisis situations/matters and which need to be adopted in very short deadlines, or to the management of litigation.

2.2. Interservice consultations (ISC) and Coordination

Implementation of the Political Guidelines and the College's priorities implies close cooperation between the Cabinet of the Member of the Commission and the services reporting to him/her.

It also requires a high degree of coordination with the other Cabinets and services in order to ensure that the Commission functions on a collegiate basis and that its proposals are relevant, coherent and of a high quality. In this area, Cabinets and lead services respectively are responsible for informing the other Cabinets and services concerned at their level in order to ensure that politically sensitive and/or important initiatives are prepared as upstream as possible, including through the convening of interservice coordination groups. Close cooperation from the very early stages of preparation ensures that proposals benefit from the collective knowledge and expertise of different services across the Commission.

The Secretariat-General ensures that this inclusive and collegial way of working is properly applied under the authority of the President, and chairs the interservice coordination groups for all politically sensitive and/or important initiatives, including all those in the Commission Work Programme. All such initiatives will already have received the relevant political authorisation at the planning stage.

To ensure that the Commission's initiatives are prepared in a collegial manner and based on evidence and expertise, Commission services must carry out interservice consultations on all acts and staff working documents before the adoption procedure can be launched. In principle, the Commission services consulted should be given at least ten working days in which to submit their comments.

For interservice consultations, it should be remembered that:

- The Cabinet(s) concerned – including those of the relevant Executive Vice-Presidents and/or the High Representative/Vice-President – are consulted before the launch of any interservice consultation that concerns its/their policy area and involves a new policy initiative or a politically sensitive and/or important policy initiative. As a general rule, the Cabinet of the Executive Vice-President concerned is responsible for approving the launch of the interservice consultation. Services inform the Cabinet of the interservice consultations that come under routine management (especially those of a financial nature) of the portfolio of the Member of the Commission;
- An interservice consultation on a politically sensitive and/or important act can only be launched with the agreement (political validation) of the Director-General, the responsible Commissioner, the relevant Executive Vice-President(s) or the High Representative/Vice-President, in consultation with the President;
- In addition, the services inform the Cabinet of any particularly important interservice consultations launched at the initiative of other services. Negative opinions issued by the services, save those issued by the Legal Service, have to be agreed with the Cabinet of the Member of the Commission to whom they report;
- In any event, the Cabinet informs the services of the major changes introduced during discussion between Cabinets or in the College.

In exceptional cases, and on duly justified grounds of urgency, the service responsible may ask the Secretariat-General for a fast-track interservice consultation with a shorter time limit. The Secretariat-General shall decide whether the fast-track consultation is appropriate and shall inform the President. This fast-track consultation can take place during a meeting or in writing in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. If the fast-track consultation is conducted during a meeting, the Secretariat-General will convene and chair the interservice meeting, record the outcome and ensure the appropriate follow-up. After the fast track meeting the lead Directorate-General resumes responsibility for the file.

3. RELATIONS WITH THE OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The Secretariat-General acts as an interface between the Commission and the other European Union institutions, the Member States' Parliaments and non-governmental bodies and organisations. The Legal Service is responsible for relations with the jurisdictions, in particular with the Court of Justice of the European Union but also with all national or international jurisdictions, including the WTO Dispute Settlement Body and the European Court of Human Rights. Directorate-General BUDG coordinates relations with the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets and Committee on Budgetary Control and relations with the Court of Auditors, with particular regard to the annual declaration of assurance.

The Secretariat-General is responsible for the smooth coordination of the Commission's activity and positions vis-à-vis the other institutions. The Secretariat-General represents the

Commission in Coreper I & II, it provides support to Members of the Commission at all Council meetings (both formal and informal, including lunches), and participates in the Conference of Presidents and, upon invitation, in the Conference of Committee Chairs of the European Parliament.

The Interinstitutional Relations Group (GRI) brings together all Cabinets to prepare the interinstitutional aspects of College meetings on a weekly basis. The GRI examines the positions to be adopted by the Commission in interinstitutional matters, in particular files pending before the European Parliament and/or the Council.

The GRI is chaired by the Deputy Head of Cabinet of the President's Cabinet and made up of the Deputy Heads of Cabinet of all the Members of the Commission. The Secretariat-General provides for its secretariat. A representative of the Legal Service participates to the meeting. The meetings of GRI take place on Friday when College meetings are held on Wednesday in Brussels, and on Thursday when College meetings are held on Tuesday in Strasbourg. Weekly meetings are prepared by a meeting between departments ('pre-GRI'), chaired by the Secretariat-General.

In connection with this:

- Cabinets and the various services must exchange information concerning any formal or informal contact which they have with the other institutions and which has an impact on their own activities or on joint activities. The services must alert the Cabinets to important points of view expressed by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on matters relating to their portfolio, in particular sensitive oral or written questions;
- Cabinets and services must liaise in preparation for GRI meetings in order to ensure that the positions expressed within a given portfolio are consistent. The services must inform the Cabinets of the outcome of pre-GRI meetings. GRI notes should be agreed by the Cabinets of the responsible Commissioner(s) and the relevant Executive Vice-President(s) or the High Representative/Vice-President. The Secretariat-General, the Legal Service and the Directorate-General for Budget, should be pre-consulted as a rule;
- Cabinets and services must inform the College, via the GRI, of any developments regarding possible European Parliament Resolutions based on Article 225 TFEU;
- Correspondence sent by a Member of the Commission to the other institutions (or to their representatives) having institutional implications or concerning cross-cutting matters should be submitted to the GRI for advance consultation before being sent. As described above, validation by relevant Cabinets and pre-consultation of services should be ensured;
- The services must also provide representation at the appropriate level (in principle, at senior management level) in meetings with the other institutions (in particular the European Parliament, the Council and the Union's advisory bodies);
- The services must prepare timely and quality answers to oral and written questions by Members of the Parliament, as well as major interpellations and draw the relevant Cabinets' attention to questions on sensitive topics and prepare background documents for the European Parliament's part-sessions and meetings of the Council;

- While Commission proposals or other initiatives are being negotiated, Cabinets must be systematically informed by the services regarding the course of the discussions within the European Parliament's committees and Council working parties, and regarding the work of Coreper. Any change in position, by comparison with the established line, must be discussed with the Cabinet and submitted to the GRI in view of its endorsement by the College;
- Services are required systematically to send reports on progress of negotiations in Council working parties (or equivalent committees), European Parliament committees and trilogues to their Cabinet(s) and the Secretariat-General.

4. EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The Group for External Coordination (EXCO) brings together all Cabinets to examine the positions to be adopted by the Commission in the field of external relations and ensure consistency between the external and internal aspects of the Commission's work.

EXCO is co-chaired by the Diplomatic Adviser of the President and the Deputy Head of Cabinet of the High Representative/Vice-President. The Secretariat-General provides for its secretariat. Each Cabinet designates its standing Member who will participate in EXCO. The European External Action Service advises the co-chairs on foreign policy developments. The Commission's Legal Service, Protocol Service, SPP and the Directorate-General for Budget have standing invitations. The meetings of EXCO take place on Wednesday afternoon.

The EXCO agenda is set by the co-chairs, based also on suggestions made by Cabinets and services. It focuses on all external issues that require political guidance, coordination or follow-up.

Cabinets and services must liaise in preparation for EXCO meetings in order to ensure that the positions expressed within a given portfolio are consistent. EXCO notes should be agreed by the Cabinets of the responsible Commissioner(s) and the relevant Executive Vice-President(s) or the High Representative/Vice-President. The Secretariat-General, the Directorate-General for Budget and the Legal Service, should be pre-consulted as a rule.

The Secretariat-General will chair an EXCO preparatory meeting at services' level, bringing together all services. The services' standing representatives to the EXCO prep will be designated by the relevant Directors-General at the level of Head of Unit or higher.

Following each EXCO meeting, the secretariat circulates short operational conclusions agreed by the co-chairs, which will include a mention of which points require further discussion in Hebdo. Hebdo in turn decides which points should be open for discussion at the College. All EXCO conclusions are validated by the College. EXCO systematically reverts to previous conclusions to monitor implementation.

5. SPEECHES, BRIEFINGS AND CORRESPONDENCE

5.1. Speeches and briefings

A Cabinet may ask the services to provide briefings and elements for speeches for a Member of the Commission or his/her Head of Cabinet. High-quality documents delivered on time will ensure that the Member of the Commission is supported effectively by his/her Cabinet

and services as he/she carries out his/her duties.

The Cabinet's responsibilities

Before asking for a new briefing, Cabinets should assess whether needs are adequately covered by existing sources (e.g. recent briefings, press material). New requests should in principle be limited to new information, or tailored information necessary for a specific meeting or event.

A briefing request should include all information necessary to provide departments with a clear understanding of the context and purpose. The request sets out the political objectives and rationale for the meeting or event and the main topics to be discussed, refers to related meetings or correspondence, and includes relevant background documents (invitations, correspondence, agenda, reports). A well-specified request ensures that a high-quality, tailored briefing can be provided. In the case of complex requests, such as country visits, Cabinets should consider organising a preparatory meeting with the departments concerned.

Cabinets should request briefings as early as possible and in principle at least five working days prior to the deadline for receiving the briefing. Any updates should be shared with concerned departments at the earliest opportunity. This allows for proper preparation by departments, including the necessary coordination and validation.

Cabinets should provide feedback and make final versions of briefings available to departments. In addition, departments can be invited to attend the meeting or event and prepare a meeting report. If departments are not present, the Cabinet should provide a report within seven working days of the meeting to debrief on the outcome of the meeting.

Where the briefing concerns a mission in a Member State or a third country, the Cabinet should, as a rule, share the briefing in advance with the Commission Representation or the EU Delegation.

Further operational details should be set out in the practical arrangements governing working relations between the relevant Member of the Commission, Cabinet and department.

The service's responsibilities

The departments are responsible for producing briefings within the specified deadline. They must adhere to the good practices and examples provided on the Commission's Intranet site and take due account of prior feedback.

Departments should put in place arrangements to ensure they are able to respond efficiently to urgent briefing requests and respect briefing deadlines.

Specific arrangements for Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President acting in their coordination role

In order to ensure policy coherence and consistency with the Political Guidelines, requests for targeted briefings from the Executive Vice-Presidents and High Representative/Vice-President in their crosscutting role to Commission services should always be made via BriefingNet.

5.2. Dealing with correspondence

Pursuant to the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour, any correspondence received by a Cabinet must be answered at an appropriate level within 15 working days. The deadline set for the draft reply to be prepared by the service and forwarded to the Member of the Commission must take this requirement into account.

The relevant Cabinet is responsible for correspondence addressed to a Member of the Commission. Where the service's expertise is required for the draft reply, the Cabinet sends the correspondence to the Director-General's assistant.

If the correspondence is written in a language other than French, English or German and requires an urgent reply, the Cabinet has it translated into one of those languages before it is sent to the service for a reply to be drafted, and also has the draft reply translated.

Management of correspondence addressed to the Commission's President and Executive Vice-Presidents and/or High Representative/Vice-President in their crosscutting role is covered by a special procedure under the responsibility of the Secretariat-General⁶. Draft replies prepared by other services at the request of the Secretariat-General are validated by the Director-General of the lead Directorate-General (the corresponding Cabinet must be notified).

Multi-Commissioner correspondence

Correspondence addressed to more than one Member of the Commission is covered by a special procedure administered by the Secretariat-General and intended to ensure that correspondents receive a single, internally consistent reply from the Commission. The Secretariat-General consults the Cabinets in order to find out which of them have received it. It allocates it to the relevant Cabinet, so that a reply on behalf of all other addressees can be prepared. Any associated services are consulted regarding the draft reply. The letter is signed by a Member of the Commission or by the Director-General/the head of service or a member of the appropriate service. It explicitly states that the reply has been drawn up on behalf of all those to whom the correspondence is addressed. The lead Cabinet has to inform all addressees of the reply given.

6. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THE HANDLING OF SENSITIVE INFORMATION

6.1. Human-resource management

Staff is recruited in accordance with the Staff Regulations applicable to officials and other servants of the European Communities and the specific procedures adopted by the Commission, in particular the Decision on the exercise of the powers conferred on the Appointing Authority (AA)⁷ and – for the Cabinets in particular – the Communication from the President concerning the composition of the Cabinets of Members of the Commission⁸ and of Spokespersons.

The Appointing Authority for middle managers within the services is the Director-General/head of service. In the case of grades AD13 and AD14, the Executive Vice-

⁶ Procedure for President (CDP) and Vice-Presidents' (VP) mail, June 2019.

⁷ Commission Decision C(2007) 5730 of 30 November 2007, as amended by Commission Decision C(2009) 3074 of 29 April 2009.

⁸ President's Communication to the Commission P(2019)3.

President and the Member of Commission concerned must be consulted. In the case of grades AD9 to AD12, the Member of the Commission concerned must be consulted.

The general management of human resources must take account of the objective to achieve gender balance at all levels of Commission management, as well as geographical balance.

6.2. Management of financial resources

Each Director-General is responsible for the smooth running of his/her service in accordance with the rules and standards laid down by the College. He/she accounts for his/her responsibility by means of his/her annual report to the Member of the Commission and to the College. Detailed information is called for in order to enable (in particular) the Member of the Commission to exercise his political authority over the service concerned and, where appropriate, to carry out monitoring as part of the budgetary-discharge procedure.

Accordingly:

- The Director-General and his/her services endeavour to identify and reduce management-related risks;
- The services provide the member of the Commission regularly with appropriate information concerning budgetary and financial matters. They draw his/her attention to any major problem in this area, relating to a previous, current or foreseeable state of affairs;
- In this framework and based on the principle of sound cooperation, the services supply the Member of the Commission with the relevant documents which will enable him/her to assess the service's financial situation⁹. The Member of the Commission is also informed of any substantial change concerning the Directorate-General's financial systems and the checking procedures;
- Prior to finalisation of the annual activity report, the Director-General discusses the draft with the Member(s) of the Commission. The purpose of the discussion is to inform the Member(s) of the Commission in view of his/her political responsibility and, in case the Director-General envisages to enter reservations in his/her declaration of assurance, to decide on an action plan proposed by the Director-General for the purpose of remedying the weaknesses identified by means of the caveats expressed in the draft report. This action plan is set out in a written document and is covered by a specific follow-up procedure. The Director-General remains fully responsible for the content of his/her declaration of assurance and should not be instructed to modify the declaration;
- The Member of the Commission and the Director-General meet at least twice a year in order to discuss the internal-control weaknesses highlighted or the caveats expressed in the services' annual activity report and the action plans devised in order to remedy them;
- With regard to the management of the administrative appropriations for which the Cabinets have a specific budget, the Directorate-General and the Cabinet are kept entirely

⁹ Examples of document which may be forwarded: information relation to the financial management of the Directorate-General/service (problems, description of financial systems, internal-control mechanisms), Court of Auditors reports, records of parliamentary debates relation to the discharge, annual activity reports, reports/recommendations issued by the Internal Audit Service, Directorates-General/services Internal Audit Capacities and related actions plans, reports on the results of ex-posts checks.

separate, particularly where mission and representation expenses are concerned.

6.3. Document management

Good document management is essential for the functioning of the Commission. Document management within the Commission must ensure that the institution is able, at any time, to quickly retrieve documentary records of the actions it has taken and for which it is accountable. Proper document management contributes to efficiency and effectiveness, facilitates the exchange and retrieval of information and allows the Commission to comply with the applicable regulations as regards, in particular, data protection, access to documents and information security.

In accordance with the Commission Decision on document management a document drawn up or received by the Cabinets and/or the services – including email – must be registered in the relevant IT system (ARES) if it contains important information which is not short-lived and/or may involve action or follow-up by the Commission or one of its departments.

6.4. Handling of sensitive information

The Director-General immediately forwards to the Member of the Commission any sensitive information which may engage his/her responsibility and/or that of the College. Such notification is carried out by means of the following formal referral procedure:

- Written notification giving rise to a swift formal response on the part of the Member of the Commission in whatever form he/she judges most appropriate (organisation of a dedicated meeting, request for additional information, etc.);
- Where appropriate, drawing up of a documented action plan, the implementation of which is covered by specific monitoring arrangements agreed between the services and the Member of the Commission.

The Member of the Commission is also informed – as soon as he/she takes office – of serious situations which have come to light in the past and which have not been fully remedied, and also, during their mandate, of any fraud or irregularity brought to the attention of the Director-General and likely to have a significant impact on the European Union's reputation and/or budget. The services convey to the Member of the Commission the reports or documents relating to the investigations carried out by OLAF or the EPPO, as well as audit reports which require special follow-up.

Unauthorised disclosure inside and outside the Commission, in whichever form, of any information of an internal, sensitive or classified nature is subject to the sanctions laid down in the legal provisions in force.

ANNEX II: EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

1. RELATIONS BETWEEN CABINETS, THE SPOKESPERSON'S SERVICE AND THE DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR COMMUNICATION

On political communication matters, the European Commission Chief Spokesperson reports directly to the President of the European Commission. He/she leads the overall activities of the SPP. For all other matters, he/she reports to the Director-General of Directorate-General Communication.

The European Commission Chief Spokesperson, his/her Deputies represent the President of the Commission and the institution as a whole towards the media, and liaise on this directly with the President's Cabinet. The Commission Spokespersons and the Spokespersons for the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission report to the European Commission Chief Spokesperson and communicate with the media on behalf of the Commission, under his/her authority. All Spokespersons serve the common interest of the Commission as a College.

Appropriate involvement of the relevant teams of the Directorate-General for Communication, in particular the Directorate for political communication and services, to the work of the SPP and of the Cabinet Communication Advisers, needs to be ensured, to enable the preparation of communication plans and the delivery of quality and timely communication products.

The SPP organises daily press briefings or press conferences, normally at 12:00. Once a day, at 11:45, the European Commission Chief Spokesperson circulates all new 'Lines to Take' to Heads of Cabinet, Deputy Heads of Cabinet and Communication Advisers for their information. The European Commission Chief Spokesperson also makes available a 'Lines to Take' database (updated regularly) that can be accessed by all Cabinets and by the Representations 24 hours/seven days per week to ensure collegial communication on all issues at all times.

To ensure collegial preparation of and follow-up to all communication activities of the Commission the Chief Spokesperson of the Commission together with the Executive Communication Adviser in SPP and in coordination with the President's Communication Adviser chair a weekly meeting with the Communication Advisers, the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication and to which the Commission Representations are linked up by video-conference, to frame the media activities for the forthcoming week, as well as more longer-term communication actions, such as campaigns, events etc.

The SPP also organises the following types of press briefings:

- A regular weekly press briefing/conference after the College meeting: every Wednesday (respectively Tuesday during Parliament plenary sessions in Strasbourg), following on the College meeting. The President, Executive Vice-Presidents, High Representative/Vice-President, or Commissioners present the main decisions of the day in the press room;
- Press conferences/statements by the Members of the Commission: these are organised as often as necessary, whenever announcements or political events warrant it; Members of the College need to ensure they are available to present Commission initiatives in the press room after the College as well as the following day, to ensure an effective

planning of press conference and give adequate visibility to the respective initiatives;

- Background briefings with political staff (Cabinet members/Cabinet Communication Advisers) and/or officials from the services to prepare or explain important initiatives;
- Briefings on upcoming political issues and events, where appropriate, to set out the agenda and main topics for the days to come;
- Briefings for social media content creators, together with the Social Media team of the Commission.

Every Member of the College designates one member of his/her Cabinet to be in charge of communication. This Cabinet Communication Adviser plays a central role in shaping the communication profile of the Commissioner, in close and permanent cooperation with the SPP and the Executive Communication Adviser of the President. To this end, he/she:

- is the contact point for relations between the Spokesperson's Service and the Commissioner;
- takes part in a weekly meeting co-chaired by the European Commission Chief Spokesperson and the Executive Communication Adviser in SPP in coordination with the President's Communication Adviser;
- can request support from the Spokesperson's Service for media activities of his/her Commissioner;
- ensures that the Commissioner's web presence – which is managed by Directorate-General for Communication and the Spokesperson's Service – is always up to date, including the Commissioner's agenda;
- is in charge of the speeches and social media activities of the Commissioner, in coordination with the Social Media team of the Commission, and participates in the Social Media Network;
- is called upon by the SPP for political input to 'Lines To Take' on matters under the portfolio of his/her Commissioner;
- helps to adapt the main political messages of the Commission (provided by the Spokesperson's Service) to the political needs of his/her Commissioner;
- accompanies the Commissioner on missions with media impact to support and advise him/her, in coordination with the SPP and in close liaison with the Press Officers in the Representations or Delegations. Where appropriate, and in exceptional cases, the European Commission Chief Spokesperson may decide to provide human resources support to Cabinets by allowing a Spokesperson or Press Officer to accompany a mission;
- chairs weekly meetings between the Cabinet, the corresponding Press Officer(s) in the SPP – or where appropriate a Spokesperson – and the Communication Units in the portfolio Directorates-General, together with the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication, on devising and implementing the Directorates-General's

Communication Strategies in line with the Commission's Internal Control framework (see point 2 on communication by the Directorates-Generals and the Corporate Communication Steering Committee) and the steer provided by the Corporate Management Board and the Corporate Communication Steering Committee;

- has no mandate to speak to the media on the record.

The Cabinet Communication Adviser, the SPP, the communication unit and the teams in the Directorate-Generale for Communication work upstream on designing communication plans on the relevant policy topics.

Press releases and other press material are prepared and issued by the SPP, in close cooperation with the Cabinet Communication Advisers. Where required, these are supported by additional materials such as press packages, factsheets, webpages or audio-visual products, produced in association with the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication. The planning for press material is established by the SPP in close cooperation with the Cabinet Communication Advisers, following the joint weekly meeting and the Cabinet Communication Advisers' weekly communication meeting with the respective services and the SPP, with the involvement of the Directorate for Political communication and services and other relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication. As a general rule, input for press material, media briefing files, and press speaking points is requested by the Spokespersons and Press Officers from the services directly in order to be finalised by the SPP in close cooperation with the Cabinet Communication Advisers.

To ensure coherence and consistency between policy and media activities, the Secretariat-General provides the necessary material to the SPP ahead of media activities involving the President, the Executive Vice-Presidents and the High Representative/Vice-President.

In addition to the services of the SPP, the Directorate-General for Communication provides a number of services to members of the Commission and Cabinets in order to strengthen the Commission's communication activities: daily press reviews, media monitoring analysis, audiovisual studios for live and recorded messages, corporate video production, web pages, corporate and digital communication, including social media and cooperation with social media content creators, support for citizens' engagement, countering disinformation online and political reporting on developments in the Member States, as well as related guidance and trainings. It provides support to ensure audiovisual coverage of College members during their trips, when linked to corporate priorities.

To benefit best from the work of the Directorate-General for Communication, the Cabinets should:

- Plan the activities of their Commissioners in the Member States, especially the Commissioners' visits and direct engagement with citizens, for example in the context of citizens' engagement and the youth dialogues and involve the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication, including the Representations, well in advance;
- Respond to the information provided by the Directorate-General for Communication or the Representations and ensure that it is followed up;
- Inform the Directorate-General for Communication and the Representation concerned about any initiative that could have media or political repercussions, particularly letters and declarations. Instructions should be given to Directorates-General under the responsibility of the Cabinet to do the same for initiatives taken at the level of the Directorate-General.

The Representations of the Commission in the Member States should:

- Consult Cabinets about sensitive political issues and, at the same time, the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication, and, where necessary, the Directorate-General concerned;
- In case of press-related queries, consult the relevant members of the SPP;
- Upon request of the Spokespersons or Press Officers, contribute to briefing packs for members of the Commission for their use when speaking to regional and national media during their visits to the Member States, building on the regular political reporting and analysis provided by Representations to headquarters;
- In agreement with the European Commission Chief Spokesperson, his/her Deputies, adapt 'Lines to Take' to the political and media situation in the Member States and, where necessary, propose lines to take on important national issues that may have consequences for European politics.

2. COMMUNICATION AND THE DIRECTORATES-GENERAL

As a general rule, the Spokespersons and the Representations of the Commission in the Member States are responsible for contacts with the media.

The Communication Units of the Directorates-General are the key partners of the Directorate-General for Communication. In order to enable them to fulfil this central role:

Steer and guidance must be provided by the Corporate Management Board, the Corporate Communication Steering Committee, the Communication Network and other thematic communication networks¹⁰, and by the Directorate-General for Communication as domain

¹⁰ Such as the Social Media Network, the Audiovisual Correspondents Network, the Graphic Design Network, the

leader in the area of external communication, including in relation to citizens' engagement and corporate communication. The Directorate-General for Communication works closely and regularly with all Communication Units on the planning and implementation of communication plans and actions, to achieve consistency of messages.

- The Cabinet Communication Adviser, the corresponding Press Officer(s) of the SPP – or where appropriate, a Spokesperson – as well as the communication units of the responsible services and the relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication must be in regular contact through weekly communication meetings;
- The communication units should be included in the management meetings of the Directorate-General and oversees its communication activities;
- The communication units appoints a contact person in charge of relations with the SPP in order to ensure the quality and swift delivery of press material and draft 'Lines To Take'. This member of the unit must have the skills required to draft, or coordinate the drafting of 'Lines To Take' and other quality press materials under short deadlines. The contact person of the unit must have a thorough understanding of online communication and interface with the Directorate-General's digital team;
- The unit keeps the SPP and the Cabinet Communication Advisers informed about any forthcoming announcement or event that will need proactive communication with the media or that may raise questions from journalists. The SPP will inform the Directorate-General in good time of its needs as regards the preparation of press material;
- The unit deals with requests from the SPP addressed to the Directorates-General, including requests for 'Lines To Take' for use in the press room. This procedure should be swift and documented in writing. It should guarantee that a quick and precise reply can be provided to questions from journalists and the public;
- The unit prepares draft press releases, draft interview replies and articles, press packs, technical briefing notes and replies to the technical questions from the press for the SPP. Following the agreed procedure, Directorates-General send their draft by e-mail to the SPP, with a copy to the Cabinet Communication Adviser. The Portfolio Press Officer or a Spokesperson approves 'Lines To Take', press releases and any other press material and ensures that they are issued and transmitted to all the Representations of the Commission in the Member States. In order to ensure timely and efficient preparation, draft press material relating to College files must be sent to the European Commission Chief Spokesperson or his/her Deputy after the interservice Consultation and before special meetings of Heads of Cabinet;

- The unit ensures that the Directorate-General’s digital team thoroughly monitors online conversations and informs the SPP and other relevant teams in the Directorate-General for Communication as soon as possible of emerging online activity relevant to the Commissioner’s portfolio. The Directorate-General advises and supports Directorate-General Communication in crisis communication situations;
- The unit prepares daily press reviews that are relevant for the portfolio Commissioner;
- The Head of the communication unit is a member of the Communication Network and is responsible for ensuring transparent, coherent and coordinated planning of communication activities of the relevant Directorate-General, whether corporate or sectoral/stakeholder, in line with the guidance provided by the Corporate Management Board, the Corporate Communication Steering Committee, the Communication Network and the Directorate-General for Communication.

Directorates-General communicate with interested parties and the general public in coordination with the SPP and Directorate-General for Communication, on the basis of the communication priorities established by the Commission and always in accordance with the Lines to take established by the SPP. Communication activities must be part of the communication plan of the Directorate-General, developed in consultation with the Cabinet, SPP and the Directorate-General for Communication. Directorates-General should provide the material for their external communication activities. For all large-scale communication actions that the Directorate-General prepares, the Communication Unit requests prior consent from the Directorate-General for Communication.

In terms of the media, SPP can exceptionally refer journalists directly to the Communication Unit of a Directorate-General on purely technical issues under the responsibility of the Directorate-General. The Directorate-General will involve the SPP or will keep it informed, as appropriate, of its reply to the request. The services must never reply on any subject on which the Commission has not yet adopted an official position. Directorates-General approached directly by the media shall refer them to the SPP.

Members of staff can be granted approval by the SPP to speak on the record on issues within their areas of responsibility.

3. THE COMMISSION’S REPRESENTATIONS IN THE MEMBER STATES

Representations support the President and the whole Commission in their interaction with Member States. Heads of Representation are nominated by the President and act under her political authority. They participate in diplomatic activities, including in meetings of EU Heads of Mission. Representations also maintain direct contact with national, regional and local media.

The Representations promote permanent political dialogue with the national, regional and local authorities, parliaments, social partners and civil society. They prepare, support, accompany and follow up visits by Members of the College and by senior officials of the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), aiming for outreach beyond capitals, and help to organise meetings and press coverage.

Representations are informed of high-level visits well in advance by cabinets or Directorates-General and are normally invited to participate in meetings between Members of the College and the authorities of the Member State. They are also copied to official correspondence by Members

of the College and, where appropriate, Directorates-General with the authorities of the Member State in which they are posted.

The Representations provide country-specific knowledge, analysis and advice to the President and all Members of the College, with a view to maximising the impact of Commission policies in the Member States. They report to Commission headquarters, including directly to the President, about relevant political and other developments in the Member States.

The Representations reach out to citizens and play a key role in organising citizens' engagement activities, including in the context of the youth policy dialogues, and actions with stakeholders. Representations conceive and implement a variety of communication actions in line with their 'Country Communication Strategies'.

The Representations play a key role in implementing corporate communication in the Member States. They work closely with the European Parliament Liaison Offices (EPLO), which are mostly hosted in joint premises, in the 'Houses of the European Union' and, often include Europa Experience installations.

Together with the SPP, Representations promote the EU through press, information and communication activities. They help to identify the aspects of EU policies that are important locally and frame messages and activities to match local needs. They help prepare the ground for Commission strategic political initiatives through outreach and relevant citizen engagement activities.

The work of the Representations is supported by Europe Direct Centres, which provide a decentralised information and communication service in the Member States that ensures outreach to citizens at regional and local level. Representations also work with other relevant communication networks in Member States, in particular the network of local councilors.