



Council of the European Union

General Secretariat

Directorate-General Organisational Development and Services - ORG

The Director-General

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Mr Klaus-Heiner Lehne
President of the European Court of Auditors
12, rue Alcide De Gasperi
L-1615 Luxembourg

By e-mail: Eca-DQC-contact@eca.europa.eu

Subject: Reply to the preliminary observations on the audit on "The EU institutions and COVID-19 - Responded rapidly, challenges still ahead to make the best of the crisis-led innovation and flexibility"

Copy: Marek Opiola, Member of the European Court of Auditors

Dear Mr Lehne,

We agree with the overall assessment of the Court that the Council demonstrated its resilience vis-à-vis the unprecedented challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. The General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) reacted rapidly and flexibly and was, thus, able to ensure both

- the European Council's and Council's of Ministers business continuity, enabling both institutions and their Presidents to fulfil their respective mandates and
- the safety of the GSC's staff as well as of all delegates and external guests to our buildings.

For this purpose, the GSC was able to build on its investments in digitalisation as well as in crisis preparedness. The rapidity and flexibility of the response was guaranteed by an agile and proactive approach of the organisation, a flexibility inherent in the existing rules and procedures that could easily be adapted where needed and a rapid reaction in accelerating on-going modernisation projects, be it in the area of IT or new ways of working more generally. Communication with staff, delegates and external guests was key during this challenging period, as was interaction, information exchange and coordination where adequate with the other EU institutions as well as the national authorities.

As regards the assessment by the Court on teleworking from outside the place of employment, the GSC would like to stress that it considers that this is a measure which is in the interest of the service under certain conditions defined in the GSC's decision on teleworking.

As regards the recommendations of the audit and without prejudice to any positions the Council may take on the report when it examines it:

Recommendation 1: The General Secretariat of the Council accepts the recommendation. The GSC considers that given the nature of its tasks and the characteristics of the two institutions it serves, its existing business continuity plans provide for sufficient reassurance and flexibility to react to short, medium and long-term crisis of varying sorts. The GSC also considers that the interaction, information exchange and coordination with the other institutions functioned very well during the various phases of the pandemic by using existing channels and fora. Nevertheless business continuity plans will be updated with respect to longer-term crisis. The GSC will contribute to the inter-institutional coordination on this recommendation in the context of the CCA and other possible fora.

Recommendation 2: The General Secretariat of the Council accepts the recommendation. The work will be taken forward in the context of on-going IT projects on electronic signature, including on digital contracting and electronic signature of financial documents as well as an increased use of e-procurement tools, taking into account the national legislation in this regard.

Recommendation 3: The General Secretariat of the Council accepts the recommendation. Some of the assessments requested in the recommendations have started. The assessment of the other strands of new ways of working will take place in the context of the development of the Council's new buildings strategy, the assessment of the NWOW pilot project and the work of the environmental steering committee.



William SHAPCOTT
Director General