RESOLUTION (EU) 2020/1903 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 14 May 2020

with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2018, Section X — European External Action Service

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

— having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2018, Section X — European External Action Service,

— having regard to Rule 100 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A9-0043/2020),

A. whereas the effectiveness and efficiency of management systems and the use of resources in headquarters and Union delegations are key guiding principles for achieving the objectives of foreign policy, for responding to geopolitical challenges and for strengthening the role of the Union as a global actor;

B. whereas it is essential to promote a common management culture within the European External Action Service (EEAS) by reinforcing the European character and 'esprit de corps' of diplomatic staff;

C. whereas in the context of the discharge procedure, the discharge authority wishes to stress the particular importance of further strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Union institutions by improving transparency and accountability, and implementing the concept of performance-based budgeting and good governance of human resources;

1. Regrets, as a general observation, that chapter 10 'Administration' of the report of the Court of Auditors (the 'Court') on the annual accounts of the institution for the financial year 2018 (the 'Court's report') has a rather limited scope and conclusions, notwithstanding the fact that Heading 5 'Administration' of the Multiannual Financial Framework is considered to be low risk;

2. Considers that the audit work carried out under chapter 10 of the Court's report should be better balanced between the Union institutions and should go beyond compliance requirements;

3. Believes that more audit work should be dedicated to operating expenditure or issues that are becoming of high relevance or even critical for the EEAS, such as strategic communication capacity and information technology, for example cybersecurity, the performance of the global security package for delegations or the financial management and administrative support of mission support platform to the civilian common security and defence policy;

4. Notes also that, for the second consecutive year, the Court did not report any specific issues for the EEAS;

5. Notes with appreciation that, for the second consecutive year, the Court did not identify material levels of error in the EEAS annual activity report and governance arrangement;

6. Notes that the total budget of the EEAS for 2018 amounted to EUR 678,5 million (i.e. an increase of 2,8 % compared to 2017) with an execution rate of 99,9 % for commitments and 84,8 % (slightly lower than 2017 with 86,7 %) for payments as of the end of the year and with additional contributions from the Commission to cover the administrative costs of Commission staff posted in Union delegations; notes the current budget breakdown, namely EUR 249,7 million for EEAS headquarters and EUR 428,8 million for the delegations;

7. Notes that a contribution of EUR 58,5 million was also received in 2018 from the European Development Fund and the trust funds compared to EUR 55 million in 2017;

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

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

10. Observes that the headquarters' budget amounted to EUR 249,7 million out of which EUR 162,4 million (i.e. 65,5 %) concerned the payment of salaries and other entitlements of statutory and external staff, EUR 30,8 million (i.e. 12 %) were for buildings and associated costs, and EUR 34,9 million (i.e. 14 %) were related to IT computer systems, equipment and furniture;

11. Notes that the delegations' budget of EUR 428,8 million was divided between EUR 118,4 million (i.e. 27,6 %) for the remuneration of statutory staff, EUR 168 million (39,2 %) for buildings and associated costs, EUR 72,1 million (or 16,8 %) for external staff and outside services, EUR 27,6 million (6,4 %) for other expenditure related to staff and EUR 42,7 million (10 %) for other administrative expenditure; notes also that EUR 196,4 million (compared to EUR 185,6 million in 2016 and EUR 204,7 million in 2015) was received from the Commission for the administrative costs of the Commission's staff posted in the Union's delegations and was split between the Commission's Heading V with EUR 47,2 million, the administrative lines of operational programmes with EUR 93,2 million, and the European Development Fund and trust funds with EUR 58,5 million (compared to EUR 55 million in 2017 and EUR 45,4 million in 2016);

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

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

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

15. Notes that the EEAS has transferred EUR 30,8 million out of which the largest amount was used to purchase a building in Washington, and the latter amount reduced the final headquarters budget to EUR 239 million while increasing the delegation budget by EUR 10,7 million;

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

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

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

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

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

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

22. Notes that the Article 60 of the Financial Regulation provides for new arrangements for the delegation of budget implementation powers to the delegations, namely the possibility for deputy heads of delegation to act as subdelegated authorising officers and to implement the operational budget of the Commission in order to ensure business continuity;

23. Welcomes in that context the EEAS adaptations of its internal rules accordingly but invites nevertheless the EEAS to carefully monitor such situations when this new provision will be used, namely in small-sized delegations; invites the EEAS in the framework of its internal control strategy to pay particular attention to the related potential risks by proceeding to intensified remote operations control on the adequacy of the financial workflows and/or by providing increased temporary support with relevant *ad hoc* monitoring and reporting of these periods; recalls that the internal control standard 'Business continuity' was one of the weakest components of the EEAS internal control system for several years, especially for delegations;

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

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

26. Welcomes the alignment in 2018 of the *ex post* methodology with the Court's methodology, enabling to provide error rate per principal domains of expenditure, namely staff expenditure, infrastructure, security and IT/telecommunications and based on random stratified samples of operations; considers that that positive evolution will provide the management and authorising officer by delegation a better overview of operational and overall financial amounts at risk based on a larger and exhaustive coverage of financial transactions; highlights that that methodology will provide more objective grounds for the issuance of dedicated action plans with mitigating measures or potential reservations;

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

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

29. Welcomes the EEAS' efforts to foster the sense of accountability of newly appointed heads of delegation for the sound financial management of Union funds falling under their operational responsibilities alongside their political mandate; considers that this also concerns all the actors within foreign affairs such as EU special representatives, EU special envoys, heads of military operations and heads of civilian missions;

30. Recalls that reservation is a keystone in the accountability construction and therefore constitutes a preventive and transparency instrument within the building of the EEAS assurance chain reflecting ongoing challenges or remaining and occurred weaknesses faced by heads of delegation;

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

32. Observes that at the end of 2018, the population of Member State diplomats in the total administrator population amounted to 33,76 %, almost equivalent to the 2014 level of 33,8 %; notes the following slight fluctuations between 2014-2018: 32,83 % end 2017, 31,7 % end 2016, 32,9 % in 2015; invites the EEAS to stay in line with the staffing formula as set out in the Decision 2010/427/EU ([1]), namely a ratio of one third of staff from Member States and two thirds from Union's institutions;

33. Remains concerned at continuing imbalances in the staffing profile of the EEAS as regards nationality; notes that at the end of 2017, Member State diplomats represented 32,83 % of the overall administrator staff of the EEAS (i.e. 307 persons), at the end of 2016, 31,7 % of the staff of the EEAS came from the Member States compared to 32,9 % in 2015 in comparison to 33,8 % in 2014;

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

([1]) Council Decision 2010/427/EU of 26 July 2010 establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service (EEAS) (OJ L 201, 3.8.2010, p. 30).

35. Calls for the enhancement of the geographical balance within the EEAS; reiterates the importance of appropriate and meaningful presence of nationals from all the Member States; stresses that the EEAS must ensure that all Member States are adequately represented while respecting the competences and merits of the candidates; therefore encourages the EEAS to carry on interacting with Member States to promote its posts among the national diplomat networks;

36. Calls on the EEAS to implement gender budgeting in all public expenditure;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

46. Observes that the interest and the number of co-location projects increased gradually due to their cost-effectiveness and synergies, and that they provide a mechanism to recover full-costs of co-locations;

47. Welcomes the increase in co-location arrangements of Union delegations with Member States with the signature of twenty-two new co-location agreements in 2018, concerning 65 delegations and leading to a total of 114 co-location projects; notes also the conclusion of two service level agreements with the European Union Intellectual Property Office and the Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and welcomes that further service level agreements are under negotiation with the European Investment Bank, European Border and Coast Guard Agency and European Union Aviation Safety Agency;

48. Notes with appreciation that co-locations generated non-negligible new sources of revenues for the EEAS amounting to EUR 52,1 million, providing room for manoeuvre to develop its real estate purchasing policy; notes that the EEAS owned 34 office buildings in delegations and rented 143;

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

50. Welcomes the progress made on reducing the number of delegations exceeding the maximum space of 35 m^2 per person, following the Court's recommendation in order to make the best use of EEAS premises and avoid unnecessary spending;

51. Supports the permanent annual review mechanism as an effective workforce management instrument to better prioritise and to ensure a recurrent adaptation of EEAS human resources in the network of delegations to the evolving geopolitical priorities and the size of projects portfolios (e.g. the preparation of the opening of the United Kingdom Delegation, the closure of the Solomon Islands Delegation, the upgrading of the Panama Delegation and the opening of a Delegation in Mongolia); notes in 2018, as a first result of this rationalisation exercise of staff resources, that eight posts have been transferred between delegations;

52. Reiterates that the Union took a step towards fair remuneration for all within its institutions; stresses that the EEAS should ensure that its trainees in headquarters and in delegations receive a decent remuneration for all types of internships (Blue Book, Bruges and Other); welcomes the implementation of paid traineeships in delegations and the termination of offering unpaid traineeships on the European Ombudsman's recommendations; notes that the number of trainees in delegations have more than quadrupled, from 26 in 2017 to 109 in 2018; regrets, however, that out of the total 404 traineeships offered by the EEAS in 2018, 126 were not remunerated, as they were part of a compulsory training for students; calls on the EEAS to guarantee an appropriate allowance to all EEAS trainees in order to avoid the reinforcement of discrimination on economic grounds;

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

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

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

56. Observes that after having updated its administrative arrangement with the European Anti-Fraud Office and reinforced its cooperation on fraud related issues with directorates-general acting in external affairs, such as Directorate-General for Foreign Policy Instruments (DG FPI), Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) in 2017, the EEAS has continued its efforts to refine its anti-fraud strategy; stresses that further cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office and Commission (the directorates-general acting in external affairs, such as DG FPI, DG NEAR and DG DEVCO) should be implemented; notes with appreciation the awareness raising of the heads of delegation in agreement with DG DEVCO and DG NEAR on fraud prevention and reporting via its internal control principle 'Prevention of fraud'; welcomes the fact that the EEAS is a member of the Fraud and Detection Network chaired by European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF);

57. Calls on the EEAS to indicate in its annual activity report the number of referred cases to OLAF and ongoing investigations by the OLAF related to potential conflict of interest in the EEAS;

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

59. Supports the EEAS efforts to improve transparency by promoting and improving the e-EEAS Register, through which citizens can request access to documents; notes with satisfaction that citizens used the e-EEAS Register on a higher frequency compared to 2017; asks the EEAS to ensure a quick response to citizens' requests;

60. Welcomes the entry into force in 2020 of the three joint decisions on conditions of employment, LA-Medical and LA-Provident Fund, which introduce a new framework of rules for local agents in delegations in order to modernise and improve social security schemes; welcomes the first joint EEAS-Commission staff survey in delegations in 2018; supports the launching of an internal audit on the recruitment and management of local agents to remedy certain weaknesses found by the Court in the recruitment procedures of local agents in delegations (i.e. a lack of transparency as regards certain steps of the procedure);

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

62. Draws attention to the findings and recommendations of the Court's Special Report No 15/2018 'Strengthening the capacity of the internal security forces in Niger and Mali: only limited and slow progress'; calls on the EEAS to (i) take measures to improve the operational efficiency of the missions by providing adequate practical guidance and enough support, (ii) improve the occupancy rate of staff posts in the missions, (iii) set mandates and budgets to match operations and devise a common, comprehensive exit strategy clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the winding-up of the common security and defence policy missions, (iv) increase the focus on sustainability aspects and (v) improve performance indicators and the EEAS impact assessments to adequately monitor and evaluate the achievement of tasks;

63. Supports the reinforcement of the linkage between policy making, public diplomacy and strategic communication; notes, in that context, that EUR 3 million were allocated to the EEAS in 2018 (compared to EUR 1,1 million in 2017) for consolidating its Strategic Communication Plus action in order to counter disinformation and hybrid threats, to develop resilience to foreign interference while also noting the development of business intelligence services;

64. Underlines the need to fight propaganda and to expose disinformation and malicious foreign influence; stresses the importance of the EEAS Strategic Communication Task Force and calls for providing it with the necessary financial and personnel resources;

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

66. Supports the efforts made by the EEAS in order to reinforce the full range of physical and IT security issues from the staff and buildings security with the purchasing of new security equipment, to the training of regional security officers to preserve the security interests of the EEAS and to provide further security know-how by implementing a formal security risk management, and the cybersecurity challenge and policy; particularly welcomes the launch of the security awareness programme to reduce risks in the headquarters, based on 2018 staff survey, and the security risk management system in the delegations to standardise the reporting of local security threats, including risks regarding health and safety; encourages the EEAS to continue a real policy for the digitalisation of its services;

67. Welcomes the first follow-up report of the discharge resolution on the EEAS for the financial year 2017 adopted by a majority of Members and the EEAS's commitment to address the main recommendations and observations raised during the discharge procedure with the aim of further improving the management of Union funds;

68. Asks the EEAS to provide for a follow-up report for the financial year 2018 in accordance with Article 266 of the Financial Regulation;

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

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

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

72. Emphasises the growing importance of the EU Arctic Policy and the need to strengthen the Union's credibility among partners by ensuring the stability of the EU's Arctic Ambassador post.