

Note on the process of adapting the General Secretariat of the Council (18 April 2001)

Caption: In the light of the increase in and extension of the tasks of the General Secretariat, resulting from the development of the European Union and the extension of the scope of the Council's activities, the General Secretariat sets out, in a note dated 18 April 2001, its determination to undertake a process of adaptation, aimed particularly at ensuring positive changes to its working methods.

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Note to the Permanent Representatives on the process of adapting the General Secretariat of the Council (Brussels, 18 April 2001)

Introduction

1. The development of the European Union since the Treaty of Maastricht has extended the scope of the Council's activities. It has also led to the creation of specific structures and procedures for implementing the Common European Security and Defence Policy.

These changes have increased and reinforced the General Secretariat's tasks, which go beyond those of a Conference Secretariat.

2. The General Secretariat has embarked on a process of adaptation designed to achieve a number of objectives (mostly approved by the European Council in Helsinki) along the following lines:

- tailoring the Secretariat's structures to the operational requirements of the Council, in particular by reorganising work in larger administrative units;
- giving more responsibility to the administrative units which are called upon to contribute at their level to managing the human, material and financial resources of the Secretariat;
- strengthening internal auditing to ensure the best possible match between the Council's requirements and the human and material resources available in the General Secretariat;
- ensuring positive changes in the Council's working methods ¹;
- implementing a human-resources policy designed to provide greater staff motivation and enable staff to carry out their tasks efficiently;
- developing the use and ensuring better application of modern technology, including data processing and electronic means;
- adapting the procedures and chain of document production and transmission; making as much use as possible of redeployment to cope with new tasks, on the understanding that where that is not possible the appropriate human resources must be made available to the Secretariat;
- further developing interinstitutional cooperation with a view to avoiding duplication and establishing as many synergies as possible.

The first priority is to improve financial management, that being the guiding objective of all the organisation and rationalisation measures which the Secretariat has undertaken and which are described below.

3. This process of adaptation also takes account of current consideration by the Board of Heads of Administration of the administrative consequences of enlargement and will, when the time comes, have to incorporate any consequences arising from the administrative reform which the Commission intends to propose before the end of 2001. In most cases this involves consulting the bodies representing staff and/or negotiating with the trade union and professional organisations. Staff support for this process will be a major factor in making it possible.

Organisation and Structures of the General Secretariat

4. As part of the reinforcement of the CSDP and to provide back-up for the permanent political and military structures, the Secretariat has made provision for creating a politico-military structure within Directorate-General E (External Economic Relations - CFSP), involving the following three Directorates: political affairs, operations and exercises, external action mechanisms. Procedures are under way to cover staff

requirements using existing officials, exchanges with the Member States, seconded national experts and new recruits.

5. In 1999 the URMO ² embarked on an analysis of structures (limited initially to "non-horizontal" Directorates-General) and in particular the workload and staff requirements of the various units, in order to determine a detailed "rolling establishment plan" with sufficient flexibility to enable the Secretariat to cope with variations in the workload.

In the light of an initial report from the URMO, which still has to be elaborated on, the Deputy Secretary-General:

(i) noted that the number of officials occupying posts at the top of the hierarchy was greater than needed and embarked on a process of reducing that number by not replacing two A1 s and one A2 who had retired. This process will continue when conditions allow;

(ii) decided to combine Directorates-General C and D to form one Directorate-General. There may be other restructuring operations of the same kind;

(iii) decided to embark in stages on a degree of decentralisation by transferring administrative management to the Directorates-General in order to strengthen their capacity to act in this area. There are plans to allocate one category B official to each Directorate-General to form the core of an administrative structure responsible for a number of management tasks and to improve coordination between the Directorates-General and DG A (Administration). It should be possible to initiate the internal competition for the selection of the necessary category B officials in the first half of 2001;

(iv) set 2002 as the target date for defining the rolling establishment plan.

6. In May 2000, the URMO was requested to extend its audit to "horizontal" Directorates-General and Services, giving top priority to DG A (Administration), which could only be managed more efficiently if it were reinforced and its responsibilities were more rationally allocated. In the case of the latter Directorate-General, the main aim of the audit is to check, on the one hand, that the staffing (number, grades and qualifications) and the structural organisation (number and composition of the Directorates) are appropriate to the tasks for which it is responsible and, on the other hand, that the methods used in financial management are in accordance with good administrative practice. The overall outcome of the audit should be available by the end of 2001.

7. At the request of the Deputy Secretary-General, the URMO in collaboration with the financial controller and the present Directorate for Finance has given priority to the aspect of the audit concerning DG As Directorate for Finance and in February 2001 submitted suggestions for restructuring that Directorate which were approved by the Appointing Authority.

This restructuring, which is to be implemented following an indicative timetable with an intermediate stage to begin in January 2002 and a final stage to be implemented in January 2004, is based on the following principles and objectives:

- clear identification of the responsibilities of the various protagonists (accountability);
- separation of the Services responsible for drawing up, managing and monitoring the implementation of the budget in accordance with the political priorities established and the Services responsible for expenditure;
- giving the Services which make use of the budget greater financial responsibility by delegating to those

Services (which become budget holder units) powers to implement activities having financial implications;

- defining uniform rules and procedures for the awarding and conclusion of contracts;
- maximum limitation of the risks of improper use of financial resources.

Financial Management

8. The Secretariat has focused on three sorts of measures of a more specifically financial nature, namely: very strict management of budget appropriations, particularly as regards missions, the aforementioned restructuring of the Directorate for Finance and the development of financial control functions and tasks.

(a) The new Directorate for Finance will have to be big enough and specialised enough to draw up serious medium and long-term financial plans and manage with even greater efficiency the financial resources made available to the Secretariat in conjunction with the current implementation - by all Institutions in fact - of activity-based budgeting ("ABB"). This activity-based budgeting approach should make for better budgetary discipline and a clearer definition of priorities in allocating resources and involves a considerable increase in both computer resources and appropriately skilled human resources for the accounting function. At the same time, with a view to achieving unassailable management and total transparency in the matter of public contracts, the Directorate for Finance will have to include a unit having all the specialist knowledge needed for standardised management of all assessment and tendering procedures and a unit responsible for managing the inventory of goods acquired by the Secretariat. This new Directorate for Finance will therefore comprise three units responsible respectively for the budget/financial management (budget and accounting), purchasing and procurement procedures and inventory management.

A number of services which are currently the responsibility of this Directorate (e.g., transport, drivers, restaurant, purchases of office technology, furniture and consumables) will have to be transferred to other structures to be identified during the current audit of DG A.

In the same way, there will be a fundamental reshaping of the units responsible for the procurement of goods and services for the Secretariat by considerably reducing the number of officials who are "authorising officers" and bringing them closer to the various actual "cost centres".

(b) As for the duties and tasks of the Financial Controller, major changes have already occurred or are under way.

(i) following the adoption of Council Regulation No 2548/98 of 28 November 1998, which extended the financial controller's audit duties, the financial controller devoted his attention to defining a strategy for reinforcing and modernising the control function in order to make it more efficient and more effective and to make it possible ultimately to manage the transfer of the *ex ante* control function of a horizontal nature to the audit.

The new principle of control gives pride of place to an integrated approach to internal control focusing on two essential principles:

- internal control is a continuous process, the primary responsibility for which lies with the managers;
- the progressive transfer of the field of intervention of horizontal control and of the analysis of the regularity and conformity of the transaction to the examination of the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and processes, or indeed of the quality of the response by the relevant structures of the Secretariat to the objectives and missions assigned to them.

(ii) The implementation of this modernisation of the control function meant that as of September 2000:

- the Financial Control department was reorganised to include a new Audit unit comprising two professional auditors (1 A5, 1 A6) responsible for the general organisation of the function and for the conduct of audit missions;
- the *ex ante* control function was expanded, in consultation with the authorising officers, extending the preliminary examination, depending on the nature and importance of the transactions, to take account of the principle of good financial management (expediency, economy, efficiency and effectiveness);
- new control instruments in addition to *ex ante* control were used, particularly project evaluation and progressive use of pre-audits and audits.

(iii) In the field of administrative and financial management, the audit is called upon to contribute to the development of greater awareness among managers, at all levels of the hierarchy, of their responsibility for the development and maintenance of high-performance management systems.

The main function of the internal audit is to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the processes and internal management and control systems and, where appropriate, to propose improvements. Its main recommendations will be systematically evaluated by the Directorates-General concerned.

The internal audit is also responsible, in collaboration with the managers, for putting a system in place for monitoring decisions taken following their recommendations.

(iv) The 2001 work programme for the internal audit function provides essentially for work in the area of financial management. The approach is intended to provide support for the implementation of the Finance Directorate's new management structures and processes.

The conclusions of the three audits conducted to date (Procedures for decommissioning movable assets, Accounting procedures (annual closure 2000) and Schengen financial statements for the financial year 2000) have been submitted to the Deputy Secretary-General and the recommendations adopted will be closely monitored.

Moreover, the 2001 work programme includes the preparation of an audit charter and a schedule for the gradual transformation of the *ex ante* control function. When detailed plans for this project are being prepared, they will take account of the implications of the recasting of the Financial Regulation, the objective being to provide the General Secretariat with a fully operational Internal Audit department as soon as the new Financial Regulation comes into application.

(v) The availability of qualified personnel operating according to a rigorous methodology and a strict professional code of ethics is an essential prerequisite for the completion of the mission assigned to the internal audit.

Management of Human Resources

9. In the field of staff policy, as part of the elaboration of an overall strategy for modernising methods and working tools, increasing motivation, providing further training and planning human-resource needs and career prospects, two areas have been selected for priority action: mobility policy and training and

information policy which, although they already exist, need to "move up a gear" and change direction. The objective is to develop both these policies in parallel, as far as possible; in practice they are two complementary instruments designed to match the human resources available more fully to the Council's existing and foreseeable needs in the best interests of both the Institution and the officials. A more dynamic, proactive, incentive-driven mobility policy and a more diversified and more structured training and information policy throughout officials' careers should both enable them to acquire, improve and expand the knowledge and skills relating to their duties and to other foreseeable duties within the Secretariat and enable the Institution to have the necessary expertise permanently available at an appropriate level in the various areas of activity.

(a) With regard to mobility, a Task Force was set up in February 2000, its terms of reference being to draw up recommendations for the Appointing Authority in preparation for redefining a mobility policy for the entire permanent staff of the General Secretariat which should have the following main objectives:

- make best use of the Institution's human resources and maximise the potential of each official;
- improve the career prospects and career development of officials by implementing the appropriate instruments.

The Task Force submitted its report in September 2000. Consultation of the Joint Committee and the Mobility Committee on this report was also completed in February 2001. The consultation procedure between the Appointing Authority and the trade union and professional organisations with a view to using the abovementioned work as a basis for defining the mobility policy to be implemented within the Secretariat will begin very shortly, the objective being to enable the policy to take off in 2001.

In view of the great complexity of situations in Category C, as noted by the Task Force, a joint study body will shortly be set up to examine in greater detail the problems existing in that category of officials and the orientations advocated in the Task Force report as well as any other suggestion which would provide an appropriate response, as far as possible, to the difficulties existing.

In response to the request from the Helsinki European Council, the Secretariat has already contributed to defining the legal instruments to implement an exchange system between officials of the General Secretariat and officials of national administrations or international organisations³. The system is being applied for the first time in setting up the Secretariat's politico-military structures in conjunction with the implementation of the CESDP. Exchanges of linguists between the Community Institutions have also been taking place for some years.

(b) With regard to training/information, a Study Group was set up in July 2000 and submitted its report and recommendations at the end of January 2001. Its suggestions relate to training activities (on recruitment, throughout the career and in response to specific requirements), information activities which are essential if training is to be effective, and the resources to be put in place to ensure the success of both training and information.

According to the Study Group's recommendations, a redefinition of training policy in the General Secretariat of the Council should result in:

- promoting a more "active" approach to training in all DGs;
- establishing priorities which would make it possible to match training effort more closely to real needs;
- accepting the compulsory nature of training to meet the needs of the service;
- integrating training into a more active career development policy;
- more systematic use of the General Secretariat's internal resources and capacities;

- encouraging self-instruction.

The report has been submitted to the Staff Committee and the Joint Committee on Staff Training for an opinion. Both opinions will be delivered shortly and the next stage, the consultation procedure with the trade union and professional organisations, can then begin.

Action in this area will of necessity require a significant increase in the appropriations granted by the budgetary authority.

10. In the area of staffing trends and redeployment, the Secretariat is aware of the rigorous policy applied by national administrations in the allocation of human resources and has for several years been applying similar rigour in the management of its own establishment plan. Its policy focuses on the following main points:

(a) Limiting requests for the creation of new posts to cases in which the Secretariat has new duties assigned to it, such requests being made only after all redeployment possibilities have been examined

Since 1995 the establishment plan has increased by only 11,5 % in a period which included the effects of the accession of three new Member States, the integration of the Schengen Secretariat into the General Secretariat of the Council, the creation of the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (PPEWU), the arrival of the Secretary-General/High Representative and the establishment of the European Union Military Staff. Leaving aside those new developments, the Secretariat's establishment plan increased by only 0,4 % in the period from 1995 to 2001. Significant redeployment also took place over the same period involving over 200 posts, mainly in categories C and D. The following units were thus staffed solely through redeployment without the creation of any additional budgetary posts:

- the secretariat of the New York office
- the Secretariat of the CFSP unit in DG E
- the secretariat of the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit
- the EUMS secretariat.

The General Secretariat has also undertaken to create the secretariat infrastructure of the new politico-military structures through redeployment in the course of 2001.

The General Secretariat has resorted to temporary redeployment too. That was how it set up the whole of the team responsible for the negotiations throughout the period leading up to the next enlargement.

The establishment plan of the Council General Secretariat is relatively small by comparison with that of the Commission or even the European Parliament. Further redeployment possibilities are therefore not unlimited. The General Secretariat will nevertheless continue to examine the possibility of redeployment, following developments in the area of new technology, each time it is faced with the need to take on new duties.

(b) Concentration of human resources on the Institution's political activities (core activities) and reduction of the number of staff involved in manual work

That element of staff policy is being applied through two main channels:

(i) Outsourcing

A task force set up in September 1999 produced its report in February 2000 indicating the sectors in which some work could be contracted out instead of being done by permanent or temporary officials. Work on implementing those recommendations began in January 2001 when the dishwashing function in the Restaurants was contracted out. Other recommendations will be assessed during the current budget year. It

should, however, be noted that the rate of outsourcing is constantly dependent on the possibilities of vocational retraining for the staff concerned and on certain legal considerations in connection with local legislation.

(ii) Adjustment of the establishment plan

As from the budget for the financial year 2001, the General Secretariat has undertaken to gradually readjust its establishment plan by proposing some increase in categories A and B through the abolition of a number of posts in other categories, particularly category D.

That operation is also intended to restore the pyramid structure of category A and is neutral in budgetary terms, tending as it does to reduce the overall establishment plan slightly. The General Secretariat intends to follow the same policy in its estimates for the financial year 2002.

(c) Adapting the workload

In a situation in which the human resources made available to the General Secretariat would only increase if it acquired new duties, it is clear that there are also limits to the workload it can take on. The days when the General Secretariat was an inexhaustible source of resources and support for a succession of Presidencies are long gone. The General Secretariat must examine with the political bodies all areas of its activity, and especially translation, in order to satisfy itself as to their continuing usefulness.

11. The Secretariat attaches great importance to the development of interinstitutional cooperation, which ought to reach far beyond the areas covered at present (particularly social aspects (schools, creches, after-school centres), language courses, translation, interpreting, information technology). It is in this spirit that the Secretariat takes an active part in all initiatives to achieve this goal. Its actions in this respect are primarily based on four criteria: creating real added value both in economic terms and in terms of efficiency; maintaining the necessary degree of flexibility to take account of the specific circumstances and needs of each Institution; placing all Institutions on an equal footing; taking appropriate account of the (situations of officials who may be affected by this development.

In January 2001 the Permanent Representatives Committee was briefed on the work carried out under the responsibility of the Heads of Administration to evaluate the administrative aspects of enlargement (in particular, the report by the "Interinstitutional Task Force" identifying those areas in which cooperation between Institutions should be introduced or strengthened).

On the initiative of the Secretaries-General, four new specific projects are currently under examination; these concern the Interinstitutional Recruitment Office, the libraries, the management of buildings and security and caretaking.

The Secretaries-General aim to establish the IRO by the end of 2001 so that it can become operational as early as possible in 2002, and be already in use for recruitment linked to enlargement.

12. The ongoing acquisition of the most effective new technology, the restructuring of departments, the growth and diversification of the Secretariat's tasks and duties, developments in working methods, the advisability of restoring the balance in the establishment plan and the very wide use of redeployment are all factors which require the Secretariat's human resources to make a constant endeavour to adapt and undergo professional (re)training.

However, there are inevitably limits to this process. Some staff are no longer able to successfully acquire the additional and/or more suitable skills needed to perform the new duties and tasks.

The Secretariat therefore considers it necessary to be included in the measures to terminate the service of officials, as put forward in a Commission proposal which is applicable to the Commission's own departments and is currently under examination by the Council bodies. Indeed, the considerations underlying this proposal are equally relevant to the Secretariat which in the course of the last ten years has, in fact, used redeployment measures more than any other administration.

These considerations have already been expressed within the Staff Regulations Committee by the representatives of the Secretariat's Administration.

Basing itself on the conditions governing termination of service as proposed by the Commission (age, minimum seniority required), the Secretariat notes that they concern approximately 900 Council officials and considers that special retirement measures should apply to 10 % of that number (between 80 and 90 individuals).

Developments in Working Methods

13. In this area, it should be noted that:

(a) Although the workload of the Technical Production Services (TPS) has increased continuously over the last quarter of a century, the situation has been brought under control and productivity gains have been made, in particular by using high-performance photocopiers. Nonetheless, the work remains paper-based to a very large extent.

The need to modernise the TPS and to integrate them into a production flow from document drafting right through to distribution (electronic and paper) was the subject of a discussion started in 1997 and was endorsed in the DGA III Action Plan (1999-2001).

Such modernisation takes place in the context of the development of information technology. Electronic document distribution will greatly influence the quantity of paper documents produced annually (at present, roughly 15 000 documents with an approximate total of 200 million pages). In future, there will be a noticeable reduction in paper reproduction.

The new document production system will be centred around the following:

- (i) radical rationalisation of the TPS (possibility of distant printing documents in order to make them available near the meeting rooms; automation of document distribution and of certain dispatch operations etc.);
- (ii) drastic reduction in the number of copies printed following the official implementation of the U 32 Mail/Extranet system;
- (iii) foreseeable increase in the number of copies printed following the accession of new members (impossibly to quantify at this stage).

(b) A pilot experiment on individual working time management was conducted on floor 50 of the Justus Lipsius building from the beginning of October 2000 until the end of February 2001. The aim of the scheme was to test the viability of a computer system which makes it possible to manage complex and diverse configurations arising from very varied flexible working hours as well as to simplify administrative procedures, and which also allows each official to individually manage presences and absences (leave, missions, absences for service or personal reasons, time off for recovery, etc.). This experiment formed part of the consideration currently being given to the possible reform of working hours, in order to bring greater flexibility into more general use (flexitime), with a view to reconciling two requirements: on the one hand, to meet the needs of the Council and its preparatory bodies more effectively and, on the other hand, to allow

each official, without prejudice to the interests of the service, to organise his/her working time in a way more compatible with his/her private and family life. In the light of the conclusions drawn from this experiment, a revised version of the Administration's proposals is currently being drawn up for the forthcoming resumption of the consultation procedure with the trade union and professional organisations which was suspended in 1998. In parallel with that procedure, the possibility of extending the experiment to other departments has not been ruled out, especially in order to test the tool's other functionalities.

(c) In the context of the studies being conducted in order to resolve the problems arising from the expansion of language cover following enlargement, a decision has been taken to conduct remote interpreting tests. Computer technology is now such that this method can be used.

The aim of this project is to test the efficiency of this method of interpreting, as applied to Council meetings, to examine the related technical issues and to see how much space may be saved by using remote interpreting.

(d) A pilot project on teleworking is currently being prepared. This comes under the objective of offering the broadest range of working conditions, which allow optimum reconciliation of the requirements of the service with officials' personal situations. Eventually, teleworking could also lead to greater flexibility in managing office space and to a rationalisation of the timetables of those taking part.

On the basis of an initial approach, the translation service and the secretarial service in DGA III should, in view of the nature of their work and their high degree of computerisation, be those services designated to participate in such a pilot scheme. This would only concern officials based in Brussels.

Infrastructure

14. In order to meet the requirements for implementing the ESDP, the Secretariat has carried out a thorough re-examination of its security policy with a view to creating an organisation and a structure which guarantee protection of the occupants of buildings and of goods and equipment, the confidentiality of classified information and the availability and integrity of all information kept or produced by the institution in whatever form and the continuity of the Council's activities.

This has resulted in the adoption of measures in the following fields:

- ◆ the legislative and regulatory framework
- ◆ buildings and infrastructures
- ◆ data-processing and telecommunication networks and equipment
- ◆ administrative structure and organisation.

As regards the legislative and regulatory framework, the Secretariat prepared and accompanied the proceedings of the Antici Group and the Permanent Representatives Committee which resulted in the adoption of the security regulations at the Council meeting on 12 March 2001. The GSC is currently making preparations to implement these Regulations, particularly the adaptation of the Security Office's brief, application of the new classification rules, internal measures for the protection and processing of classified documents and training of staff with access to classified information.

Moreover, the Secretary-General/High Representative signed Interim Security Arrangements with NATO in July 2000 providing for the exchange of classified information between NATO and the GSC.

The Kortenberg building which has been secured in accordance with generally recognised standards will be occupied by the Military Staff, the Policy Unit and four Directorates of DGE as from May 2001. The highly secure data-processing and telecommunication networks and equipment planned for the Kortenberg building and for its links with the Justus Lipsius building were put out for tender and are now being supplied or installed. Work is also in progress to install a secure meeting room on floor 70 of the Justus Lipsius building.

These measures go hand in hand with a reorganisation and reinforcement of the administrative security structure.

The Security Office has been reorganised and strengthened by enlisting the help of officials and specialists (recruitment procedures are currently in progress) in particular to carry out tasks involving security engineering, data-processing security audits, the accreditation of data-processing systems provided for in the security regulations, close protection for the Secretary-General/High Representative and protection of high-security areas in the Kortenberg building. Such reorganisation is being accompanied by a specific staff training programme.

In order to meet the requirements imposed by the security regulations, an INFO SEC Office has been set up with the following mission: to define the rules and procedures applicable to the processing of classified information on computer storage media; to identify threats to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information processed; to identify the necessary means of protection and to define the procedures for using them; to verify on a regular basis the effectiveness of the protection measures adopted. Specialists are being recruited for this Office.

15. The ever-increasing use of new technology has always been a priority for the Secretariat as it enables it to render its supporting role more effective and, in view of the need to comply with budgetary discipline, it facilitates the policy of redeploying human resources wherever possible to carry out the new tasks and missions entrusted to the Secretariat.

In order to benefit to the full from the dynamic development of information and communication technology, computerisation of nearly all sectors of activity in the Secretariat with increasingly integrated and powerful equipment is proceeding.

The new computer services and facilities will be put at the disposal of users in the short and medium term in the framework of specific projects and will comprise the following measures in particular:

- (a) introducing a new facility for the integral management of the workflow as regards the production of Council documents (WORKFLOW) and a single system for the storage of Council documents (SINGLE DOCUMENT REPOSITORY);
- (b) launching a modern method of transferring Council documents in digital and secure form to the Member States' networks, including the provision of document search and access facilities using "Web" technology (U32 Mail/Extranet);
- (c) introducing a virtual work environment which will facilitate cooperation within working parties outside meetings;
- (d) implementing a "video conference" pilot project to examine the possibilities and possible impact of the use of a "multisite-videoconferencing" system as an additional worktool, especially in the Euro Group;
- (e) developing and introducing an information and communication system in the framework of the judicial network;
- (f) setting up and operating secure infrastructures and applications:
 - ◆ local networks and systems in the new Kortenberg building;
 - ◆ connections between the Secretariat buildings;
 - ◆ PHONE, FAX and DATA communication between the Secretariat and the Member States in the framework of CFSP/ESDP;
 - ◆ information/management systems in the framework of CFSP/ESDP;
- (g) introducing a system of secure remote access to the Secretariat networks (during missions, in the

framework of teleworking);

(h) examining and testing new solutions/functions to facilitate integrated management of the human, material and budgetary resources of the Secretariat.

In order to minimise risks to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information processed, most solutions referred to above will be put into practice on the basis of a secure infrastructure of networks and systems using inter alia cryptographically approved and accredited technologies and products (electronic signature, Public Key Infrastructure).

To reduce costs and meet increased interoperability needs, the Secretariat is making increasing use of technical standards and, where suitable, of systems and facilities worked out by other European institutions.

16. As early as 1997, the General Secretariat began its initial studies on the impact of future enlargements of the Union on the Council's building requirements in Brussels. Acting on the successive instructions given by Coreper, the Antici Group and the Secretariat carried these studies further. To date, a number of guidelines have already been adopted as working hypotheses: keeping the Justus Lipsius building as the Council's headquarters, maintaining the principle of full language cover, limiting to 2 the number of places per delegation at the table in meeting-rooms, finding a building in the near vicinity to cover new requirements. The practical organisation of interpreting facilities (traditional booths or remote interpreting) is still under examination; however, the tests currently being carried out in several institutions, including the Council, should soon make it possible to obtain a clearer picture, especially as regards building implications.

On the basis of information currently available, the General Secretariat considers that in the light of future enlargement prospects, the Council would need to expand its premises by 100 000 m², approximately half of which would be intended for meeting-rooms, interpreting, delegations and associated servicing rooms.

In this connection, it will also be necessary to find a way to bring the services located in the Kortenberg building (PPEWU, POLMIL, EUMS) closer to Justus Lipsius in a secure building that is better suited to this new function.

For all these problems relating to premises in Brussels, the General Secretariat has contacted the Belgian authorities, the other European institutions and the private property market.

It is obvious that future enlargements will also have implications for the Kirchberg Conference Centre in Luxembourg and for the Liaison Offices in Geneva and New York.

From a general point of view, it is useful to point out that any major real estate project requires at least five years for studies, permits, tendering procedures and for actual construction⁴.

It will therefore be necessary for the Council to take a decision on the matter in the near future.

The General Secretariat intends to submit its proposals to Coreper shortly.

¹ This note does not concern either the working methods of the Council and its bodies or the internal working methods of the Secretariat in its role of adviser to the Council and the Presidency.

² Unit for the analysis of the resources, working methods and organisation of the General Secretariat, set up in 1996.

³ Decision of the Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of 21 December 2000 and Council Decision of 22 December 2000.

⁴ In the case of the Justus Lipsius building, studies and construction work took from 1985 to 1995 and not all of the permits have yet been obtained