

Workshop “Born into Crisis: The Challenge of building effective European diplomacy”

On 4 May 2011, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Chatham House held the final of a series of three workshops examining the role of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The workshop examined three areas: what diplomatic lessons can be learned from the first six months of the EEAS and its response to events across North Africa and the Middle East; what the expectations, choices and limitations of external cooperation and internal coordination are; and what future orientation and objectives for EU diplomacy ought to be.

The European External Action Service is being constructed in the midst of a dramatic and volatile period in international relations. Since it was formally launched on 1 December 2010, Baroness Ashton and her team have had to respond to revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and a European driven military deployment in Libya. Globalization presents demographic, economic and security challenges which affect the very nature of the international system and brings new complexity to the task of collective diplomatic action. For the European Union, it raises questions about the strategic objectives and priorities of EU diplomacy as well as the expectations, choices and limitations of the EEAS. It is against this background that the workshop took place.

Lessons Learned from European Crisis Diplomacy in the Middle East

The infant EEAS is still growing and therefore naturally still lacks experience and expertise in foreign and security policy. National foreign ministries demonstrate that it takes years, sometimes decades, to establish an efficient and effective diplomatic operation. Participants therefore agreed that the expectations of the performance of

EEAS should not be too high at this time. Member States are still underrepresented in the Service's personnel and some institutional arrangements are still blurry, for example the relationship between the crisis management units and the thematic desks which was reflected in the Service's crisis response. In the case of Libya, different views were expressed concerning the necessity and the process of placing a humanitarian CSDP mission on the ground in Libya. While the immediate EU reaction on Libya was criticised among the participants, the joint communication of the EEAS and the European Commission on the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity (8 March 2011) was praised: The quality of the document was all the more surprising as it came after weeks of depressing discussions and divisions among the member states on the position towards the Southern Mediterranean region.

Participants agreed that the High Representative (HR) was in an impossible position; leadership was demanded from her but, at the same time, she was not enjoying the political support she needs to lead. Taking this into account and given her heavily loaded agenda, a number of workshop participants strongly criticised the decision to reduce the number of EU Special Representations (EUSRs). Many felt regional representatives have become important interlocutors whose voice was heard and respected in their regions of operation. Delegating some of her work to EUSRs or to national foreign ministers could be an option to relieve the burdens and demands on her time.

Expectations from Member States and International Organisations

The question that most participants agreed upon was that it is impossible to create an

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efficient service while insisting on the principle of budget neutrality. Participants agreed that the service should be ambitious but expectations should remain reasonable. The EEAS should increase coherence, convergence and continuity of European external action, provide common analysis of crisis situations and could be regarded as a facilitator, consolidator and federator in the build up of the EU's global partnerships. In order to succeed, EU delegations must develop close relations with member state embassies. In the long term a stronger consular cooperation is foreseeable.

However, several participants expressed the fear that, instead of reducing overlap and institutional turf wars, the EEAS might, if not properly implemented, open an additional institutional fault line, increasing the complexity of European foreign policy decision making. It was argued that the US has lowered its expectation considerably following the performance of the HR and EEAS in its first months. Another voice argued that the creation of the EEAS had not been in response to crises in the world, but to institutional problems in Brussels and those significant structural problems would always hamper the service's performance.

Future priorities

Several participants argued that the European Neighbourhood and the situation in South Sudan should be priorities of EU diplomacy. Advancement in the Middle East Peace Process was seen as a priority, with a realistic chance of progress in the coming months. Cyber security was mentioned and it was reiterated that conflict prevention remained a key priority for the High Representative. Another priority for the mid-term was the strengthening of EEAS personnel training. Some participants thought the EEAS ought to concentrate its efforts on Security Sector Reform, peace building and promoting the rule of law. There was disagreement on the need to review or renew the European Security Strategy.

The first EEAS workshop was held under the title: "The Future of the European External Action Service and EU Foreign and Security Policy" at Chatham House on 9-10 December 2010. The second meeting held under the title: 'The EAS: Partnerships and Priorities for a new European Diplomacy' took

place, also at Chatham House, on 24 March 2011. A paper on the conclusions and recommendations from the workshop series will be published in June 2011 and will be accessible via this website.



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