

# THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE

## A DIFFICULT START OF AN INNOVATIVE INSTITUTION

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The European External Action Service, created in December 2010, has the potential to become an innovative foreign policy instrument and to strengthen Europe's global role. The EEAS has the potential to make European foreign policy more coherent and efficient and may be a vital contribution to the development of a European strategic culture. Nevertheless, it has had a difficult start and is still struggling for recognition by other foreign policy actors. It has so far been unable to fulfil the high expectations placed upon it. This year's evaluation of the EEAS, carried out by its own head, Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, offers an opportunity to improve upon the EEAS' structure. For the EEAS to function successfully, the Commission and member states must take a constructive approach towards the new institution.



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### THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE'S DIFFICULT GENESIS

One of the most innovative suggestions to come out of the 2002 Constitutional Convention was the creation of a European External Action Service (EEAS) with an EU Foreign Affairs Minister at its fore.<sup>1</sup> Approximately nine years prior to this, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

1 | Article III-296 of the Constitutional Treaty verbatim: "In fulfilling his or her mandate, the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs shall be assisted by a European External Action Service. This service shall work in cooperation with the diplomatic services of the Member States and shall comprise officials from relevant departments of the General Secretariat of the Council and of the Commission as well as staff ▶"

was launched. Initially, the CFSP was in the hands of various Directorates-General of the European Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council.

The establishment of an EU Foreign Affairs Minister and an External Action Service was intended to bundle the foreign service expertise that was scattered over several institutions and directorates. First, future European foreign policy should take into account the various dimensions of external action (civilian, military, development, humanitarian). Second, it should improve foreign policy coherence between the EU and its member states. The third objective was a greater degree of foreign policy continuity; until then, it was predominantly the Presidency of the Council of the European Union with a six-month rotation period that set the foreign policy agenda. The results were constantly changing priorities and a lack of continuity in the EU's external actions.



High Representative Ashton: The nomination of the Briton was approached with great scepticism. | Source: Jay Louvion, Studio Casagrande, Welthandelsorganisation (WTO) ©①©.

seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States. The organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service shall be established by a European decision of the Council. The Council shall act on a proposal from the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs after consulting the European Parliament and after obtaining the consent of the Commission."

However, in the years that followed, enthusiasm among the member states for the External Action Service waned considerably – not least because of the collapse of the constitutional treaty following two negative referenda and due to the outbreak of the economic and financial crisis. The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on 1 December 2009, thus worded it more cautiously: the office of the Foreign Affairs Minister became now that of a High Representative. But the heads of states and governments clung to the European External Action Service itself.<sup>2</sup>

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Aside from the reference to the High Representative, the text is identical to that of the Constitutional Treaty. According to the Lisbon Treaty, the EEAS' function is to support the High Representative in his or her work and to cooperate with the member states' diplomatic services. The EEAS should comprise officials from the General Secretariat of the Council, the Commission and staff seconded from national diplomatic services. The exact function or detailed layout of the EEAS, however, was not remarked upon in the Lisbon Treaty. The detailed stipulations regarding the EEAS' organisation and function should be determined by a Council decision – after a European Parliament hearing and approval by the European Commission.

Accordingly, the Lisbon Treaty's phrasing left some maneuvering room for the organisation of the EEAS. If the political will was still great enough to establish as comprehensive and powerful an instrument as possible during the Constitutional Convention, the political conditions now seem to be worse. In the twelve months that followed the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, a heavy tug-of-war ensued between the member states, the European Parliament and the European Commission regarding the function, scope and infrastructure of the EEAS. The British Labour politician appointed as High Representative, Ashton, faced the Herculean task of reconciling widely divergent views.

2 | Article 27 TEU, Lisbon Treaty, <http://www.lisbon-treaty.org/wcm/the-lisbon-treaty/treaty-on-european-union-and-comments/title-5-general-provisions-on-the-unions-external-action-and-specific-provisions/chapter-2-specific-provisions-on-the-common-foreign-and-security-policy/section-1-common-provisions/116-article-13a.html> (accessed 16 Aug 2013).

Overall, the establishment of the EEAS took place under difficult circumstances: Unlike in 2002, the EU now found itself in the midst of an economic and financial crisis. Accordingly, scrutiny of the financial aspects of establishing the EEAS also intensified. The overall enthusiasm for the EEAS had waned. Additionally, the domain of foreign policy is a bastion of national sovereignty. The member states' very divergent foreign policy traditions collided during the conception of the EEAS.

High Representative Ashton had shown only a small amount of foreign policy experience; her appointment was occasionally received with great scepticism and she had little credit with many foreign policy decision makers. Finding a common denominator for the interests of the many actors who were involved in establishing the EEAS – member states, the Commission, the High Representative, but also the European Parliament – proved to be another enormous challenge.

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The European Parliament<sup>3</sup> quickly presented itself as the greatest advocate of a strong EEAS with the most extensive capacity possible. At the same time, they advocated that the EEAS should be as closely connected to the Commission as possible. In doing so the Parliament hoped to have the maximum possible influence on the EEAS' strategic decisions and its personnel.

The European Commission also wished to see the EEAS located alongside it. However, at the same time, it tried to maintain as much sovereignty as possible over the most important financial instruments of foreign policy, e.g. the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) or the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). The Commission's motivation not only lay in protecting its own authority, but also in its fear of increased intergovernmentalism in other policy areas, such as development policy.

3 | The European Parliament (EP) had only to be consulted according to the Lisbon Treaty, but influenced the establishment of the EEAS through its budgetary powers. Consequently, it was impossible to establish the EEAS without the EP's approval.

Most member states categorically disapproved of an EEAS tethered to the Commission. Among other things, this was due to the fear that too close a dependence on the Commission would soften the CFSP's intergovernmental nature through the back door. While the member states were largely united in their disapproval, they had diverging interests in terms of the organisation of the EEAS: Germany and Italy, for example, were supporters of the EEAS from the start, but saw it primarily as a think tank for elaborating on foreign policy strategies. Great Britain, however, was more sceptical. France supported the EEAS, but wanted it to be modelled after a French ministry. Many smaller and medium-sized member states saw the EEAS as a multiplier of their own influences at the global level and generally regarded it positively. However, they feared a devaluation of the six-month Council Presidency that had also made it possible for the smaller member states to place their own foreign policy interests at the highest level. Furthermore, the member states were competing over key positions in the EEAS.

In all respects the establishment of a new institution was uncharted waters for the actors involved. There was no blueprint whatsoever for the EEAS, the more so as the member states stressed from the beginning that they did not wish to establish a 28<sup>th</sup> foreign ministry. Given these circumstances, it was ultimately unsurprising that it took a year of the toughest negotiations and fiercest conflicts over the EEAS' authority, objectives, control and financial endowment before the EEAS was established in December 2010 and was able to officially begin its work in January 2011. The fact that, given these hurdles, the EEAS saw the light of day after "only" one year of negotiations should even be seen as a success in hindsight.

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## **THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE'S AUTHORITY AND ORGANISATION**

A critical compromise between the member states and the European Parliament was reached in a meeting in Madrid in June 2010. The legal basis for the EEAS is Council decision 427/2010 from 26 July 2010. The crucial points:

The EEAS' position and that of the High Representative: The European External Action Service is linked neither to the European Commission nor the Council, but rather is an institution *sui generis*. The High Representative presides over the EEAS, but at the same time is associated with both institutions. This is reflected in a triple role: The High Representative is the head of the CFSP, and is simultaneously the Vice President of the European Commission and presides over EU Foreign Minister's meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council.

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The organisation of the EEAS: The EEAS cannot be compared to a "classic" national foreign affairs ministry. On the one hand, elements of a diplomatic service are lacking; on the other, the EEAS considerably exceeds the role of a foreign ministry. Thus the External Action Service does not solely comprise diplomatic personnel, it also brings together military, development and humanitarian expertise that would be found either in member states' ministries for defence or ministries for development cooperation. Various units concerned with crisis management, e.g. the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) or the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), are under the High Representative's direct control. The military expertise is located within the EU Military Staff (EUMS), which is also subordinate to the High Representative. With the help of this broad scope of expertise, the EEAS should have the necessary tools at its disposal to face a crisis comprehensively considering all military, civilian, humanitarian and development aspects.

The function of the EEAS: The EEAS' objective is to provide support to the High Representative in conducting the Common Foreign and Security Policy and ensuring the coherence of European foreign policy. A further core function is the coordination of all aspects of European foreign policy – under the European Commission's prerogatives. In concrete terms, this means coordinating the member states' policies and positions. However, the management of the financial instruments remains with the European Commission. But general decisions, such as the orientation of enlargement or development policy, should be worked out by the European External Action Service and the

European Commission together. Furthermore, the European External Action Service should also support the work of the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the European Commission as a whole in this area. Thus, the preparation of a summit meeting, for example, has devolved to the EEAS' purview. Given this complexity between the EEAS and the Commission, the Council decision foresees that all policy areas be subject to mutual consultation. This should prevent opposing objectives being pursued in different policy areas. At the same time, the EEAS should propose its own initiatives in the policy process. Overall, the EEAS has turned out to be smaller and narrower than many – the European Parliament, among others – had hoped for.

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**Staffing:** At least one third of the staff should come from the member states,<sup>4</sup> at least 60 per cent from EU institutions. In the process, incredibly varied ways of thinking assemble within the EEAS; representatives of EU institutions, who are most familiar with the Brussels machine, and experienced diplomats, who take a considerably more political tack to their work. This means that a large portion of the officials who were previously responsible for the regulation of financial instruments are now undertaking political duties. However, national diplomats must return to service in member countries after a certain amount of time. The objective is to strengthen understanding for cultures of foreign policy through this kind of intermixing. In short: In doing so, the EEAS is supposed to represent a platform of socialisation in the medium-term and contribute to the development of a combined culture of European foreign policy strategies in the long-term.

**Establishment of EU delegations:** One of the most important innovations introduced with the establishment of the EEAS was the reorganisation of Commission delegations in third countries to EU delegations whose head is subordinate to the High Representative and the European External Action Service. The delegations' task is now not only the

4 | Council of Europe, Council Decision from 26 Jul 2010 (2010/427/EU), Art. 6, para. 9, [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/eeas\\_decision\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/eeas_decision_en.pdf) (accessed 16 Aug 2013).

implementation of EU programmes and financial instruments, but also the coordination of the work of the member states' embassies in particular countries. In addition, the delegations should be "politically" active by maintaining political and economic contacts, as well as contacts in civil society in their country of assignment and carry out political reports for the EEAS. The heads of the delegations have the entire delegation staff at their disposal, regardless of whether they are Commission representatives or diplomats (Article 5). They preside over both the political personnel and the Commission personnel responsible for implementing various Commission programmes. Regardless of this, the Commission is still the only one who may provide specification, e.g. if it is a matter of financial instruments administered by them. This should be conducted under the authority of the head of the delegation.

The role of the European Parliament in monitoring the EEAS: At the same time, the European Parliament has been granted considerable rights to be heard, therefore the High Representative must discuss policy guidelines with the European Parliament. In addition, important personnel appointments (e.g. directors or future delegation heads) are summoned to a hearing in the European Parliament.

Given this complexity, it is clear just how dependent the EEAS is on good cooperation with the Commission and the member states. It also shows both the potential and how complex its structure is.

### **MIXED RESULTS**

The EEAS has been observed critically from the start. Further complicating the situation was the fact that it was confronted with one of the greatest foreign policy challenges in the CFSP's history shortly after its establishment, the Arab Spring. Particularly in its first twelve months, the development of the EEAS proceeded rather dismally for several reasons.

### **Slow-moving crisis management**

Despite the new structures, the EU still took too long to prepare and implement its input. The swiftness of action is still in dire need of improvement, as the protracted planning process for the training mission for Mali in 2013 made quite clear. In some cases, the EEAS' crisis management was not even really deployed. Plans for a humanitarian mission in Libya had been prepared but were never put into practice because Lady Ashton insisted upon waiting for a UN request that never came.

### **Lack of political leadership and visibility**

Another reason for the anticlimax of the External Action Service was the High Representative's weak profile and the EEAS' lack of external visibility. From the beginning, the EEAS was in a difficult position; at the outset of the Arab Spring, either the heads of state or foreign ministers thrust themselves into the spotlight and, in doing so, undercut the High Representative's coordination efforts. That was ultimately not conducive to the EU's overall view on the crisis and generated confusion regarding its real position. Having said that, it was also often not possible for the EEAS to bring this to bear because the member states could not come to a consensus on certain issues; the member states preferred the High Representative to comment solely on those issues on which they had come to a consensus. The EEAS was also limited in its right of initiative.

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In addition, the EEAS' influence and visibility stand and fall with the High Representative. From the start, Catherine Ashton was entrusted with a multitude of tasks and authorities (Head of the Foreign Affairs Council, Vice President of the European Commission, a vast number of trips, and regular presence before the EP). Her foreign policy visibility suffered from this. Many of the causes of her frequently criticised balance are structural; the High Commissioner's job description is excessive and all of the duties cannot be fulfilled by one person alone. Ultimately it proved to be too great of a balancing act to oversee the establishment of the EEAS on the one hand and to provide a presence

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and decision-making powers on an international level on the other. Some criticism her work has received is either unjustified or excessive. Nevertheless, other

shortcomings can be traced back to the High Representative, for example her initial disregard for the military components of foreign policy. To some extent Ashton operates too

hesitantly, for example in the case of Libya within the context of the Arab Spring. However, the member states never wanted the High Representative to play a more active role. They had intentionally chosen Catherine Ashton as a candidate who was known for her negotiating skills but who did not yet have any distinctive profile in the international arena.

The EEAS' external representation in international organisations was paltry, which may well also have something to do with the EU Representative's inexperience in that area. The member states must also take some credit for the poor image of the EEAS and the High Representative. For example, Great Britain undermined the EU's uniform positioning on international organisations in 2011, largely discrediting the EEAS and the EU. The criticism by some sceptical member states of the EEAS' lack of visibility calls for circles to be squared. On the one hand, they demand that the EEAS provide proof of its added value and demonstrate innovative approaches, but on the other hand are not ready to grant the EEAS and the High Representative the necessary freedom to do so.

### **Bumpy institutional development**

On occasion, the process of appointing staff to the EEAS proceeded chaotically. Conflicts of authority within the EEAS crippled its ability to act. Frequent personnel changes frustrated parts of the civil service and ensured that the work lacked continuity. Some former Commission officials are still having difficulties adjusting to the External Action Service's "political" work. Conversely, some diplomats are having trouble familiarising themselves with the Brussels machine.

In addition, the lack of contact between the geographical departments and the crisis management structures occasionally makes communication within the EEAS somewhat opaque. According to many experts, even the division of responsibilities between the EEAS' top management, the cabinet and the High Representative could be optimised. Just like with any other new institution it can be expected that much is carried out through the principle of trial and error. An example of this is the discussion over the EU Special Representatives for crisis regions: In the first few months, Ashton considered abolishing these positions and only a collective appeal from member states, non-governmental organisations and experts led them to then be appointed. Now strengthening their position further and better integrating them into the EEAS is being discussed.

### **Difficult relationships with other foreign policy actors in the EU**

One of the new service's main problems is its difficult relationship with the European Commission. Despite the meetings that were instituted in 2012 between commissioners whose portfolios have a foreign affairs dimension (in practice, the Commissioners for Development, Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Trade, Economic and Monetary Affairs), there is still a lot of grit in the gears. Coordination efforts in the areas of trade or economic policy in particular have proved quite difficult.<sup>5</sup>

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Relationships with national foreign ministries are varied. A relatively strong mistrust and a wait-and-see attitude still dominate. Unlike in the case of the rotating Presidency, the organisation of which a particular member state was responsible for, the national diplomatic offices are still wary of the EEAS. Germany, Italy and the majority of the smaller and medium-sized member states are completely

5 | Rosa Balfour and Kristi Raik, "Equipping the European Union for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: National diplomacies, the European External Action Service and the making of EU foreign policy", *FIIA Report 36*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), Helsinki, 17 Jan 2013, <http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/309> (accessed 26 Aug 2013).

sympathetic to the EEAS; this can be seen in some of the proposals the Foreign Affairs Minister launched in 2011 and 2013 to strengthen the EEAS' working capacity. However, the national foreign ministries still have an cautious relationship with the EEAS because it is considered competition in the medium-term. So far, Great Britain and the Czech Republic have been most sceptical of the EEAS. Nevertheless, the EEAS' coordinating role in terms of trade policy and sanctions was welcomed by these member states. Small and medium-sized member states in particular accuse the EEAS of being too much under the influence of the larger member states. The exchange of information between national ministries and the EEAS could improve as well.

### **Development of responsibilities**

So far, the EEAS has not lived up to its expectation to forge innovative strategies. As yet, the larger countries with traditional foreign ministries have received little additional insight from the EEAS. In the absence of EEAS initiatives, important foreign policy initiatives often come from a coalition of several member states.

Nevertheless, from the start there have been positive developments that have already indicated the EEAS' added value in its first two and a half years; in the past few months in particular there have been several reports of success. The first positive example was the new strategy for the European Neighbourhood Policy introduced in May

2011 together with the Commission, which

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led to a policy shift in European Neighbourhood Policy towards a greater degree of political conditionality. It is apparent that the EU has regained some credit within the European Neighbourhood in that the High

Representative was able to take on the role of intermediary between the parties involved in the conflict in Egypt. The EEAS' preparations for the discussion regarding the EU's strategic partners (USA, Russia, China, India, etc.) in terms of the European Council were considered extremely helpful by the heads of state and government. Lady Ashton's role in the Middle East peace process and the dialogue with Iran have been rated positively. The

communication on the future strategy regarding Syria, which the High Representative submitted together with the Commission at the end of June 2013, received relatively positive reviews. In general, coordination with the Commission regarding enlargement policy went well: Ashton and the External Action Service were able to achieve solid success in procuring a settlement between Serbia and Kosovo in April this year. However, it is also significant that such a success was managed in a policy area where entry to the EU certainly also played a role and not just the foreign policy authority of the EU or the High Representative.

The development of EU delegations also provided a ray of hope. Nearly all of the member states have recognised the majority of the EU delegations – despite a few issues; to some extent, parallel command structures are still in place among the diplomatic and Commission staff. Particularly in countries where member states also have a specific interest, acceptance of the delegations is still proving difficult. So far, however, some member states have been willing to grant the EU delegations more rights and greater freedom in terms of formulating policy. But behind this is the fact that all the small and medium-sized EU states and Poland have fewer representatives worldwide than the EU does. As of now there are 139 EU delegations; only France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain have worldwide more representatives at their command. In many countries, the EU delegations can serve as the eyes and ears of countries that possess no embassy there. The EU delegations in Syria have been informing member states about the situation in the country long after many had already closed their embassies. In addition, there are many examples of pragmatic cooperation involving member states making use of the EU delegations' diplomatic premises. Overall, the office of the delegation heads gained significant importance through the heavy politicisation of their duties.<sup>6</sup> More and more the heads of the delegations are being recognised as EU ambassadors.

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6 | For details on the role of EU delegations from the point of view of the national foreign ministries: Rosa Balfour and Kristi Raik (eds.), "The European external action service and national diplomacies", *EPC Issue Paper* 73, Mar 2013.

The appointment of staff to the EEAS is also proceeding comparatively well. The goal of filling one third of the posts with personnel from member states' foreign ministries has almost been achieved (the proportion of member state diplomats is above that quota in the EU delegations, but still considerably below it at EU headquarters in Brussels). Nevertheless, the distribution of personnel between the member states remains uneven: Central European countries remain comparatively under-represented in the delegations. German diplomats also remain under-represented, although a couple of key positions are occupied by Germans. Overall, the member states are highly interested in occupying key positions, including as heads of the EU delegations. Criticism that the naming of delegation heads would reflect the member states' geopolitical interests have proved true only to a very limited extent and is most likely to be observed in Latin America. Currently, the EEAS has 3,400 employees<sup>7</sup> and thus has fewer members of staff than the diplomatic offices of the six largest member states and the Netherlands each have.<sup>8</sup>

## THE REVIEW'S POTENTIAL

**Corresponding changes to the original Council decision were to be enacted as needed by 2014 in order to bring the institutional reform process to a close before the new European Commission began their 2014-2019 term of office.**

The Council decision envisaged an initial evaluation of the EEAS in 2011 and a comprehensive review by the High Representative in 2013. Corresponding changes to the original Council decision were to be enacted as needed by 2014 in order to bring the institutional reform process to a close before the new European Commission began their 2014-2019 term of office. Given the EEAS' difficult start and the above-mentioned issues, calls for comprehensive reform were quickly expressed. By December 2011, twelve foreign ministers had appealed to the High Representative through a joint letter making suggestions to improve the EEAS' operations – including the German foreign minister. For her part, the High Representative released an initial report on the status of the EEAS at the end of 2011.

7 | EU, European External Action Service (EEAS), *EEAS Review*, 29 Jul 2013, [http://eeas.eu/library/publications/2013/3/2013\\_eeas\\_review\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.eu/library/publications/2013/3/2013_eeas_review_en.pdf) (accessed 9 Aug 2013). To this must be added approximately 3,500 Commission officials which are working in the delegations.

8 | Balfour and Raik, n. 5, 38.

However, the real review will take place this year. In the process, the EEAS' efficiency, structures and its relationships to other institutional actors will be scrutinised. Relevant proposals for changes to be made for the Council Decision should be approved this autumn. This review will be conducted by the High Representative, although the European Parliament as well as the member states have contributed to the process from the start. In doing so, the foreign ministers of 14 member states<sup>9</sup> took a stand in February 2013 with a report initiated by the Germans. The European Parliament has presented its position in terms of the report developed by EPP MEP Elmar Brok and Social Democrat Roberto Gualtieri in April 2013. The High Representative submitted her own report on 29 July 2013.

The reports of the foreign ministers and the European Parliament shared some demands:

1. Both reports demand better coordination between the Commission and the EEAS, but also a stronger role for the EEAS in terms of long-term programme planning for the financial instruments used in European foreign policy. In addition, content management in terms of elaborating on strategies relating to specific regions should lie with the EEAS. The Council report also proposes regular meetings (on a monthly basis at the least) between the Commission and the EEAS.
2. Both reports agree on the need to reform internal structures, particularly in terms of the role of the Secretary-General and coordination among the various leadership bodies.
3. They also call for an increase in the delegation heads' authority and visibility, including as it relates to Commission staff, as well as the creation of a uniform financial cycle. Basically, member state embassies should work more closely with each other, e.g. by exchanging reports, administrative arrangements and joint initiatives.

9 | Foreign Ministries of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden, "Non paper. Strengthening the European External Action Service", 1 Feb 2013, [http://eurotradeunion.eu/documents/20130201\\_nonpaper.pdf](http://eurotradeunion.eu/documents/20130201_nonpaper.pdf) (accessed 26 Aug 2013).

4. Reforming the EEAS' crisis management structures in order to achieve more efficient planning and deployment of CSDP missions: The European Parliament has plans to create a crisis board that would incorporate all crisis management instruments.
5. Both reports mention the possibility that the EEAS could assume consular responsibilities for some member states. The EP and the small and medium-sized member states in particular are interested in this.

However, the reports also set their own priorities. The foreign ministers campaigned to transfer responsibility for European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to the EEAS and to strengthen its role in strategic and multi-year programme planning for development policy. In addition, the EEAS should play a greater role in communications with third countries and should, for example, take charge of the negotiations on the association and partnership agreements on behalf of the EU. Some countries, such as Sweden, are advocating a stronger position for the EEAS in policy conception relating to the EU's strategic partners. Additionally, the foreign ministers are calling for national diplomats to have an even stronger presence in the EEAS and that the one-third quota can be taken here to represent only a minimum.

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The European Parliament goes even further with its ideas. In order to unburden the High Representative, permanent political representatives should be appointed to take over the representative responsibilities of the High Representative. Further relief should also occur through a greater degree of inclusion of national foreign ministers. In addition, the EP is calling for improvement in the EEAS' political expertise, e.g. by establishing a political council within the EEAS.

The High Representative released her report on 29 July in which she echoes many of these proposals and which clearly identifies previous shortcomings. One key aspect is the improvement of the working relationship with the European Commission. First, meetings with the other Commissioners should take place more frequently and cooperation

should improve on a working level. The High Representative's authority over those EU Commissioners whose areas of responsibility also concern the European Union's external relations should increase in the medium-term.

Second, Ashton would like to further increase the EEAS' expertise and influence on policy formulation; in doing so the EEAS (and Ashton's successor) should gain a more significant role in the planning of development and European Neighbourhood policy. In addition, the EEAS would like to improve upon its expertise regarding the foreign dimensions of other political areas (energy security, environment, migration, suppression of terrorism, economics). The EEAS should also play a greater role in implementing sanctions and election monitoring missions. Ashton calls for the EEAS' planning capacities to be increased in order to be able to fulfil its core mission of formulating foreign policy strategies.



German soldiers under the symbol of the EU Naval Forces during Operation Atalanta: Rapid reaction and availability were the "raison d'être" of the CSDP. | Source: Rock Cohen ©①①.

A third key issue is the revision of the EU's crisis management structures. The report proposes that an integrative crisis reaction centre be established, which should be a combination of the Commission's and the EEAS' crisis units. The report calls for a dramatic revision of the rules for preparing CSDP operations. Fourth is the idea to appoint political representatives to relieve the burden

on the High Representative. The report proposes both the appointment of permanent representatives as well as representation based on formal agreements with foreign ministers, commissioners or high-ranking officials in the EEAS. Fifth, the EU delegations' external visibility and position should be strengthened. The report calls for an intensification of logistic cooperation and exchange of information with member state embassies. The report rather cautiously remarks on the EU's role in consular activities, e.g. consular protection; taking charge of such responsibilities must involve a corresponding increase in the EEAS' resources and staff.<sup>10</sup>

### ASSESSMENT AND PROJECTIONS

The EEAS will need another few years, if not decades, to reach its full potential. The widespread disappointment about the EEAS is attributable not least to some actors' exaggerated expectations. Occasionally, a downright quantum leap in the EU's capacity to act is expected, particularly with regard to crisis management. However, it would

be more appropriate to gauge the EEAS not only by the expectations formulated from the outset, but also by the situation that preceded it: Compared to the rotating Council Presidency, the EEAS now ensures greater

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continuity, e.g. in the case of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Given the sensibility of the political sphere, it can be seen as a success that no country has challenged the EEAS' existence. Most of the issues and the EEAS' lack of visibility do however present challenges in the medium to long-term.

Nevertheless, it is wise to conduct a comprehensive evaluation two and a half years on in order to free the successor to Catherine Ashton – who has announced that she will not serve another term – from the dead weight of an over-burdened office. In doing so, a distinction has to be made between which issues can be blamed on the EEAS' structural nature and which simply on its initial and transitional phases. Most experts agree that reforming the crisis management structures, increasing the EEAS' visibility and initiative functions, as well as improving cooperation with

other foreign policy actors should take precedence. Initial reactions to the review were positive.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it sends a clear signal: Despite its difficult start, the EEAS is ready to take on a long-term leading role in formulating and shaping European foreign policy. It remains to be seen how the demands made by the member states, but particularly by the Commission, will be accommodated.

The document's rather confident tone is also based on some of the EEAS' successes this year after a very bumpy start.

**Proposals being discussed in the current evaluation process seem reasonable, especially those concerning civilian and military crisis management.**

The proposals being discussed in the current evaluation process seem reasonable, especially those concerning civilian and military crisis management. In actual fact, speed and quick employability are the CSDP's *raison d'être*. Should the EU be unable to improve its capacity to act, the CSDP runs the risk of shrinking to a platform of only training missions and small rule of law missions and of completely disappearing from view in the medium-term.

Unburdening the office of the High Representative and delegating responsibilities to political representatives could further improve capacity to act. In addition, more extensive measures are occasionally required. The administration of consular duties through the delegations should be examined thoroughly. This would be an important step in increasing the EEAS' external visibility, but would also be an example of its specific added value, which could consequently relieve the pressure on smaller and medium-sized member states' diplomatic offices affected by cut-backs.<sup>12</sup> It would be wise for reforms of national diplomatic services to be effected essentially in coordination with the EEAS.

In addition, it is important that the next High Representative is a known figure on the European or international arena. Someone with well-respected foreign policy experience could better bring the EEAS to bear internationally and strengthen Europe's foreign policy profile. The High Representative should also submit his or her own initiatives

11 | See also Jan Techau, "At Long Last, a Sign of Leadership From Ashton", *Carnegie Europe*, 30 Jul 2013, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategicEurope/?fa=52524> (accessed 9 Aug 2013).

12 | Balfour and Raik, n. 5, 48.

more boldly<sup>13</sup> in cases where there is no completely stable consensus among the member states. In the short-term, this will inevitably lead to rejection, but without the proactive exercise of the office, the EU's visibility as an international actor will hardly be able to increase. Nevertheless, it would be foolhardy to expect that making a personnel change at the head of the EEAS alone could improve Europe's capacity to act or could disguise diverging geographic and topical priorities.

**Initiatives set up by a group of member states could become European initiatives with the EEAS' support.**

Experts and institutional representatives unanimously agree that ultimately the support by the Commission and the member states is critical for this institution to succeed. They should not view the EEAS as competition, but rather as a possible multiplier of their own influence. In doing so, initiatives set up by a group of member states could become European initiatives with the EEAS' support. Some even go so far as to say that the EEAS could present an opportunity for national foreign ministries to strengthen their own influence in particular member states.<sup>14</sup>

The member states' request to increase service opportunities for national diplomats and enable more long-term careers has been similarly embraced<sup>15</sup> because this could bolster the desired socialisation effects between officials and, in the medium-term, could lead to a convergence of European foreign policy thinking. However, in order to achieve this goal, the member states must send their best and most experienced diplomats to the EEAS and ensure that engaging with the EEAS does not represent a career break. On the one hand, close cooperation between the national foreign ministries and the EEAS and timely integration of the EEAS into the formulation of policy is important. On the other hand, the EEAS must also strive to consult with the member states regularly and, more

13 | Staffan Hamra, Thomas Raines and Richard Whitman, "A Diplomatic Entrepreneur. Making the Most of the European External Action Service", *Chatham House Report*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Dec 2011, 13, [http://chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/r1211\\_eeas.pdf](http://chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/r1211_eeas.pdf) (accessed 9 Aug 2013).

14 | Cf. also Almut Möller and Julian Rappold, "Deutschland und der Europäische Auswärtige Dienst – Perspektiven einer Europäisierung der Außenpolitik", *DGAP-Analyse* 12, Sep 2012.

15 | Balfour and Raik, n. 5.

importantly, in a timely manner, though this is no easy task given that there are 28 member states.

The national sense of responsibility towards the EEAS would increase if national parliaments were better integrated into the interactions with the EEAS. The suggestion to appoint political representatives for the High Representative who could, for example, speak to national parliaments once a year in order to promote the exchange of current foreign and security policy challenges is a step in this direction. However, it is not realistic to expect that the EEAS and the High Representative will be able to define the course of European foreign policy from now on. The member states are not willing to give up their foreign policy prerogatives. And there still seems to be no consensus in many capital cities regarding a long-term plan for how the EEAS should be utilised.

Given its incredibly diverse range of expertise, the EEAS has the potential to present innovative solutions and concepts that could demonstrate significant added value for all the member states.<sup>16</sup> To devise appropriate strategies, clarity regarding what interests European foreign policy consists of is necessary. Institutional representatives have reiterated the demand for the European security strategy from 2003, which defines the most important challenges and instruments for European foreign policy, to be updated.

In the medium-term, however, numerous experts have called for the role of the EEAS to exceed that of such a think tank if Europe truly wishes to outwardly appear to have a unified voice. For this purpose, the EU should increasingly seek unified representation in international organisations. The fear is that a poor (or simply a lack of) image of the EEAS and the High Representative may contribute negatively to the EU and its member states.

**The EEAS must develop into a foreign policy think tank if Europe truly wishes to outwardly appear to have a unified voice. For this purpose, the EU should increasingly seek unified representation in international organisations.**

Ultimately the belief that a stronger and more capable EEAS lies in the best interests of all member states prevails among experts. On the one hand, because it would enable a more efficient use of resources in terms of foreign and

16 | Hamra, Raines and Whitman, n. 13.

security policy; on the other, because the member states will lose importance and influence in third countries and international organisations if Europe's interests cannot be focussed.

The European External Action Service is in many ways a unique experiment; it unites foreign policy, military, humanitarian and development policy expertise under one roof. This mixture, along with the fact that the staff are bringing with them foreign policy traditions from 28 member states and the foreign policy expertise of the Commission and the Council, allow the EEAS to devise comprehensive foreign policy strategies for the current foreign policy challenges we are facing. These characteristics predestine the EEAS – in close cooperation with the 28 national foreign ministries – to find solutions to the central foreign policy challenges that will be faced in the coming decades.

Many of the EEAS' effects, particularly the socialisation effect, will only be noticeable in the medium-term. Likewise, it will take time for the national foreign ministries to acclimatise to the EEAS and to accept the possible lower visibility in certain countries in the medium-term. The EEAS' strength will critically depend on whether the member states truly want a common European foreign policy.