

## **BALANCE OF COMPETENCES FOREIGN POLICY REPORT: SEMINAR IN PARIS, 19 FEBRUARY 2013**

British Embassy Paris hosted an evidence gathering round-table with French think tanks on 19 February. The following is a summary record of key points made by participants during the discussion. As such it does not reflect BE Paris or FCO views.

### 1. The impact of the current economic climate on the EU's attractiveness

- The EU's incapacity to deal with the euro zone crisis had harmed its ability to act externally. The real question we needed to ask ourselves was : were we seeing the end of the EU as a model for others (viz countries in the east, Turkey)?
- China believed that if there was one European power to be dealt with it was Germany, not the EU or the UK or France.
- The EU needed to project its soft power better.
- There was economic benefit for the UK/Member States in acting through the EU on foreign policy questions.

### 2. The EU's foreign policy strategy

- The end of the rotating Presidency had resulted in a lack of drive in EU foreign policy.
- There was consensus that the EU lacked strategic direction in foreign policy. The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) had not provided this vision. The EU should develop a strategic concept like that developed for NATO in 2010.
- The European Security Strategy set out the EU's tools not its end goals. The Member States had not wanted to create a document that was legally binding, which decreased its value.
- The EU should create its own white paper to crystallise its strategy – it should conduct a strategic defence review. The December 2013 European Council focus on defence was welcome.
- The EU had no long term vision for the Mediterranean region. It was very reactive.
- The EU should launch a common project, such as common surveillance of its collective air space, to show that it could do more than simply discuss its problems.
- Member State (MS) 'cherry picking' hindered the EU's ability to reflect strategically.
- The EU's strategic paper on the Arab Spring did not offer a clear narrative to the countries of the region. As the EU could not offer enlargement as an incentive, it did not have much to offer.

### 3. How effective is the EEAS ?

- The EEAS was created in the midst of an economic crisis and was currently 'work in progress'.

- The EEAS suffered from a systemic contradiction: Member States had not wanted to create a real European diplomatic service to rival national diplomacies. The framework they had designed for the EEAS and their choice of HR/VP reflected this. There was little point therefore in criticizing the service. If it was not as effective as some might wish, the responsibility lay with Member States.
  - The EEAS had ‘forgotten’ about its CSDP dimension. It was important to remember that Catherine Ashton was the HR/VP for foreign affairs and defence.
  - The decision to give the EEAS responsibility for “foreign policy” but leave the “foreign policy tools” ie money with the Commission was a brake on effective action.
  - The EU’s MS did not speak with one voice about what they wanted from the EEAS. One example was the Eastern Partnership. Sweden and Poland were very supportive of this initiative and Poland, at least, would like to integrate all six partners into the EU. Other MS were more reticent. In reality, the MS did not really know what they wanted.
  - At the moment, any revision of the EEAS was likely to be bureaucratic rather than based on how the EU could become a better Foreign policy actor.
  - The external perception of the EEAS was that it had not been able to demonstrate its added value. If we wanted a credible European diplomacy the EEAS would need to prove that it was necessary.
  - Our current diplomatic systems abided by 19<sup>th</sup> century rules. The EEAS should enable the EU to adapt to 21<sup>st</sup> century demands, but it had shown an inability to address multidisciplinary problems.
4. How well does the EEAS communicate?
- The EEAS suffered from a gaping communication ‘deficit’. Six months after the EU had launched operation Atalanta, there was still no webpage explaining to EU citizens what it was for. The same could be said for Mali – there should be a webpage outlining the EEAS’ response. Diplomacy was not just about doing but also communicating.
  - The HR/VP should communicate the EEAS’ message/its responses to crises more effectively to the EU’s citizens.
  - The EU was the first aid donor in the world yet was invisible.
5. General questions relating to the EU’s external action
- The HR/VP was not managing to foster a common EU vision on foreign policy issues. She did not have the same influence as Javier Solana. The EEAS should create a serious Policy Planning Unit.
  - The EU did not have a coordinated external energy/migratory policy. We were divided over the issue of energy imports from Russia.
  - The EU needed to have an internal think about conditionality – if you looked at the ENP’s Eastern dimension, very few countries responded to the EU conditions. The Eastern Partnership’s building blocks needed to be reconsidered.
  - The EU should reconsider its relationship with NATO, which had worsened since 2004.

- There was no common EU culture – if you put a German and a Frenchman round a table, they would not have the same perception of what defence meant.
  - Another problem was development aid – the EU was unable to ‘plant its flag’ when it has delivered aid because MS protected their bilateral contributions. But this was something the EU could be better at in the future.
  - Most EU development projects on the ground were bogged down by bureaucracy – Commission financial control was slow/inefficient and there was little follow up once aid has been delivered.
  - There was a trend in Brussels at the moment to say we were in a post-Westphalian world, but most countries didn’t think this way. They still thought in terms of balance of forces.
6. Some positive points/suggestions for the future
- The EU had become a more significant ‘actor’ in International Organisations. Joint Actions on non-proliferation for example had been a success.
  - A positive example of EU action was the 2008 war in Georgia.
  - The creation of EU delegations was a step forwards.
  - The HR/VP’s efforts over the Iranian dossier were a positive example of how she/the EU could be useful when Member States were clear about what they wanted.
  - If the EU wanted to be a serious actor in Arab Spring countries it needed to respond to the desires of these populations. People were hungry and needed work. The EU was a considerable agricultural power and yet had done nothing effective on market access or mobility. This should be remedied.