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The European External Action Service two years on

Rosa Balfour, European Policy Centre, Brussels and Kristi Raik, Finnish Institute for International Affairs, Helsinki.

This evidence submitted here contributes to addressing questions 1, 4, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 16. It is partially based on the project 'The EEAS and national diplomacies' of the European Policy Centre and the Finnish Institute for International Affairs, run by the two authors and involving a pan-European network of researchers. During the first half of 2013 the project will be producing a number of publications.

1. Assessing how the EEAS performed during its first two years is no easy task. There is no benchmark against which to assess the early steps of a historically unique diplomatic body. What and whose agenda should provide the criteria against which to assess change, success, and failure? The fact that the EEAS was inaugurated at a time of great expectations was one of the reasons behind the very bad press it has received. Furthermore, the EEAS operated in a context of constraints due not just to the economic crisis but also to the reluctance of the member states to invest in the Service that they created.
2. Relations with the Commission have perhaps been the least successful area of the new Service. Rather than cleavages based on nationality due to the intake of diplomats and officials from the member states, the key dividing line was, especially during the first eighteen months of the EEAS, between the EEAS and the Commission. This had negative repercussions on a number of areas. First of all, a working culture within the EEAS has been slow to develop. Today, this remains an area for priority, to be addressed through the EEAS Review, training schemes and internal management of the Service. Secondly, it has severely hampered the development of more integrated and coherent policies where the EU can demonstrate an added value compared to member states' foreign policies. If the EU were capable of thinking and linking internal and external policies, the global dimension of internal areas of competence, it would greatly enhance Europe's ability to deal with cross-cutting challenges from migration, the management of global resources and public goods, and international diplomacy. Finally, one consequence has been that fears of 'competence creep', with both the member states and the Commission afraid of losing competences to the new body, have put everybody involved - supranational institutions, member states and the EEAS - in a defensive position, providing fertile ground for turf battles.

3. By 2012 some signs of improvement in inter-institutional cooperation were showing, though this evaluation varies according to the field addressed. EEAS officials cite the Balkans and enlargement as one area of good cooperation, but the officials working on the Balkans region were already doing so before the Lisbon Treaty in the Council and in the Commission. It is reported that the Commission and the EEAS coordinated with each other with regard to the development of the new initiatives to address changes in North Africa and the Middle East, through the creation of task forces mobilizing officials from different institutions for bilateral meetings with Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt.
4. But in other areas EEAS-Commission coordination remains poor and/or ad hoc. The development of a 'comprehensive approach' within the EEAS, for example, has met very negative responses from the Commission's directorates dealing with Development Cooperation and with Humanitarian assistance. On crisis management the EEAS spent much of 2011 restructuring internal offices to respond to crises, but it remains unclear how it is supposed to coordinate with the Commission, which manages the financial instruments. In other areas there is far more need for coordination and development of strategic thinking, including the external impact of internal policies (such as energy).
5. Areas of achievements, in operative terms if not in terms of impact on the ground, include EU sanction's policy, where EU member states were able to coordinate effectively in incrementally upgrading sanctions against Syria and Iran. The member states and much of the international community also appreciate the role the EEAS is playing in the talks with Iran, where the unity of the E3+3 group is appreciated notwithstanding its actual results. Other efforts at international cooperation too have been commended, such as the dialogue with 'new' actors such as the Arab League, the Organisation for the Islamic Conference, or initiatives to coordinate with other actors, such as the Cairo Group.
6. With respect to the role of the member states in EU foreign policy, intergovernmentalism has not been seriously challenged by any of the proposals stemming from the EEAS or the HR/VP, but the protagonism of the foreign ministers, after the cacophony during the initial period of the Arab Spring, and the competition among politicians to get a photo opportunity on Tahrir Square first has somewhat waned to the benefit of the HR/VP. It is reported that the member states have become more cooperative with the EEAS during 2012, but the real test will be seen in the degree of adaptation of the member states and their national diplomacies, and whether they restructure and re-strategise their priorities taking into account that many tasks could be more effectively and efficiently carried out by the EEAS.
7. National diplomacies have been slow in adapting to the new situation and, overall, have adopted a 'wait and see' position towards the EEAS. All emphasise the need for the EEAS to complement rather than substitute national foreign policy, with very little thought on how the two could reinforce each other in terms of strategies, capabilities and institutional structures. Most member states have cut their foreign policy budgets and structures since the creation of the EEAS, but member states have been slow to start considering the potential economies of scale to be gained through the EEAS, above all by making better use of its network of delegations. Some early experiences

of division of labour exercises, burden-sharing arrangements, and rationalization of services already exist, and there is much potential to do more.

8. The creation of a more coherent and integrated foreign policy has been more challenging in certain issues of key importance, such as representation in the United Nations or defence related matters, where most member states prefer to limit the EU's role to the minimum. Relations with the United States are a different kind of high priority where member states compete for attention of the White House and grudgingly accept the fact that Washington increasingly prefers to deal with Brussels rather than 27. In some other high-priority areas, EU backing or empowerment can be very important, but there is no question about the EU replacing national diplomacy (e.g. relations with Russia and eastern neighbourhood for the eastern member states). Not surprisingly, member states have a more relaxed attitude towards allowing a greater role for the EEAS in non-priority areas, above all geographically remote regions. Yet if the EU only moved forward on the marginal foreign policy issues, its level of ambition would be low and it could hardly have more than a marginal role as a global actor. It is the EU's role in key areas, such as in the neighbourhood, in relations with major powers and representation on key multilateral fora, that really determines whether the EU can have a stronger global voice.
9. Apart from high and low priorities, there are so-called 'declaratory priorities' that are formally high on the agenda, but where member states willingly shift the burden to the EU. This kind of 'offloading' can be observed with regard to value-based issues such as democracy and human rights. Here member states can converge (in so far as the so-called 'values' do not interfere with some key national interests), or can use the EU as a protective shield in those cases in which third parties may not appreciate the EU expressing its concern over such values.
10. From efficiency perspective, the EEAS is one among many opportunities and solutions for MFAs to 'do more with less', the other options being burden-sharing with partner countries, other national government agencies, non-governmental actors etc. In order to adjust their capacity for global action to a variety of demands of the state, citizens and businesses, MFAs need to engage different stakeholders and re-assess their functions. The EEAS has yet to establish its place in the changing configuration of actors. Unlike the other stakeholders and collaborators of MFAs, the EEAS actually has the potential to take over some of the core functions of diplomacy, in addition to its potential as an innovative policy entrepreneur operating across sectoral borders.
11. The locus of EEAS added value for national diplomacies lies in the 140 EU Delegations. EU delegations can offer significant political benefits thanks to common representation and outreach, access to local players, reporting and information sharing. They also entail the potential to rationalize European diplomacy and make it more cost-effective, allowing member states to focus national resources on key national priorities and to rely on the services of EU network elsewhere. Third countries now have a single interlocutor to discuss not just trade and aid, but also political relations, security, energy, natural resources, migration issues. As the importance of the

Delegations becomes evident to non-European interlocutors, this will feed back not just to headquarters in Brussels but also in the member states.

12. The early phase of upgrading the EU delegations has been relatively successful, and in most cases the member states accept the new coordinating role, even if there are important exceptions and variation between locations. EU coordination and a new representative role has been relatively easy to establish in less important and peripheral locations where member states have fewer political interests at play and where the status and rank of their diplomats is more modest and leaves more room for accepting leadership by EU representatives. The easiest cases from the viewpoint of MFAs' readiness to accept a leading role of EU delegations are locations where one's own country has no representation. These delegations provide access and information and can be used as extensions for the conduct of national foreign policy. At the same time, they do not compete with national representations and fit neatly with the principle of EEAS complementarity. But these cases are not limited to peripheral countries. The EU Delegation in Syria was deliberately kept open while member states were closing theirs precisely to have an important antenna in the country, and is reported to be working very well.
13. The most difficult test for the ability of EU delegations to bring value added is posed by the key locations where member states are not likely to give up national representations any time soon, if ever, but where concerted action of the EU is all the more important for Europe's ability to maintain global relevance and impact. In international organisations the EU in most cases continues to be represented by the rotating Presidency – a step back compared to the Lisbon Treaty. In Washington, Beijing, New Delhi, Moscow, Cairo, and Tokyo it is most challenging for the EEAS to be more than the 28th member state. It is also in these locations, where each MS prioritises national representation and reporting, that the coordinating role of the EEAS is most vital.
14. Staffing in the Delegations has now reached the aim of including one third coming from national diplomacies. This has considerably enriched the knowledge, skills and working culture of the Delegations, making them better equipped to become the first interface with third countries. In a few Delegations there are national military attachés seconded, such as in New York and in Pakistan. The larger Delegations are also better staffed with officials dealing with cross-cutting issues.
15. The EEAS has been too slow in involving the Delegations in policy-shaping. Some member states are willing to give the delegations more leeway and appreciate policy proposals made by the delegations on their own initiative, but others are more cautious and stress the role of Brussels and national capitals in defining policy guidelines. Faced with such contradictory expectations, the delegations have to gradually build up their role, win trust among the member states and beware of national sensitivities, while at the same time spending much time in their new coordinating role.
16. There is considerable interest among the member states and in the EEAS in co-location arrangements, notably joint embassy premises and the possibility to place national 'laptop diplomats' in the premises of EU delegations. For example, an embassy of Luxembourg has been established in the premises of the EU delegation to

Ethiopia, and the EEAS and Spain have just agreed on the establishment of the embassy of Spain in the premises of EU Delegation to Yemen.

17. Many member states have complained of a lack of transparency and information-sharing as a major problem that has undermined trust in the EEAS and fed suspicions about the largest three member states controlling the agenda. There have been problems with both the scope and timing of EEAS information-sharing. During the early phase of the EEAS, member states were receiving less information on CFSP-related matters than in pre-Lisbon times. In particular, many member states considered reporting on meetings of the HR with external partners to be insufficient. As for timing, the practice of distributing relevant documents very close to the meetings (FAC in particular) was broadly criticised by the member states. Information-sharing in the other direction, from European capitals to the EEAS has been even more difficult. On the positive side, informal contacts between the EEAS and MFAs on the lower level have been working reasonably well: member states' diplomats are fairly satisfied with the responsiveness and openness of their colleagues in the EEAS when it comes to informal consultations; this goes for both the headquarters in Brussels and EU delegations abroad.
18. On the local level, a new information sharing system, ACID, introduced recently among embassies and EU Delegations on the ground, is helping to bring the local diplomatic networks together, providing concrete added value to all member states. It is important to get the system to full operation globally; this requires additional efforts also from the member states.
19. Rotation of staff between national diplomacies and the EEAS is a key element of the service and one of the main instruments for ensuring a sense of ownership and trust among member states. It can balance the intergovernmentalism of common foreign policy, which is oriented to defend national interests, by strengthening a European mind-set and habit to consider broader European interest among national diplomats, despite the variety of national backgrounds, as the experience of CFSP institutions such as the Political and Security Committee or the former Policy Unit of the Council Secretariat show. The EEAS has the potential to function as an incubator of European diplomats that complements these processes of socialisation.
20. As of June 2012, the share of national diplomats in the EEAS had reached 27%. So, despite tensions around the recruitment process, the service is close to reaching the one-third target and completing the staffing marathon, with a reasonably balanced representation of each member state. The next challenges are to integrate the staff from different backgrounds into a common culture and make the rotation work so that there is regular and smooth circulation between Brussels and national capitals. It would advance the cross-fertilisation of European diplomats if the permanent staff of the EEAS could also be rotated to national MFAs, and not just vice versa.
21. Where the EEAS has succeeded is attracting highly qualified and motivated staff from national diplomacies. There has been tight competition for posts in the EEAS, indicating a high level of interest among the member states. Promoting their diplomats to the EEAS has been a priority for most MFAs, although there is variation as to the intensity of encouraging staff to seek positions in the service. In spite of the well-

known troubles of the transition phase and low morale among EEAS staff, diplomats posted to the service tend to be highly motivated to make the new structures work smoothly and deliver.

22. In order to utilise the potential of the highly motivated and professional staff, to draw people from different backgrounds together and maintain the attractiveness of the service, an investment in creating an esprit de corps is essential. Variety of experiences and perspectives of its staff is an asset of the EEAS, but these need to be brought together into a joint pool of skills and a sense of community. A shared working culture should also be consciously reinforced. Common training is necessary with a view to all of these goals and needs to be designed in line with the unique nature of the EEAS. Apart from traditional diplomatic skills such as reporting, negotiation and cross-cultural interaction, a special consideration of Europe's place in the world and a European perspective on global problems needs to be nurtured. At the same time, EEAS staff needs to be able to encounter three different kinds of audiences: not only those external to the EU, but also those of the member states who may view the EU and its foreign policy with suspicion, and finally those internal to the EU machinery where inter-institutional rivalry is a constant threat to the pursuit of common goals. In addition to passing on specific knowledge and skills, training always has the function of fostering personal ties and networks that are invaluable in later careers. Training should not be limited to skills' transfer and improvement, but should aim to create more opportunities for EEAS staff to work with European diplomats. Encouraging joint participation of EEAS and national diplomats in existing training schemes could also help foster a common diplomatic culture.
23. A well-functioning system of rotation between the EEAS and MFAs is one way (though not sufficient) to strengthen such a link and ease the tensions between national and EU foreign policies. It would be in the interest of MFAs and the EEAS alike to make it a norm across the EU that the best and brightest European diplomats serve in the EEAS at some point of their careers. The MFAs need to make an effort to ensure smooth return of their people from the EEAS and adequate acknowledgement of the EEAS experience. Once the national diplomats return home, MFAs have much to gain from their experience in the EEAS and inside knowledge of the EU.
24. Areas for improvement: coordination and synergies with the Commission needs to be one of the top priorities, as well as ensuring the full participation of member states through better consultation and information-sharing. These are political issues of great consequence. Further concrete priority areas should include: improving political reporting from Delegations, strengthening the role of Delegations in shaping policy, creating a deputy/deputies for the HR (and clearer competences/role for the top management), and developing a common working culture inside the EEAS.