

More Action, Better Service

How to Strengthen the European External Action Service

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Summary

The European Union is currently going through one of the most difficult periods of its existence. While the focus is on the efforts to save the euro, its foreign policy arm, the European External Action Service (EEAS), is struggling as well. Originally conceived in a more optimistic era, the foreign policy reforms of the Treaty of Lisbon are being implemented against this backdrop of crisis and loss of confidence. There is a risk that under these conditions, implementation will fall short of the full potential of the Lisbon reforms. Roughly one year after its establishment, the EEAS still suffers from a number of design flaws. It has an insufficient resource base and there is a lack of genuine buy-in on the parts of both the member states and the European Commission. These flaws can be overcome, however, if corrective action is taken:

- **Enhance the buy-in of member states:** For the EEAS to grow into a dynamic leader of European foreign policy, member states must trust it more and support it more actively. In order to achieve this, the high representative should promote the systematic involvement of the member states' diplomacies in the work of the EEAS, through increased tasking of foreign ministers with European missions, delegation-embassy teamwork, information sharing, and a supporting role for the EU delegations in the area of consular protection.
- **Strengthen the coherence of external action:** Expectations that the Lisbon Treaty would narrow the gap between classical diplomacy and the external competencies of the European Commission in areas such as trade, development, energy, and the environment have not materialized. Both the Commission and the high representative need to take action in order to ensure that the various instruments of external policy can become part of a comprehensive and coherent strategy.
- **Set clear priorities:** The EEAS has a lot on its plate, and without strong leadership and direction, much of its activity turns into empty words and sterile rituals. The high

representative must take a stronger lead in setting priorities, in giving strategic direction, in streamlining the political dialogue with international partners, and in building a record of concrete policy successes through well-targeted personal engagement.

- **Improve institutional capacity:** Today, there are probably fewer officials working on European foreign policy than before the Lisbon Treaty. The EEAS needs more manpower, better integration of its diverse components, and improved recruitment and training practices. The chain of command and the procedures should be reviewed to allow the EEAS to respond more rapidly to developments.

The foreign policy provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon represent the most ambitious reform effort in European foreign policy—ever. By taking action in these areas, the EU can begin to overcome some of the flaws in the system and make the vision of Lisbon a reality.

The foreign policy provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon represent the most ambitious reform effort in European foreign policy, ever. They were originally drafted at a time of confidence and optimism regarding the future of the European Union (EU), during the Convention on the Future of Europe, which put forward a draft constitution in 2003. But that constitution was rejected, so these foreign policy reforms are only now being implemented in a radically different political environment. The deep financial and economic crisis, the uncertainty regarding the future of the euro, and indeed of European integration, weigh heavily on the foreign policy of the EU. Under these difficult circumstances, there is a real risk that the implementation of the treaty provisions will fall well short of the full potential of the Lisbon reforms. At the present time the new foreign policy arrangements suffer from a number of design flaws, from an insufficient resource base, and from a lack of genuine buy-in, both from the member states and from the European Commission. However, these flaws can be overcome if they are properly recognized and if corrective actions are taken.

Enhance the Buy-in of the Member States

Nothing is more important for the success of the European External Action Service (EEAS) than a strong sense of ownership on the part of the EU member states. Different from instance from the Commission's role in commercial policy, the EEAS does not operate on the basis of exclusive competencies. The member states remain in the driver's seat. The extent to which they give the new service a role and even follow its leadership will depend wholly on the degree of trust it enjoys.

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In the previous system, the country holding the rotating EU presidency led the EU's foreign policy efforts for a period of six months. This system had great disadvantages. Priorities could change suddenly, as national interests influenced the agenda. The rotation hindered the buildup of know-how and the development of personal relations with the leaders of partner countries. It also made effective crisis management very difficult.

However, the old system had a positive side. As the country holding the presidency was in charge of all aspects of EU work, it offered a more coherent chain of command than the complex post-Lisbon arrangements.¹ Presidencies also brought to the table a lot of enthusiasm and fresh energy and generally worked with the member states collegially. As all ministers and diplomats knew it would eventually be their turn, they felt a certain basic solidarity with the presidency and generally supported it.

The EEAS has the great virtue of continuity, which over time should also ensure greater professionalism and effectiveness. However, the new setup makes it more difficult to ensure the vital buy-in of the member states. Sometimes member states' diplomats regard the new service not as their own instrument but as another Brussels bureaucracy and even as a potential rival. There is a sense that an EEAS that becomes prominent and successful would eventually become a threat to the foreign ministries of the member states.

The high representative and the member states should address this problem head-on by promoting the systematic involvement of the member states' diplomacies in the work of the EEAS. They would thus make clear that implementing the Lisbon reforms is not a zero-sum game but a win-win proposition, from which both the new entity and the member states would draw considerable benefits. If member states were given more responsibility and shared more of the burden for the EU's foreign policy activities, they would develop a sense of ownership of the EEAS. They would also gain additional information and influence in EU decisions. The EEAS for its part would greatly benefit from "leveraging" its limited manpower (there are currently 3,200 employees, including contract agents and local staff) with the far greater diplomatic resources of the member states (altogether, more than 50,000 people).

Tasking the Foreign Ministers

The drafters of the Lisbon Treaty gave the high representative three full-time jobs (high representative, vice president of the European Commission, and president of the Foreign Affairs Council) without providing for political-level deputies. The "multi-hatted" high representative is obviously unable to attend all the meetings in which a high-level EU presence is required. Whenever she

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goes to one international venue, she misses out on a number of others, and is criticized for her absence.

The issue of the political-level deputies should be eventually revisited.² In the meantime, Catherine Ashton should rely even more than she already does on the support of EU foreign ministers. So far she has at times delegated attendance at international meetings to a minister of a member state, usually the foreign minister of the rotating presidency. This concept could be used more systematically and not just at multilateral meetings but also for visits to partner countries or crisis regions. This “tasking” of her colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Council could reduce their tendency to go off on such missions on their own with insufficient prior coordination. In order to ensure that the national interests of the particular minister do not interfere with the EU agenda, she could in special situations send more than one minister, include EEAS officials in the delegation, and clear the key messages in advance of the visit.

Teamwork Between EU Delegations and Embassies

Member states’ diplomatic services could also be more directly involved in the actual conduct of EU foreign policy to enhance buy-in. In some multilateral fora (such as the United Nations and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) there is already a fairly developed division of labor among EU partners. Individual member states take the lead in negotiating particular issues, all, of course, within the framework of continuing consultations among the 27. There is no reason why this model cannot be applied between EU delegations and member states’ embassies in third countries as well, where the workload is heavy and the capacity of the EU delegation limited.

The regular consultations among the EU heads of mission, which are now chaired by the head of the EU delegation, would be the appropriate forum to manage such arrangements. Ideally, EU delegations and the missions of member states should over time develop into a cohesive EU team, possibly also sharing infrastructure and other resources.

Sharing of Information

A more systematic exchange of information would be mutually beneficial to EU institutions as well as to member states. As EU delegations gain importance and access as interlocutors of the host country governments, they should be prepared to share their insights with the diplomatic missions of member states. Conversely, national diplomatic and intelligence reporting can be a valuable resource for the EEAS. At present, EU embassies report about the same local developments separately to their respective capitals. This is not a good use of

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scarce resources. Systematic “pooling and sharing” of reporting and analysis would clearly be in everyone’s interest.

Some sharing of information between EU delegations and the embassies of member states takes place already but so far in a relatively unsystematic and limited manner. There are a few barriers to the free flow of information, such as some genuine concerns about confidentiality. A sense of rivalry and lack of trust can also play an inhibiting role. There is clearly a need for solid procedures, secure communications, and concrete commitments to ensure reciprocity. These issues should be addressed in a forthright way as part of a substantive dialogue between the EEAS and member states.

This information from EU delegations should also reach member states not represented in the country concerned. Moreover, the EU delegations should become regular service providers for such countries. This could include providing briefings and support for visiting delegations. All of this would contribute to an increased sense of ownership of policy among member states.

Cooperation in Crisis Management

Political crisis management is another area where much more burden sharing between the EEAS and member states could take place. When the EU confronts a serious foreign policy challenge, such as the uprisings in Arab states in spring 2011, there should be a better way to mobilize rapidly the regional influence and expertise of member states. The high representative should be able to call on EU political leaders to use their personal contacts with actors in the crisis. National experts could be recruited into the EEAS for short-term assignments, deployed in Brussels and in EU delegations. The concept of “crisis management task forces” could offer an appropriate framework for creating such ad hoc “surge capacity” of European diplomacy. Logistic and financial resources should be made available to support such mobilization efforts.

EU Delegations and Consular Protection

There is a strong case for using the EEAS to support the consular protection of EU citizens. In the age of globalization, Europeans travel all over the world, including to the most dangerous places. Most EU countries have rather small consular networks and find it increasingly difficult to ensure consular support for their citizens. Using the extensive network of EU delegations in a supporting role (the primary responsibility would stay with member states) would constitute a genuine added value of the EEAS. Such a role would also be highly visible and help secure public support for and buy-in to the EEAS.

There has not been much success on this front in the past. Due to the resistance of a few member states, the issue did not find a satisfactory solution in the negotiations on establishing the EEAS. According to Article 5(10) of the European Council Decision that created the EEAS, delegations can on request provide such consular protection on a “resource-neutral basis.” As it is hard to envisage a meaningful service that costs nothing, little can be expected from this provision. It is therefore to be hoped that the EEAS review in 2013 will revisit this issue, and that the common sense of doing more together in this area will eventually prevail.

Strengthening the Share of Member States Diplomats

Finally, according to the Council’s decision, member states’ diplomats should make up one-third of the staff of the EEAS by 2013. This is, of course, yet another important way to ensure a sense of ownership of the 27. Some progress has been achieved. Particularly in the senior management and among the heads of delegations member states are already well represented. Nonetheless, as only a few additional posts will be created, it will take a major effort by the high representative to reach this target within the agreed time frame.

Recommendations

- Regular tasking of ministers to undertake missions and to participate in international events on behalf of the high representative
- Systematic burden-sharing arrangements between EU delegations and member states’ missions both in multilateral institutions and in bilateral postings with the sharing of infrastructure and pooling of assets where possible
- Enhanced sharing of reporting and other information
- EU delegations acting as service providers for member states not represented in the respective countries, supplying briefings and supporting visiting delegations
- Development of crisis management task forces involving EEAS officials, other EU institutions, and member states, both on political and expert levels (“EU surge capacity”)
- Revisiting the issue of the delegations’ role in providing consular protection to EU citizens at the 2013 EEAS review
- Continued efforts to reach the one-third share of member state diplomats, particularly in the headquarters where there still is a serious shortfall

Strengthening Coherence of External Action

Climate change, migration, energy security, and terrorism are probably on most Europeans' lists of top challenges for the next ten years. A strengthened European foreign policy would need the ability to effectively integrate the instruments to deal with these and other global challenges into a coherent overall approach. In spite of sometimes claiming the contrary, the EU currently does not live up to this ambition. The competencies for dealing with key international problems are subject to different legal procedures and are dealt with in different bodies.

The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) handles traditional diplomacy and crisis management on the basis of the intergovernmental approach, which means that the Council's role is dominant and those of the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court are weak. The community method, implying a strong role for the Commission, the Parliament, and the Court, prevails in the areas of trade, development, and enlargement as well as regarding external aspects such as justice and home affairs, environment, and energy. The member states also retain important competencies in a number of these areas.

Effective coordination among these different aspects of the EU's external relations has so far been elusive. One major reason for this state of affairs was the antagonistic mindset of the Commission and of member states. Each wanted to protect its own areas of influence. The Commission feared that its external relations competencies would be contaminated by the intergovernmental approach of the CFSP. And member states were concerned that the Commission would interfere in traditional intergovernmental policies, particularly in the areas of security and defense.

The Lisbon Treaty has done little to harmonize the divergent legal and procedural approaches to handling international issues in the EU. It has, however, locked the various dimensions of external relations together in a new institutional structure designed to enforce greater coordination and coherence. One key element of this is the assignment of multiple roles to the high representative—Ashton's job combines the functions of high representative with those of a vice president of the Commission for External Relations. As vice president of the European Commission, Catherine Ashton chairs the meetings of the other commissioners dealing with external relations (RELEX). This was supposed to reinforce her coordinating role when it comes to international issues outside the scope of the CFSP.

This arrangement was based on the assumption that coordination between the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Commission's external

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competencies would be easier if the same person sits atop of both hierarchies. However, Catherine Ashton is not truly at the top in the Commission. In the process of defining the powers of the EEAS, her boss, Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso, took an essentially defensive line. The Commission worked toward limiting the scope and competencies of the new service, protected its own powers, and in some areas even built firewalls between itself and the EEAS. A cynic might say that the Commission has shared with the EEAS its more problematic features like bureaucracy and rigid procedures but not its real assets, namely competencies and money.

One crucial decision was the choice of the instrument of an “inter-institutional service” as the legal basis for the EEAS. This denied the service any executive power over its own budget, making it wholly dependent on the Commission in the implementation of its policies.

A major battle concerned the role of the EEAS in the area of development. While the EEAS was eventually granted a role in programming, this is to be done under the authority of the commissioner for development. The Commission thus succeeded in protecting its final say in the area of development policy. A key component of the EU’s relations with the majority of countries in the South, therefore, remains largely independent from foreign policy.

Catherine Ashton responded to the Commission’s restrictive approach by focusing on her role as high representative and on the CFSP and crisis management issues rather than on her function as vice president of the Commission. She hardly ever chairs meetings of the RELEX commissioners.

After a year of the functioning of the new system, few of the expected gains in coherence have materialized. Some progress toward using the various external policy instruments in a more integrated manner has been achieved in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, which seeks to develop links between the EU and countries to the EU’s east and south. By its nature, that policy requires a crosscutting methodology. In the EU’s response to the Arab Spring, the task forces set up by the high representative have proven useful in promoting a comprehensive approach to that issue. The current revision of the external action instruments for the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework should also help to ensure that the EU’s foreign policy interests are better taken into account in the future. So far, these positive developments are exceptions to the rule, however. For the most part the various components of external relations continue to lead their separate lives instead of becoming part of a unified strategy.

Some key elements of the EU’s external relations, such as trade and, in particular, the external aspects of environmental policies (such as climate change) or of justice and home affairs (migration) as well as energy policy, were

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never meant to fall within the scope of the EEAS. Nonetheless, they constitute crucial elements of the broader international agenda and are important subjects of regional and global multilateral cooperation.

In this regard the post-Lisbon arrangements actually represent a step backward. Previously, the Commission's former Directorate General for External Relations, which was merged into the EEAS, maintained a limited capacity to deal with the external dimension of the internal community policies, such as energy and the environment. However, these experts have not been transferred to the EEAS; they remained in the Commission. The gap between foreign policy in a narrow sense and Community competencies has thus widened. The EU finds it even more difficult than before to integrate the various components into a coherent strategy.

While taking a restrictive approach to the EEAS, the Commission—somewhat paradoxically—was at the same time very successful in ensuring that the great majority of management positions in the new service were given to Commission officials. Thus, in terms of expertise and familiarity with the Commission's procedures, there is in theory a genuine potential for a more integrated approach. However, due to narrow institutional interests, that opportunity is not fully exploited.

Of course, the Commission is not the only “turf minded” actor hindering the emergence of a more coherent and unified external policy. Some individual member states show similar reluctance. During the summer and autumn of 2011, the United Kingdom blocked a large number of statements in international organizations on the grounds that such statements could not be made “on behalf of the EU” if aspects relating to the national competencies of member states were concerned. Nonetheless, the Commission's insufficient engagement for the development of a credible EEAS is particularly worrisome. If the EEAS remains restricted primarily to the CFSP it will represent hardly any progress over the pre-Lisbon system. Given the increasing linkages between the various aspects of external relations, the EU urgently needs a more coherent approach.

A crucial role in ensuring future coherence of external relations can be played from the bottom up by the EU delegations in third countries. With their focus on a particular country, the delegations should be able to develop a comprehensive vision of the EU's bilateral relationships that brings together community and intergovernmental elements. Through reporting and through the local coordination function of the head of delegation, this comprehensive approach can also be fed into the Brussels policy process.

Unfortunately, the current makeup of the delegations makes this task rather difficult. Only the delegation heads and the political departments are part of the EEAS. Outside of that, the delegations are comprised of officials from different

parts of the Commission services, such as trade and development experts. As the instructions and reporting lines remain separate, the Brussels divisions persist on the level of the delegations and hinder the emergence of a truly coherent approach. While local team spirit and the leadership quality of the head of delegation can sometimes compensate for these handicaps, efforts to integrate the delegations better would make them more effective instruments of EU foreign policy.

It has to be admitted that the objective of enhancing member-state ownership and that of strengthening the support of the Commission are not easy to reconcile. An EEAS that is closer to the member states might find it more difficult to develop a strong relationship with the Commission, which prides itself on its independence. Conversely, if the member states perceive a Commission “takeover” of the EEAS, they will distance themselves further. Nonetheless, both aforementioned objectives have to be pursued actively and in a balanced manner. A “stand-alone” EEAS would be largely irrelevant, but if it manages to link its two sets of stakeholders closely together, the EU will have taken a major step forward.

Recommendations

- Similar to the approach taken in the response to the Arab Spring, the high representative and the Commission should submit joint papers to promote coherent EU policies for different regions.
- The current revision of the external action instruments for the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework should be used to ensure that foreign policy and security aspects are better taken into account in the future.
- The EEAS review of 2013 should address coordination regarding external competencies as a matter of priority, in particular as regards global challenges. The capacity of the EEAS on these questions should be increased.
- Systematic and regular consultation between the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission, and the high representative should be ensured.
- Coordination among RELEX commissioners under the leadership of the high representative/vice president of the Commission should be revived.
- Steps should be taken to better integrate the EEAS and Commission elements of the EU delegations.

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Agenda Setting and Leadership

The process of making foreign policy in Brussels resembles an enormous machine. More than twenty working groups on geographic and thematic topics report to the Political and Security Committee and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. Monthly meetings of the foreign ministers are held, along with a plethora of regular dialogue meetings with international partners on various levels (the high representative has more than 80 such commitments a year). All of this, combined with the daily need to react to unfolding events, produces a steady stream of declarations, demarches, conclusions, and press statements. Without strong leadership at the center, much of this activity turns into empty words and sterile rituals. This agenda- and priority-setting role had been the core task of the EU's presidency, which was rarely very good at it. Now, according to the Lisbon Treaty, this function has been transferred to the high representative and the EEAS.

Catherine Ashton has proven to be an efficient chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Council. She handles the debates well and is good at arriving at agreeable conclusions. However, in terms of agenda setting and overall leadership of EU foreign policy, there are considerable deficits. This is unsurprising given the newness of the post-Lisbon arrangements and the difficult political context. However, it will be one of the main benchmarks against which the high representative and the EEAS will be judged.

What is needed most of all is a more focused approach. Ten years ago the EU foreign ministers discussed a range of issues, but most of the substantive debates concerned only two policy areas: the Balkans and the Middle East. In the meantime, the agenda has become much more crowded and truly globalized. Yet, the capacity to produce real foreign policy results (rather than just press declarations) has not grown at the same rate. Consequently, the EU's response to many foreign policy challenges remains unconvincing. There is a real need to concentrate attention and resources on policy issues where the EU can make a real difference. The high representative needs to take a clearer lead in setting the agenda. She and the EEAS should be more proactive in shaping policies and in proposing concrete outcomes. The debates in the Foreign Affairs Council should be prepared more systematically, particularly through option and decision papers.

Eight years have passed since the EU drew up its European Security Strategy, which offered a broad vision of the security environment of the EU and set out some principles of a response to these challenges. While the paper was reviewed and updated in 2008, it would seem useful in view of the important external developments and the internal restructuring of the EU's foreign policy machinery that have taken place in the meantime to initiate the elaboration of a new strategic concept. This would be a good way to give the EEAS a coherent conceptual framework and a sense of strategic direction.

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In the post-Lisbon era, in which the leadership in Brussels remains stable for a number of years, there seems to be a good case for a far-reaching streamlining of the mechanisms of political dialogue. The cumbersome system of regular dialogue meetings with international partners, which absorbs a great part of the EU's foreign policy capacity, was developed to suit the needs of the rotating presidency.³ Every member state wanted its share of summits and ministerial meetings at which their ministers could rub shoulders with assorted world leaders. Such meetings are sometimes useful to develop and to energize a bilateral relationship, but frequently they have turned into expensive and empty rituals. Of course, there should still be summits and ministerial meetings, but they should take place when needed and not according to a rigid calendar. The EU should develop a more informal, flexible, and operational methodology for engaging key international partners.

In parallel to the official leadership of EU foreign policy there exists—at times more, at times less visibly—another type of leadership, which is that of the big member states. As they own by far the greatest part of the EU's diplomatic, economic, and military assets, they naturally also wish to play a prominent role in EU foreign policy.

Attempts to set up some kind of informal “directorate” of the big countries (for example, then UK prime minister Tony Blair's invitation to German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, French president Jacques Chirac, and French prime minister Lionel Jospin for “dinner” in London on Afghanistan in 2001) usually met with a forceful, negative response from those who were excluded. From the point of view of the smaller member states, a stronger European foreign policy is not worth having if the big countries hijack it.

This does not mean that a lead role for the bigger countries will not be accepted if it is handled in a more tactful manner. Whereas in a community of six member states decisions could be prepared in plenary discussions, this is clearly no longer the case in an EU with 27 members. On most important issues, some (usually) discreet and informal consultations take place in which primarily the big member states participate. Most of these groupings remain in the background, but some, such as the German/French/UK group on Iran, come into the open. The smaller states do not welcome this caucusing among the big but tolerate it as long as certain ground rules are observed: the interests of member states particularly concerned about the issue in question have to be taken into account and sufficient time has to be given to discussions among the 27 before a decision is taken.

Will the Lisbon Treaty weaken or strengthen the role of the big member states in shaping European foreign policy? Traditionally, the rotating presidency (when it

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was not held by one of the big countries) served as a kind of counterweight, as it alone had the legitimacy to speak and act on behalf of the EU. With the entry into force of the new treaty, this constraint on “directorate” tendencies has been lost. Now, as mere “officials,” the high representative, but also the president of the European Council will find it more difficult to resist the pressure of big countries.

Naturally, the high representative has to work closely with the countries having the greatest diplomatic resources. On some issues she can provide a link between the smaller circle and the work of the EU as such. At the same time she needs to insist that the basic rules of inclusiveness and transparency are observed and that all member states remain actively involved. It will be essential to strike the right balance. If the big EU member states are perceived to take too much of a lead, this will alienate the smaller countries and reduce their support. Equally problematic would be an underinvestment by the bigger states in the CFSP in general and in the EEAS in particular. If cooperation and political coordination between the main political actors in Europe takes place outside the common European structures, the CFSP would rapidly lose its relevance.

There is no better way for the high representative to strengthen her authority as a leader of EU foreign policy than to build up a record of concrete successes. Such achievements require a great deal of sustained effort. While a regular delegation of tasks to both foreign ministers and commissioners would help reduce the workload, with all of her commitments, the high representative will only be able to devote the necessary level of personal engagement to a limited number of issues. The selection of such issues should therefore be made with great care. She is more likely to achieve results where the EU already has some leverage, such as in the Balkans and in the European neighborhood, than on distant continents or in relations with strategic partners. Catherine Ashton’s successes in starting a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, in avoiding a referendum on the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina, or in reenergizing the work of the Middle East Quartet are all cases in point.

Now that the priority task of establishing the EEAS is fairly advanced (even though a great deal remains to be done) there should be more time available for this type of work. One of the EEAS’s priorities should be identifying such potential issues on which well-timed personal engagement from the high representative could be decisive for success.

Recommendations

- More effective and restrictive agenda management allowing the Foreign Affairs Council and the EEAS to focus on policy areas where the EU can provide real added value

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- More use of planning and option papers prepared by the EEAS
- Elaboration of a new European Foreign Policy Strategy
- Radical streamlining of political dialogue mechanism, replacing fixed regularity with a needs-based approach
- High representative to play linking and balancing role between bigger member states and the rest of the 27
- Stronger focus on potential deliverables for personal political engagement of the high representative

Enhancing Institutional Capacity

Two years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty there are probably fewer officials working on European foreign policy than before. The new service brought together the relevant departments from the Commission and the Council Secretariat. It also includes the heads, deputy heads, and the political departments of the EU delegations. In addition, about 120 new posts have been created. Altogether the EEAS currently comprises roughly 3,200 staff. This compares to about 12,000 people working in the French and 3,700 in the Dutch foreign services.

What is missing, compared to the pre-Lisbon era, is the considerable manpower that the rotating presidency used to deploy. In the old system, the foreign ministry holding the presidency not only mobilized most of its resources but often also recruited additional personnel. Doing more with less is a good slogan in this time of austerity, but there is a risk that the gap between the expectations regarding the new service and what it can really deliver will become too wide.

The problem starts at the very top. Appointing two political-level deputies to the high representative would alleviate the problem of overburdening the EU's foreign policy chief. Ideally, they should be able to represent the high representative/vice president in all her functions. Alternatively, one deputy (chosen from the circles of current and former foreign ministers) could assist in the roles of high representative and president of the Foreign Affairs Council while one commissioner could be chosen to help in the coordination of external relations.

Size matters in foreign policy. In order to be taken seriously by outside partners and by the foreign ministries of member states, the EEAS teams working on a particular subject need to have a critical mass. This is currently the case on some topics, such as the Balkans or the Middle East, but not on many others. As long as the relevant teams in London, Paris, or Berlin are three or four times the

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size of the respective EEAS capacity, the new service will not be a real player. A moderate increase in the size of the EEAS staff over the coming years will be essential to strengthen the credibility of the service. This should also involve providing budgetary resources to allow for the hiring of contractual agents that would enhance the flexibility of the service.

Part of the additional manpower should also benefit the political departments of the EU delegations. The new political role that the EU delegations inherited from the presidency is clearly one of the most promising innovations of the Lisbon Treaty. With their comprehensive mandate including both the traditional trade and development components as well as the political and security aspects, the EU ambassadors can become influential interlocutors of the local government. Through their role in coordinating the EU heads of missions they can also play a crucial part in enhancing EU coherence. This positive effect of the Lisbon arrangement is already in evidence in many places. However, the political departments of the delegations frequently lack the necessary minimum strength to unlock this positive potential of the delegations. The dearth of expertise on security issues is another serious deficit in most delegations that needs to be addressed.

In the course of the 2013 EEAS review, the organizational structure of the service should be revisited. The division of work among the members of the managing board, which oversees the work of the EEAS, should be made clearer. The crisis management units, which at the present stage appear “semi-detached,” should be better integrated with the rest of the service. The process for the clearing of briefs, declarations, and demarches is time-consuming and should be made easier and faster.

A key criterion for the review should be to enhance the reactivity of the EEAS and of EU foreign policy as a whole. Today, a foreign policy actor must be capable of responding almost instantly to developments. The crises of the Arab Spring have shown that there is an accelerating feedback loop between events on the ground and input from outside actors. A few hours can make the difference between whether an EU statement contributes to shaping developments or whether it is already dead on its arrival on the website. More delegation of responsibility, a shorter and simpler chain of command, and a greater amount of mutual trust between key actors within the service could significantly enhance effectiveness.

The EEAS brings together people from very different backgrounds. The Commission has its own very particular institutional culture: technocratic, hierarchical, legalistic, but also supranational in the sense that it is intrinsically committed to serving European interests. Diplomatic services for their part are generally more internationally minded than other parts of national bureaucracies,

More delegation of responsibility, a shorter and simpler chain of command, and a greater amount of mutual trust between key actors within the service could significantly enhance effectiveness.

but serving the national interest remains their central mission. As the diplomats in the EEAS will return to their national services after a few years of service to the EU, there is always a good possibility that their primary loyalty will remain with their country of origin. Joining the EEAS requires significant adjustment. Some commission officials used to implementing technical programs find it difficult to get used to diplomatic work and the more political approach of the EEAS, just as some diplomats experience difficulties in coping with the technical and financial aspects of the work of EU delegations.

Inevitably, the building of any new institution, particularly if the preparation process has been short and improvised, involves considerable uncertainty and produces a good deal of stress. At the same time, being part of a new beginning in European foreign policy should create a feeling of enthusiasm. At this point talking to EEAS officials you are confronted with a great deal of the former, but not yet enough of the latter.

To integrate people from such different backgrounds into a new institution with its own identity and a common sense of purpose and to motivate them to give their best will require strong leadership and a clear vision at the top. But it also needs to be supported by systematic training and by modern management instruments.

While achieving the one-third share of national diplomats remains the primary objective in the short term, in the longer term, it would make sense to reexamine the rules for recruitment into the EEAS. A more open approach that also allows the recruitment of experts from business, academia, or nongovernmental organizations would be more suitable for the extremely complex character of international relations today. To be successful, the EEAS should be able to bring the best specialists for particular countries and particular subject matters together while maintaining the sense of ownership and commitment of the EU institutions and the member states.

Recommendations

- Appointing two political-level deputies to assist the high representative/ vice president
- Strengthening the human resources of the EEAS, both through the creation of additional posts but also through budgetary provisions for hiring contractual agents
- Particular emphasis on strengthening the political departments of EU delegations and on building expertise on security issues

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- Review of the organizational structure, involving a clearer division of work and better integration of the crisis management structures
- Streamlining the process of clearing briefings and statements with a view to enhancing the reactivity of the service
- Systematic efforts to build a common identity and a common sense of purpose for the EEAS, including through training and modern management instruments
- In the longer term, opening up the recruitment process to allow the hiring of experts outside EU institutions and diplomatic services

Conclusion

Treaty change is not the only or even the primary driver of the development of European foreign policy. The overall dynamics of European integration also play a crucial role. The current euro crisis is clearly a significant handicap in this regard. A state of permanent crisis management currently absorbs most of European political leaders' attention, distracting them from foreign policy. The crisis also undermines the EU's confidence and reduces its soft power on the international stage. Fiscal austerity depletes the resources available for setting up a credible new institution. Many of the shortcomings of the EEAS's present setup can be explained by this factor.

If the eurozone ultimately disintegrates, EU foreign policy will simply be part of the collateral damage and face a setback that could last several years. A successful consolidation of the eurozone on the other hand should over time also provide a new impetus to foreign and security policy. It is too early to tell whether this would take place in the framework of the EU as a whole or possibly in the smaller framework of a new hard core of the EU.

Also key to the development of European foreign policy are the external challenges the EU faces. In this regard there are certainly sufficiently important developments out there to stimulate a serious foreign policy response. The political transformation of the Arab world is a game changer in the EU's strategic environment comparable to the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. The EU's entire southern neighborhood is likely to see years of dynamic change, which will also touch on the Union's important interests. All this takes place at a time when Washington is clearly signaling that Europe can no longer rely on the United States to take care of its security interests.

This is the political context in which the further implementation of the Lisbon Treaty will take place. While the internal crisis of the EU will at least initially act as a brake, the external environment should act as an accelerator for moving forward. At a time of dramatic change in its neighborhood, the EU must simply live up to its responsibilities as a force for stability and development.

There is thus much at stake in the further handling of the EEAS. If no remedial action is taken, the new service can rapidly drift into irrelevance, while the member states return to a primarily nationally defined foreign policy. If, however, member states can be convinced to buy into the EEAS and support its mission, if the Commission engages constructively, if the high representative exerts stronger and more visible leadership, and if the institutional capacity of the EU foreign policy machine can be upgraded, it should be possible to achieve a more coherent and effective EU foreign policy. To identify the steps that need to be taken in this context is not difficult. Mobilizing the political will to actually get them done will be the real challenge.

Notes

- 1 Now, the same foreign policy issue can be discussed under three chairs: the presidency in the Committee of Permanent Representatives, the high representative in the Council, and the president of the European Council.
- 2 See the chapter on enhancing institutional capacity.
- 3 I am grateful to Pedro Serrano for this thought.

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