

The Review of the European External Action Service in 2013

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According to the council decision that created the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) should provide a review of the organization and functioning of the EEAS by mid-2013. The review will offer an important first opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this new instrument, to address some of its shortcomings, and to give a new impetus to its further development.

The EEAS has had a difficult start. It has been overshadowed by the euro crisis and beset by resource constraints and the conflicting visions and interests of its different stakeholders. In the meantime, however, many of the service's teething problems have been overcome and significant progress has been achieved. Without the starts and stops inherent in the old system of the rotating presidency, the Brussels foreign policy machine functions more smoothly than before. The new continuity in the management of EU foreign policy has helped Catherine Ashton and her collaborators develop stronger working relationships with leaders and top officials of partner countries. And the EU delegations taking over the political functions of the presidency has significantly strengthened the EU's coherence and voice in third countries.

Nonetheless, two and a half years after the creation of the service, important deficits remain. Perhaps most seriously, the hope that the EEAS would serve as an effective platform for coordinating both classical foreign and security policy, and the external competencies of the Commission has so far not been fulfilled. While progress has been achieved concerning the European neighborhood, crisis management, and the preparation of summits with strategic partners, the gap between the two dimensions of European external action remains far too big.

More also needs to be done to enhance the member states' sense of ownership of this new instrument, to promote genuine teamwork between the EEAS and national diplomacies, and to "leverage" the modest capacity of the EEAS with the much greater diplomatic resources of the member states. Both the services provided by the EEAS to member states, as well as the member states' support for the EEAS, should be further developed.

The potential for synergy in effectively coordinating national diplomatic resources and EU resources remains vast. Foreign ministries could take the EEAS review as an occasion to review the functioning of their own services and to develop the division of work between the various elements of the post-Lisbon system.

The structures of the EEAS also require a fresh look. A more tightly integrated service with a clearer chain of command would function better, respond more quickly to developments, and deliver greater initiative and leadership.

The review process should be:

Comprehensive:

The decision that created the EEAS specifically mentions only organizational matters as subjects of the review. However, the review should take a comprehensive approach. It should look into the service's overall contribution to attaining the objectives of the EU's foreign policy, into its cooperation with the member states' diplomatic services, the European Commission, and the European Parliament, and it should examine its role in crisis management.

Ambitious:

In creating the EEAS, the Lisbon Treaty aimed at establishing a stronger operational center for EU foreign policy making with significantly enhanced instruments. While proving its added value in many ways, in its current form the EEAS still falls short of exploiting the full potential of these reforms. Considerable improvements seem possible within the existing legislative framework, but the review should also propose changes to the decision when this is necessary to correct the design flaws of the current setup.

Inclusive:

Although the lead clearly lies with the HR/VP, the process should systematically involve all the member states, the Commission, and the European Parliament. If the aim is to have a substantive result, the initial discussions should begin as soon as possible. It would be useful if the High Representative submitted a roadmap for the review process.

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The following substantive steps would go a long way in addressing the current shortcomings of the service:

Reinforcing the Role of the EEAS in Promoting the Coherence of External Action:

As neighborhood policy constitutes a core area of European foreign policy, the relevant Commission services should be integrated into the EEAS and placed under the direct responsibility of the HR/VP. The role of the service in the strategic programming of development policy instruments should be reinforced. In order to facilitate crosscutting coordination, the EEAS needs to build the necessary capacity regarding Community policies with an important external dimension, such as climate change, energy, and migration.

Strengthening the Coordinating Role of the HR/VP:

The HR/VP should chair the meetings of the commissioners in charge of the various aspects of external action. There should be regular consultations on external policy between the Presidents of the European Council and of the Commission, and the HR/VP.

A Political Deputy for the HR/VP:

In order to better support the HR/VP, a political level deputy who could replace her both in her Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) responsibilities, as well as in her Commission related functions, should be appointed.

The Structure of the EEAS Needs to be Reformed and Streamlined:

The current corporate board should be replaced by a simpler command structure with clear reporting lines. The division of work between the top executives has to be clarified. The Common Security and Defence Policy structures need to be simplified and properly integrated into the EEAS. A rebalancing between the overly large military elements and the insufficiently strong civilian crisis management capacities, should take place. The EU Special Representatives and their staff should be integrated into the geographic and thematic services of the EEAS.

The EEAS Should be Given Enhanced Budgetary Powers:

The EEAS should have responsibility for additional foreign policy instruments, in particular for the CFSP budget, and should be given the right to manage its operational budget.

Strengthening Cooperation with Member States' Diplomacies:

The review should promote systematic teamwork and burden sharing between the EEAS and national diplomacies at the central level, but also in multilateral institutions and in bilateral postings. Information exchange should be further developed and regularized. Procedures should be harmonized, infrastructure shared, and the potential of co-location examined.

Improving the Functioning of EU Delegations:

The separation of EEAS and Commission staff in delegations should be mitigated by strengthening the authority of the heads of delegations by simplifying the reporting lines and unifying the currently split financial circuits.

Consular Protection for EU Citizens:

The delegations should be given a subsidiary role in offering consular protection to citizens of EU countries that have no consular representation in the country in question.

Personnel Policy:

Additional steps—including through training and modern management methods—need to be taken to build a common identity and a common sense of purpose for personnel coming from the different sources. While it is important to

reach the one third target for the presence of national diplomats in order to enhance the sense of ownership by member states, in the longer term, the recruitment process should be opened to experts from business, academia, etc...

Enhance the EEAS' Role in International Organizations:

Member states and the Commission should work together to strengthen the status of the EU in international forums. Where there is an EU delegation, it should be able to speak also for all the EU actors in international conferences and organizations. The role of the EEAS in international negotiations covering political and external policy issues should be strengthened.

This paper is a follow up to a more substantive analysis of the EEAS: "More Action, Better Service, How to improve the European External Action Service."