Under the Crisis’s Pressure. Matching the EU External Action with National Diplomacies

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Constructive and synergic relations between the European External Action Service (EEAS) and member state diplomacies are an essential requisite for advancing a post-modern 'European diplomatic system' in the service of Europe's interests and values. This short paper examines the impacts of the EEAS on European national diplomacies, and their reciprocal interactions, in four interconnected areas: dynamics of national adaptation in EU foreign policy, leadership issues between the EEAS and member states and among national capitals, the political and practical added value of EU Delegations around the world as well as the role and impacts of national rotating secondment to the EEAS. It argues that, in spite of the unprecedented developments affecting EU’s foreign policy machinery, more member state ownership and trust in the EEAS should be encouraged on both sides, allowing Europe to better face the multiple challenges of the 21st century global system.

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Between decline and integration: European diplomacies at crossroads

State diplomacy was in essence a European invention and a major ingredient of Europe’s global power in modern times. Yet, about five centuries after the rise and consolidation of the Westphalian order, European national diplomacies have come under severe pressure. Europe’s influence around the world has been significantly affected by widespread perceptions of ‘relative decline’, aggravated by an enduring economic and political crisis, and is further challenged by the emergence of non-Western powers with an often self-centred foreign policy agenda, including on issues of increasingly global concern such as resource management, climate change and international security. Furthermore, European diplomats are facing a crisis in their raison d’être due to the practice of international ‘summitry’ among heads of state or governments, increased bureaucratic competition from the external activities of other governmental bodies or sub-national entities, transforming expectations on diplomatic functions by globally-interconnected domestic constituencies, and the paramount implications of fiscal austerity for the resources of European ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs). Against this background, the opportunity to increase European ‘critical mass’ in international relations through the European Union (EU) should sound as an appealing option to the ‘cocked hats’ of its 28 member states.

The Treaty of Lisbon brought a potentially decisive innovation to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the European External Action Service (EEAS), a brand-new body composed of staff from the European Commission, the Council Secretariat and member states’ MFAs and charged with assisting the new High Representative of the Union/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) in her/his multiple mandates: conducting CFSP, presiding over the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and ensuring coordination in EU external action as a Vice-President of the Commission. The Service represents an original ‘meta-institutional experiment’ aimed at bridging the deep-rooted

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1 For a masterly account of the history of modern diplomacy, see in particular H. NICOLSON, Diplomacy, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964.
cleavage between the traditional inter-governmental features of CFSP and the supranational community method of EU external policy toolbox (notably in ‘Commission-owned’ areas such as trade, enlargement and development), ideally bringing more consistency between EU external and internal policies in fields as diverse as energy, migration and climate change5.

EEAS’s birth was admittedly a painful one. Damaging turf wars with the Commission, a massive race between national capitals to secure key managing positions and internal organisational uncertainties indelibly marked the first months of life of the Service. In addition, Europe’s initial diplomatic cacophonia vis-à-vis the Arab Spring showed how difficult it may become for the EEAS to act as EU’s ‘foreign policy entrepreneur’ when confronted with diverging sensibilities in national capitals6. Nonetheless, by time the Service and its chief have improved their reputation in CFSP, thanks to encouraging achievements like the historic, EU-brokered agreement between Serbia and Kosovo. More recently, an informal mid-term Review has been produced by the EEAS, being saluted by some as an authoritative attempt to solve the complex riddles of EU diplomatic machinery7.

However, much still needs to be done to enhance effectiveness and coherence in EU foreign policy. Building constructive and synergetic relations between the EEAS and national diplomacies is of upmost importance for advancing a sophisticated and post-modern ‘European diplomatic system’8 in the service of Europe’s interests and values. The aim of this short paper is to briefly examine the impacts of the EEAS on European national diplomacies, and their reciprocal interactions, in four interconnected areas.

**Dynamics of national adaptation in EU foreign policy: from ‘Euro-pragmatism’ to ‘heterogony of ends’ in CFSP?**

Although intergovernmentalism remains the overarching political framework for conducting CFSP, EU foreign policy cannot be viewed as the mere reflection of inter-state bargaining.

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7 J. TECHAU, At long last, a sign of leadership from Ashton, Judy Dempsey’s Strategic Europe, 30 July 2013, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=52524.
Indeed, the creation of the EEAS did not take place in an institutional vacuum, but builds on consolidated patterns of national adaptation.

Interaction between the EU and member states in foreign policy follows two distinct but interrelated paths, in turn reflecting EEAS’ expected added value to national diplomacies: increasing Europe’s global outreach and streamlining national resources and capabilities.

On a political level, member states generally consider CFSP as an established mechanism to maximise their national interests and policy preferences in foreign policy. This widely-shared approach by European capitals nonetheless varies in scope and intensity based on factors including history, size and policy areas. While founding members like Germany and France perceive their national priorities as strictly interlaced with those of the EU, relative ‘newcomers’ in Central and Eastern Europe rather see CFSP as a way to increase their standing both within and outside the EU. The positions of bigger member states also differ between London’s ‘hyper-pragmatism’, Paris’s ‘instrumental Europeanism’ and a more integrationist attitude by Berlin and Rome, while smaller member states are generally eager to ‘Europeanise’ their bilateral (e.g. Russia for Finland), regional (e.g. Western Balkans for Slovenia) or thematic (e.g. peace mediation for Sweden or energy security for the Baltic states) priorities.

Nonetheless, the ‘depth’ of national adaptation to EU foreign policy remains largely topic-sensitive: while many diplomats in Europe consider political reporting and information-sharing, diplomatic networking and external representation as potentially promising working areas for the EEAS, issues such as commercial diplomacy, intelligence cooperation, defence integration and (often) consular services are still deemed as ‘red lines’ of national sovereignty. Also, self-preservation instincts prevail in

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10 R. BALFOUR & K. RAIK, The European External Action Service and national diplomacies, EPC Issue Paper no. 73, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels, 2013, p. 5.


12 For some analysis on the potential for more European cooperation on consular affairs and commercial diplomacy, see respectively: K. RAIK, Serving the citizens? Consular role of the EEAS grows in small steps, EPC Policy Brief, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels, 2013; A. FRONTINI, Advancing a multi-level system of European commercial diplomacy: Is there a role for the EU?, EPC Policy Brief, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels, 2013.
most MFAs, highlighting ‘complementarity’ as the desired relationship between the Service and national diplomacies13. This limits the Service’s contribution to a brand-new ‘division of labour’ between the EU and member states, obstructing more European integration in foreign policy.

From a practical viewpoint, current rationalisation, restructuring and downsizing in national MFAs may also induce innovative forms of ‘Europeanisation by doing’. Fiscal austerity measures resulted in considerable budgetary cuts, staff reductions, closing down and/or merging of missions abroad in all EU member states except Germany14. Moreover, some re-allocation of personnel and resources has taken place in most European MFAs, notably via creation of new structures in the headquarters and opening of diplomatic or consular posts in emerging economies, reflecting an increasing focus on export and investment promotion. While none of these developments is directly linked to the establishment of the EEAS, a likely use of the Service by national MFAs as a vehicle of cost-effectiveness and operational burden-sharing in the near future – particularly through EU Delegations15 but also across the entire policy spectrum, from public diplomacy to crisis-management – might gradually strengthen EU foreign policy cooperation through a bottom-up process16.

Overall, political and practical adaptation by European MFAs remains driven by pragmatic considerations, maximising visibility and effectiveness of national diplomatic conduct. Yet, in a longer-term perspective, the rational pursuit of national priorities may keep empowering EU structures and actors, notably the EEAS, consolidating an intra-EU ‘coordination reflex’17 through unprecedented ‘heterogony of ends’ in CFSP18.

14 For a comprehensive collection of data and figures on 14 selected member states, see also Ibidem, pp. 167-168.
15 The practical added value of EU Delegations will be addressed more in detail in the relevant section of this paper.
16 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, National adaptation and survival… cit., p. 9.
18 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, National adaptation and survival… cit., p. 5.
‘Who is in the driving seat?’ Leadership issues in post-Lisbon EU foreign policy

Diplomatic historiography has highlighted the crucial role played by leaders in international relations. Such assumption remains valid also for EU foreign policy, although the ‘hybrid’ nature of policy-making in CFSP has given rise to unique leadership patterns. The quest for the ‘driving seat’ in post-Lisbon EU foreign policy is characterised by three layers of competitive interaction between member states and the EEAS, between the EEAS and the Commission and among national capitals.

An underlying tension over leadership between the Service and member states was inherent in the genesis of EEAS. This was, and still is, perceived by national diplomacies as a potential competitor in foreign policy, and sometimes even beyond it, which resulted in a minimalist agenda in intergovernmental negotiations over the Service’s status and resources. European capitals have contradictory stances towards the EEAS and the HR/VP: while most pay lip service to intra-European coordination and strategic planning by the Service and its chief, some member states have not hesitated to build coalitions against the HR/VP in FAC meetings and national foreign ministers have openly criticised or discreetly side-lined the EEAS on several occasions. Competition for visibility between national and EU leaders is somewhat intrinsic in a ‘high-politics’ area like diplomacy, even more so given post-Lisbon exclusion of foreign ministers from European Council meetings. Yet, this generates a ‘catch-22’ situation, by which mistrust by member states...

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20 Although being a very significant and admittedly problematic component of post-Lisbon EU foreign policy architecture, the relationship between EEAS and the Commission goes beyond the limited scope of this paper and will not be addressed here.
21 Not only was the EEAS not granted the status of EU institution, but its staff, operational resources and administrative budgetary allowances turn pale compared to the aggregated figures at national level: less than 3500 officials, 139 Delegations and 489 million euros versus 87000 public servants, 3223 diplomatic and consular missions and 9475 million euros. See, in particular: R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, The European External Action Service... cit., p. 167.
22 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, The European External Action... cit., p. 8.
24 A clear example of this is provided by the ‘Future of Europe Group’ composed of the Foreign Ministers of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain. These issued a ‘Final Report’ in September 2012, available here: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/626338/publicationFile/171783/120918-Abschlussbericht-Zukunftsguppe.pdf
25 See, in particular, R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, Equipping the European Union... cit., p. 29.
deprives the EEAS from the charismatic capital needed to act authoritatively in CFSP, further undermining national support across Europe.

Leadership may become a problematic issue also in relations between member states. Poor political cohesion within FAC is leading to original coalition-building dynamics, e.g. between Sweden, Spain, Poland and Italy on a ‘European Global Strategy’26, hinting at a growingly ‘multi-speed’ CFSP. This may inject more dynamism in EU foreign policy, provided that EEAS is regularly involved in such policy formats. This pre-condition would help preventing CFSP ‘variable geometry’ from translating into a mere promotion of mini-lateral ‘pet projects’.27

Furthermore, fears of re-nationalisation and hidden hegemony by the ‘big three’ in CFSP have spread among smaller member states28. Undoubtedly, France, Germany and the United Kingdom possess the political leverage and the operational capabilities to influence and sustain major EU foreign policy demarches29, but they rarely act as a solid ‘bloc’. However, their supposed influence on CFSP ‘pre-cooking’ process – or even on the HR/VP – is deemed by others as excessive. Suspicions are further amplified by unwise EEAS practices such as last-minute distribution of documents and unusually concise reports on HR/VP’s meetings and missions.30 Here too, the Service should help recomposing the scattered pieces of EU foreign policy into a more unitary picture, enhancing its standing and right of initiative31 vis-à-vis member states.

‘Smart pioneers’: exploring the political and practical added value of EU Delegations

The transformation of former Commission offices in third countries into EU Delegations in charge of political relations, technical cooperation and coordination of member state missions on the ground, represent a significant novelty in post-Lisbon CFSP

26 For the final output, see: International Affairs Institute (IAI), the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), Elcano Royal Institute (RIE) and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), European global strategy · Securing European influence in a changing world, Rome-Warsaw-Madrid-Stockholm, May 2013.
27 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, National adaptation and survival... cit., p. 5.
28 Some of these elements can be found, for example, in E. TUOMIOJA, ‘Bringing in the common to European foreign policy’, Keynote speech by the Foreign Minister of Finland, Erkki Tuomioja, in the Policy Dialogue ‘Shaping the EU system of diplomacy: the European External Action Service and the future of foreign policy’, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels, 11 March 2013, http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=271982&contentlan=2&culture=en-US.
30 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, National adaptation and survival... cit., p. 7.
31 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, Equipping the European Union... cit., p. 63.
coordination of member state missions on the ground, represent a significant novelty in post-Lisbon CFSP.

So far, on-field transition has been relatively smooth and most member states supported the empowerment of EU’s ‘diplomatic interfaces’ in third countries and international forums. Personalities and locations, however, still play a considerable role: while Delegations headed by seconded national diplomats are more valued by member states given their stronger sensitivity to customary diplomatic practice, coordinating national heads of mission in non-EU capitals like Washington, Beijing or Moscow has proved being considerably harder than elsewhere.32 Moreover, operationalizing the representational role of Delegations in major multilateral institutions such as the United Nations has long encountered obstructionism by some member states, notably the UK, over the extent of EU’s mandate and powers.33

EU Delegations perform a number of political tasks bringing substantial added value to European diplomacies. Thanks to their presence in 163 third countries and international institutions, Delegations are serving as ‘the eyes and the ears’ not only of the EU but also of those national capitals lacking an accredited representative on the ground.34 In addition, diplomatic reporting and networking by Delegations can greatly help CFSP on the ground while maximising the overall political bearing of EU external policies, from humanitarian assistance to the Common Commercial Policy. This, however, requires more active collaboration by national capitals, both in policy inputs and information-sharing.35 Moreover, Delegations represent an unprecedented opportunity for achieving more economies of scale in European diplomacy. Some practical burden-sharing between national missions and EU delegations (e.g. between Spain and the EU Delegation in Yemen) or among member states (e.g. among Nordic countries) is taking place around the world through co-location in common premises, placement of ‘laptop diplomats’ in EU

34 According to recent figures by the EEAS, the EU can rely on a Delegation in more than 70 places where less than 10 member states are being represented, and in 50 countries where there are fewer than 5 European diplomatic and/or consular missions. See: HR/VP, ‘EEAS Review’, Council of the European Union, 13977/13, July 2013, p. 3: http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/13/st13/st13977.en13.pdf
35 R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, Equipping the European Union… cit., p. 46.
Delegations and/or cost-sharing in supporting services such as security, logistics and secure communications\textsuperscript{36}. The advantages of such practices still have to be fully grasped by member states but fiscal austerity in MFAs is likely to encourage more practical cooperation in the near future, possibly with positive spill-overs in policy areas such as consular protection and coordination in crisis situations\textsuperscript{37}.

Although the political and practical added value of EU Delegations has kept growing since early 2011, this still needs to be nurtured by adequate political and material investment, helping to ignite a ‘revolution from the periphery’ in EU foreign policy\textsuperscript{38}.

**Engineering a ‘pan-European’ diplomatic élite: the role and impacts of national rotating secondment to the EEAS**

An indisputably critical factor in shaping EEAS’ success in the foreseeable future is given by its ability to forge a truly European diplomatic identity. This, in turn, should be grounded on the amalgamation of different bureaucratic mind-sets and national cultures among its personnel. In the case of member state diplomats seconded to EEAS, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity: while diplomatic officials traditionally act as ‘guardians of national sovereignty’ in foreign policy, making the emergence of a supranational diplomatic class unlikely in the short term, the socialisation potential of diplomatic practice in general, and CFSP in particular, may generate considerable transformations on European diplomacies in the long run, notably by shifting political loyalties and helping to promote policy converge in EU foreign policy, at least to some extent\textsuperscript{39}. This also seems consistent with Europe’s pre-national past, when parallel identities and political belongings among elite members were still possible, notably within ‘universal’ institutions\textsuperscript{40}.

\textsuperscript{36} R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, *The European External Action Service...* cit., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{37} R. BALFOUR · K. RAIK, *Equipping the European Union...* cit., p. 48.
\textsuperscript{39} For an in-depth analysis of ‘diplomatic socialisation’ through CFSP, see in particular: J. BÁTORA, *Does the European Union transform the institution of diplomacy?*, «Journal of European Public Policy», vol. 12, no. 1, 2005, pp. 44-66.
\textsuperscript{40} Interestingly, this was also a common feature among European ‘pre-national diplomats’ acting on behalf of universal secular or spiritual entities such as, respectively, the Sacred Roman Empire and the Papal State. For some illuminating reflections on these aspects, see also: S. Romano, *Disegno della storia d’Europa dal 1789 al 1989*, Tea Libri, Milano, 2005.
Both voluntary secondment and periodical rotation of national diplomats in the Service, as foreseen in the 2011 Decision establishing the EEAS\textsuperscript{41}, mainly respond to the underlying logics of ‘diplomatic cross-fertilisation’ between the national and EU levels, and may contribute to the emergence of a ‘pan-European’ foreign service elite. Although it is admittedly too early to draw clear conclusions on such a complex process, in principle the pursuit of member state interests like access, influence and prestige through secondment to EEAS may ultimately deepen integration among European MFAs. From an individual point of view, material and status incentives also seem to be playing a significant role in attracting ‘the best and brightest’ European diplomats, further empowering EEAS’ ‘deep-socialisation’ footprint\textsuperscript{42}.

Nonetheless, while the goal of one third of EEAS staff being composed of national diplomats has virtually been achieved\textsuperscript{43}, numerous requisites for shaping a trans-national diplomatic class still need to be fulfilled, including clear-cut secondment and post-secondment strategies in national capitals, mechanisms for joint diplomatic training, and a working environment more conducive to a strong \textit{esprit de corps} within the Service\textsuperscript{44}.

Conclusion. Beyond the EEAS mid-term Review: how to enhance national ownership and trust in EU foreign policy?

Based on the daily experience gained in the first two and a half years of the Service, but also following a consultative exercise with national capitals\textsuperscript{45}, the HR/VP issued a EEAS Review at the end of last July. This presents a number of short and mid-term recommendations to be further debated by the Commission, the Council and the Parliament in light of EU’s institutional renewal in 2014. The Review is currently being discussed by member states in the Permanent Representatives Committee (CORPER), also building on some indications by the Legal


\textsuperscript{42} R. BALFOUR \& K. RAIK, Equipping the European Union… cit., pp. 51-58.

\textsuperscript{43} The current figure is 32.9\%, with 23.8\% in headquarters and 46.2\% in Delegations. 44\% of EEAS Heads of Delegations are made up of seconded member state diplomats. See also: HR/VP, \textit{EEAS Review}, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{44} R. BALFOUR \& K. RAIK, \textit{National adaptation and survival…} cit., pp. 10-12.

\textsuperscript{45} This took place, among other things, through an \textit{ad hoc} meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers in their ‘Gymnich’ format in March 2013. For more information, see also: European External Action Service, ‘Gymnich: informal meeting of ministers for foreign affairs in Dublin’, Brussels, 21 March 2013: http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2013/210313_gymnich_en.htm.
Service of the Council on the legal and institutional issues raised by HR/VP’s recommendations. The outcome of such process should be reflected in the conclusions of the General Affairs Council meeting in mid-December 2013.

Among the proposals specifically targeting relations between the EEAS and national diplomacies, EEAS’ draft Review recommends completing the appointment of permanent EEAS chairs for all the Working Groups of the Council in the area of external relations, reviewing the mandates and roles of European Union Special Representatives (who long served as the Council’s diplomatic network before the establishment of the EEAS) with the aim of integrating them further in the Service, concluding formal arrangements for existing practice of EU foreign ministers deputising – amongst others – for the HR/VP, favouring EEAS’s contribution to the general work programme of the trio of rotating Presidencies of the Council, promoting closer political coordination, greater joint reporting and classified information-sharing, as well as establishing priority lists of co-location and supporting service-pooling projects between EU Delegations and national embassies in third countries, pursuing the debate on consular activities by EU Delegations as well as framing a specific policy on the status and management of seconded national diplomats.

While these and other recommendations are a pragmatic and sensible approach to the many organisational, functioning and staffing intricacies of the Service, the Review lacks meaningful political bearing, insisting on bureaucratic details and being ultimately deprived of the visionary elements advocated by several observers as much-needed components of a renewed narrative for EU foreign policy. Moreover, it remains questionable whether even a full implementation of the Review will suffice to increase the Service’s authoritativeness vis-à-vis member states and EU institutions.

Clearly, the emergence of a post-modern European diplomatic system will not take place overnight, since it rather entails long-term, structural transformations eroding the (historically-relative) legitimacy of nation-state as the fundamental political unit of our times. Yet, in the immediate future, smoother integration between national and EU actors in foreign policy may allow Europe to better face the multiple challenges of the 21st century global system. This requires more member state

ownership and trust in the EEAS both in Brussels and national capitals, through a participatory and Service-led coordination of the long-term strategic planning processes in European MFAs, more systematic use of EU foreign ministers as special envoys of the HR/VP on a case-by-case basis and with transparent mandates, incrementally ambitious political tasks and financial endowments for EU Delegations on the ground, targeted and harmonised staffing policies for seconded national diplomats on both sides, including on personnel evaluation. All the signs, nonetheless, indicate that these modest ambitions will have to wait: the proposals in the Review and the mood among member states and EU institutions do not bode for improving EU foreign policy capacity and performance.