



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

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## **A DEPUTY, A DOSE OF REORGANIZATION AND A SCHUMAN SHUFFLE:**

**How to Make the European External Action Service Work  
Better**

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Creating an effective, functioning European External Action Service (EEAS) was never going to be simple. The EEAS has offered a seemingly easy target for eurosceptics and journalists who have been quick to point the finger of blame at Catherine Ashton for all of the new institution's woes. Yet, away from the glare of publicity Ashton's EEAS has been chalking up some quiet successes. Nonetheless, as the EEAS prepares to review progress in the coming months, attention should be focused on streamlining the decision-making processes, ensuring better co-ordination with other EU institutions, and implementing new measures to provide incentives and rewards for national diplomats to work in the EEAS and those in the EEAS to work in their national ministries, what I call the "Schuman Shuffle".

The EEAS has only been a functioning entity for just over two years. Too soon in the eyes of some to embark on reviews, but there was a clear logic to setting that date: to have all of the recommended changes in place by the time the next Commission – and hence the next High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) - comes into office.

The EEAS's strengths and weaknesses stem in large part from the fact that it offers a picture of the EU in microcosm. At the heart of EEAS is an attempt to capitalize on the pooling of sovereignty and the benefits of coordination, whilst recognizing the national interests of individual member states and the need to work closely with other institutions. The EEAS – and the EU as a whole – is never going to work perfectly, but even a few small changes at this stage could make a major difference.

## STREAMLINING DECISION MAKING – A DEPUTY AND RECONFIGURED CORPORATE BOARD

Whoever holds the HR/VP position would find it difficult to be in all of the right places at the right time and to do all the jobs. A suggestion doing the rounds in Brussels these days is for two deputies for the HR/VP: one for Commission matters and the other for Common Foreign and Security Policy. This would, however, be a retrograde step as it would recreate the divisions between Commission and Council competences EEAS is designed to overcome. Instead, I would propose a single deputy to the HR/VP. Such a deputy would need to be someone with authority and a mandate plus the support of the HR/VP, hence I suggest:

- The new Deputy HR/VP would be a Vice-President of the Commission. As Vice-President, (s)he would have been proposed by a member state, approved by the Commission President and endorsed by the European Parliament;
- The new Deputy in his/her HR function would have responsibility for long-term strategic planning, helping to counter the accusation that EEAS stumbles from crisis to crisis;
- Given Croatia's imminent accession it would help answer the question of what to do with the 28<sup>th</sup> Commissioner and avoids creating a new (unnecessary) policy portfolio.

Moreover, the current corporate board of EEAS does not work as well as it could in part because the four members tend to do both management and policy-related issues, and their job titles do not match their role and activities. Instead of the existing set-up it would be better to have a more effective division of labour, with each of the four responsible for one of the following:

1. day-to-day functioning of EEAS, particularly with regard to staffing and the budget ("Chief Operating Officer");
2. thematic/cross-cutting issues ("Assistant Secretary General");
3. geographical issues ("Assistant Secretary General");
4. civilian and military crisis management ("Assistant Secretary General").

## THE SCHUMAN SHUFFLE

For European foreign policy to work, the EEAS needs to have the best diplomats from across the EU, but not at the expense of national foreign ministries nor at the expense of permanent staff originally drawn from the Commission and the Council Secretariat. Moreover, any arrangement needs to recognize that national diplomats from large states tend to worry that working for EEAS will harm their career prospects back home, whereas those from the smaller member states are frequently not keen on returning to their national ministries. Furthermore, there is a number of EEAS staff who have not spent time in their member states, but who would benefit from the different perspective accorded by such an opportunity.

To combat these problems, taking inspiration from the ERASMUS programme - which aids mobility without harming students' status at their home institutions - I propose a new system which would apply to a significant number of posts in EEAS which I name in honour of a former Foreign Minister and one of the giants of European Integration: Robert Schuman. The Schuman Shuffle involves two to four year postings (depending on what the job entails):

- National diplomats from Member State ministries who take up a position in the EEAS are treated as having been promoted domestically and, subject to satisfactory performance (like passing exams as an ERASMUS student), will return to the national ministries at this higher level or above. Taking further inspiration from ERASMUS, such a scheme could be formalized so that participants could be granted “credits” which could be used to evaluate their progress and promotion;
- These posts are for a fixed length of time and are linked to guaranteed positions in the individual’s member state to which they return at the end of the contract. No individual who takes up the post is allowed to continue working in the EEAS when their term comes to an end;
- Just as EEAS officials are encouraged to rotate and work in EU delegations in third countries, so Brussels based EEAS officials should be accorded the opportunity to work in their national ministries. In a similar vein to the national diplomats moving in the opposite direction, EEAS staff taking such an option would be treated as having been promoted and will return at that level or above;
- Such a scheme could help break down the existing barriers in the EEAS and between the EEAS and other EU institutions helping to foster a better *esprit de corps*;
- All officials who participate in the scheme would be entitled to call themselves Schuman diplomats;
- A similar scheme could also be applied to those who rotate into the Commission.

## CONCLUSION

In business, mergers are not expected to yield immediate massive boosts to profits. They are designed for the longer term. We should not, therefore, expect the EEAS to be fully functioning after just two years of operation. Many of the discussions feeding into the forthcoming review have focused on complex issues such as institutional co-ordination with the Commission. In contrast, this paper suggests a few straightforward measures which could go a long way to increase the efficacy of the EEAS. By creating a deputy to the HR/VP who is a Vice-President of the Commission, reorganizing the Corporate Board and creating new incentives for mobility amongst Europe’s talented officials, the EEAS could be significantly improved and well placed to provide the European External Action Service its citizens deserve.

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