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Women in the EEAS and EU Delegations: Another Post-Westphalia Change?

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Introduction

Whilst political colours and nationality played an important role, Catherine Ashton was chosen as the inaugural High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) thanks in no small part to her gender; and this was likely the case with Federica Mogherini. The desire for maintenance of gender balance emerged towards the end of Ashton's tenure when EU leaders began the horse-trading and deal-making associated with several top EU positions, including that of her successor. Even though the gender of the head of the European External Action Service (EEAS) is significant an organisation is more than just its most senior post. Having a woman at the helm sends a strong signal that the EEAS is not male dominated. But we cannot judge a cake just by the icing. To what extent is the EEAS, in fact, dominated by men? Has Ashton made a difference? And will Mogherini follow her lead?

Drawing on data from the entire period of Ashton's term as HR/VP, this chapter examines the gender balance in the EEAS. It analyses the various levels of seniority in the EEAS and highlights the finding that women are underrepresented at all levels (apart from that traditional female-dominated sphere: assistants/secretaries, which are not included in this contribution); something all too familiar to those who have studied foreign ministries and services since the Treaty of Westphalia (and even before). Nonetheless, the data presented here show there was some improvement in the gender balance during Ashton's five-year stint as HR/VP. The chapter complements a number of others in this volume, particularly Murdoch and Trondal's detailed examination of EEAS recruitment practices (Chapter 5), and Juncos and Pomorska's exploration of the challenges of establishing the EEAS (Chapter 20).

Rather than repeating the theoretical discussion of recruitment in the EEAS, the focus of this chapter is largely empirical, shining a spotlight on

one particular aspect of staffing: the gender balance. The chapter identifies noticeable progress in the overall gender balance within the EEAS, but argues this improvement is unbalanced. The increase in women staff was least evident in the key decision-making positions such as EEAS senior management. Moreover, female heads of EU delegations have not been spread across the globe, but tend to be concentrated, notably in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Central Asia and the Caucasus. Furthermore, many more women were recruited from EU institutions rather than EU member-state diplomatic services and female recruitment was from few EU member states. Although some contributions to this volume argue that we are seeing the emergence of a post-Westphalian foreign policy actor, this chapter argues that in terms of gender it is too soon to claim the EEAS marks a new kind of player on the diplomatic stage.

Research design and data

The chapter draws on a variety of sources. First, for data related to overall gender balance, various available statistics were used and updated from internal EEAS, member state and European Parliament resources. Second, for managerial posts in EEAS Headquarters, the succession of organisational charts (or 'organigrammes') from February 2011 to October 2014 were used as the basis for identifying individuals holding management posts.¹ The chapter distinguishes top management from senior management. The group of top managers includes: the HR/VP, the Head of her Cabinet, the Corporate Board Members, Managing Directors, Heads of EU Military and Civilian Management (i.e., EUMS, CMPD, CPCC, EU INTCEN, CPSP), Heads of Foreign Policy Instruments and Chair of the Political and Security Committee. It excludes EU Special Representatives and heads of EU delegations. The group of senior managers includes all of the above plus all EEAS Directors.

For heads of EU delegations, on the basis of these sources and using information from a blend of internal EEAS documents, open-source information on the Internet (LinkedIn profiles, etc.) combined with personal contacts with EEAS officials and EU delegations around the globe, a unique database of 276 heads of EU delegations was created. This provides information on gender, institutional and national background of each Head of EU Delegation. A score of one is awarded to every individual, but if there were two Heads for the same EU Delegation during a year (due to rotation, resignation, etc.), a half point was assigned to each.² Unless otherwise noted, figures for 2014 are as of 31 October 2014. Given the fact that these 2014 data conclude with the 2014 rotation, the database provides a full picture of the EEAS recruitment policies under Catherine Ashton.

The gender balance in EU foreign policy-making: a never-ending story

The underrepresentation of women in the EU's foreign policy-making bodies is as old as the European integration project itself. As the 2014 Special Report on establishing the EEAS by the European Court of Auditors (REF) points out, 'significant gender and geographical imbalances, which already existed in the previous foreign policy structures, still remained as of September 2013' (European Court of Auditors, 2014, section 49, p. 18). In December 2010, just before the transfer of staff from the European Commission to the newly established EEAS, women at AD level (i.e., those working on EU foreign policy formulation) represented just over a quarter (i.e., 28%) of the entire staff in the Directorate-General for External Relations (DG RELEX), whereas nearly three-quarters (i.e., 73%) of secretaries at assistant (AST) level were women (Policy Department at the Directorate General for External Policies, 2013, p. 67). Within the most senior grades, (i.e., AD 14–16), only 17% of DG RELEX's managers were females (Formuszewicz and Kumoch, 2010, p. 23).

In 2010, the Council Decision (Council of the European Union, 2010) establishing the EEAS acknowledged the need for an adequate gender balance within EEAS staff, whilst the July 2013 EEAS Review (European External Action Service, 2013, p. 14) evaluating the first two-and-a-half years of the Service's existence declared the 'HR/VP's strong commitment to progress towards gender balance in the EEAS'. Although the EEAS Review does not provide substantial data on female representation in the Service, this general pledge is further emphasised by EU member states in their Council conclusions on the EEAS Review from December 2013 (Council of the European Union, 2013). How then does the affirmed commitment to equality between men and women in the EU's foreign policy machinery look in practice? Has there been a significant change in gender balance within the new diplomatic service and its EU delegations, implying a post-Westphalia change?

Women in the EEAS Brussels management: not quite there yet

If we first consider the top echelons of the EEAS (i.e., from the Managing Directors up), the level of female representation looks rather poor. Apart from Ashton herself, there were only two other women in such posts in February 2011 just after the launch of the EEAS. Their number had increased by only one to three female managers by October 2014, including, as the EEAS (European External Action Service, 2013, p. 14) itself points out, the most senior woman in the Service (i.e., Political Director Helga Schmid). She was also the only female member of the main EEAS decision-making body, the Corporate Board, consisting of her and three male colleagues during the first four years of the EEAS's existence.

Even if we add the director level to the mix, the percentage of women in the EEAS leadership does not rise. Rather it oscillates somewhere between its lowest level of 11.8% (in October 2013) up to a peak of 19% (in October 2014), depending on the exact moment in time and the number of vacancies that may or may not be factored in. Nonetheless, if Ashton's former fellow Commissioner Viviane Reding were to scrutinise the EEAS management, she would certainly not be pleased with the outcome: the EEAS did not meet Reding's aim of attaining 40% female representation of the board members in private businesses³ in its own EEAS Brussels HQ management. Despite the fact that a woman, Ashton, was in the driving seat, the EEAS leadership remains dominated by men.

Women as Heads of EU Delegations: patchy coverage

Moving from the EEAS Brussels HQ to EU delegations representing the EU across the globe, has the 'glass ceiling' been broken when it comes to posts of heads of EU delegations? Or does it continue, as in the private sector, to 'bar female talent' from top positions in Europe's 'embassies' around the world? Since the EU promotes the rights of women and their equality with men in the outside world, whether 'Europe' practices what it preaches, particularly in places where EU Delegations represent the Union to other countries, is a pertinent issue.

As Figure 21.1 above illustrates, even in the area of heads of EU delegations, the gender gap persists, albeit narrowing. As the total figures on the right side of the graph show, the aggregate percentage of women among heads of EU delegations increased from 15.1% in January 2010 to 22.3% at the end of October 2014; commendable progress highlighted by the EEAS

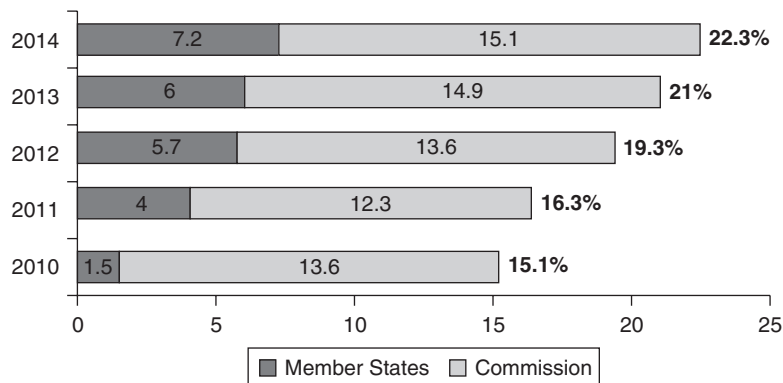


Figure 21.1 Proportion of women as % of the total heads of EU delegations and their institutional origin

itself. Yet, the total number of women heads of EU Delegation in 2014 is still far from parity with men.

However, what is perhaps more striking than the mere proportion to male colleagues is the institutional and national backgrounds of EU women ambassadors. The 2010 Council Decision foresaw a third of EEAS staff recruited as temporary agents from EU member-state diplomatic services both in the EEAS Brussels HQ and in EU delegations. As a result, increasingly more national diplomats run the daily business of EU delegations. Out of all female ambassadors, about 10% came from EU member states after the first rotation in 2010, whereas by October 2014 about a third originated from national diplomatic services. This is roughly in line with the total figures indicated in Figure 21.1. Yet, what is surprising in this overall trend towards the one-third target is the distribution of women among two separate groups: heads of EU delegations who are former Commission officials⁴ and heads of EU delegations hired from EU member states.

As Figure 21.2 suggests, the percentage of women among the group of EU ambassadors with a background in the European Commission is steadily increasing; indeed, so much so that we may at some point find the same numbers of male and female EU ambassadors having previously worked in the EU institutions. On the other hand, after an initial increase, the percentage of women among the newly recruited national diplomats to head EU delegations is rapidly declining.

These two rather unexpected trends may have the following explanations. First, although the overall number of EU heads of delegations from

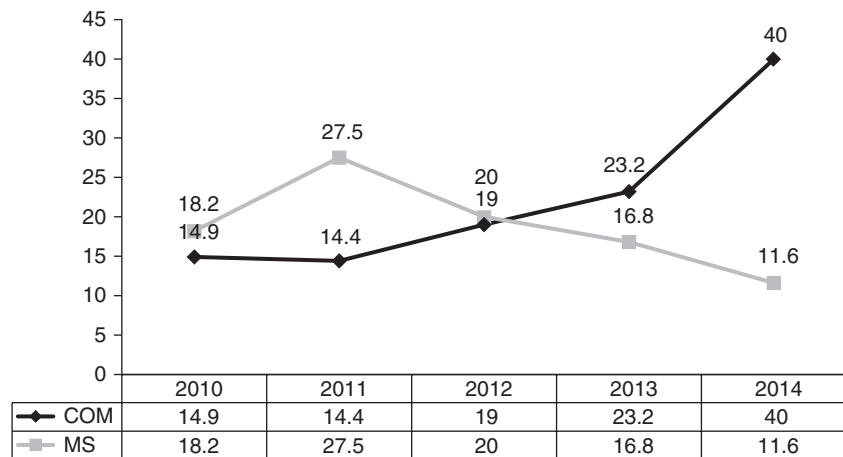


Figure 21.2 Women as heads of EU delegations with EU institutions background (%) and with National Diplomatic Services background (%)

national diplomatic services may be rising and even significantly surpassing the one-third target (Novotná, 2014b), women are not well placed among those candidates from national diplomatic services. It may be the fault of EU member states that do not send enough qualified female applicants, as the EEAS argues in one of its replies to similar findings by the Court of Auditors (2014, section 49, p. 29), or of the EEAS recruitment system, which may be favouring male national diplomats. However, it seems unlikely that the blame lies with the EEAS, given the higher proportion of women retained from the pool of former officials from other EU institutions. Moreover, the 2014 EEAS Staffing Report (2014, p. 9) shows that roughly the same proportion of women (14.3%) as the proportion of applications from female candidates (16.2%) were appointed to Head and Deputy Head of EU Delegation posts during the 2014 rotation exercise. In any case, the fact that only 11.6% of women are among the group of national diplomats at the top of EU delegations in October 2014 is rather conspicuous.

The national backgrounds of women at the top of EU delegations are more difficult to assess because of their limited geographical spread across EU member states. Given the numbers, the answers may lie in individual idiosyncratic explanations. Nonetheless, we can suggest some general factors. As with the overall success of the French in the EEAS recruitment, in part thanks to their more active and comprehensive approach to promoting *their* people (see, e.g., Balfour, Carta and Raik, 2015; Novotná, 2014b), French women have clearly won the contest with the largest number of female EU ambassadors (seven) at the helm in 2014. This figure stands in stark contrast to the other 'Big Three' members, the United Kingdom and Germany, with only one Head of EU Delegation each by the end of Ashton's term. This certainly neither corresponds to their population size nor to their clout.

Contrary to what we may expect given the general high gender equality and participation of women in their workforce, two Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Finland, never had a woman in charge of any EU Delegation within the 2010–2014 period. One of the bastions of female equality, Sweden, only had a single female EU ambassador from 2013. Although the case of the Finns may be explained by the very low overall numbers, it is rather surprising not to see more women among the cohort of usually well- or even over-represented Danes.

In contrast, a legacy of an egalitarian society seems to play a role in the share of women EU ambassadors from the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as Figure 21.3 below illustrates. Although the initial high percentage of women among heads of delegations from post-communist countries is due to overall very low numbers, once the interest (and success) of the CEE candidates grew, the male-female gap grew as well. Yet even after the numbers stabilised, the average proportion of women among the CEE EU ambassadors has always been several percentage points higher than the total representation of women among heads of EU delegations.

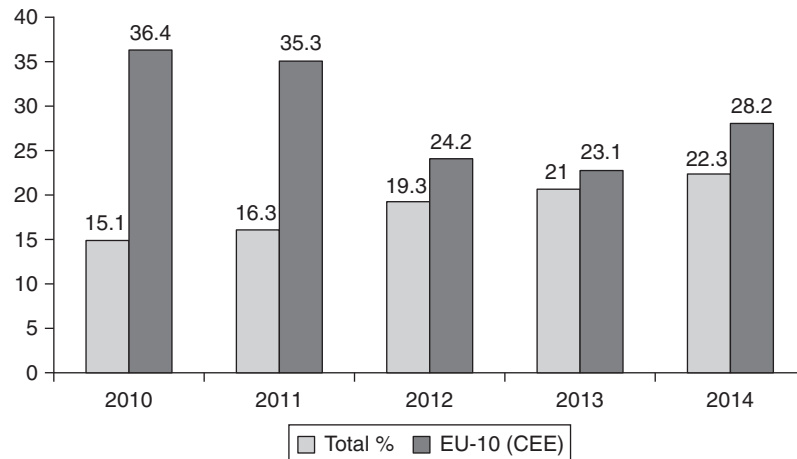


Figure 21.3 Female heads of EU delegations from EU-10 (%)

Last but not least, it is not only important who gets nominated, but also where she (or as this chapter highlights more often he) gets posted. The EU delegations to the EU's Strategic Partners⁵ are arguably the placements with most political power. In these ten destinations, women held the EU ambassadorial posts in two cases for more or less the entire period between 2010 and 2014. Thus the men-women ratio is quite high in these hard-power postings (i.e., 5:1). This corresponds to an extremely low representation of women among the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs), arguably another rather hard-power ambassador-like post, where there was in October 2014 no single female EUSR. Throughout their existence in the last years, there were a few female exceptions among the EUSRs: Patricia Flor, who was the EUSR for Central Asia (2012–2013) and Rosalind Marsden, the EUSR for Sudan and South Sudan (2010–2013).

On the other hand, the concentration of women running the EU delegations to international organisations, such as to the UN bodies (with the exception of another hard-power post in New York with responsibility for the UN Security Council), Council of Europe, UNESCO, is high: since 2012, women were in charge of around 60% of these multilateral EU delegations. The explanation for the over-representation of women in this area may lie in the fact that they are soft-power positions, which in the eyes of some are better filled by women.

Despite a relatively small sample, there was an above-average representation of women as heads of EU delegations to states in Central Asia and Southern Caucasus. Nonetheless, in other geographical regions, an interesting trend is developing in EU delegations. In delegations to the MENA⁶

countries, about 23.1% of them were led by women in 2010, about 34.6% in 2012 and, in 2014, 42.9% of them were headed by female EU ambassadors. Although, as one top EEAS official argued⁷ this may be a product of coincidence rather than design, Federica Mogherini, the successor to Catherine Ashton, should maintain the trend not only for the sake of gender balance within the EU delegations, but because of ongoing concerns about the treatment of women in the MENA region. If the EU wishes to set an example and encourage female education and political participation, having a large number of female EU ambassadors in the areas where women can be grossly oppressed is 'a good thing' and may help emancipation of MENA women and girls.

A post-Westphalian diplomatic corps? The future of female representation in the EEAS and EU Delegations

The picture of gender imbalance from the top and senior management levels in the EEAS Brussels HQ and EU delegations across the globe is replicated more broadly across the EEAS. As Table 21.1 illustrates, the overall level of women working in the EEAS in policy-making posts and the breakdown of female European diplomats among those working in the Brussels HQ and EU delegations slowly increased during the first four years of the EEAS's existence.

Nonetheless, despite this generally positive progress towards higher recruitment of female staff in the EEAS and EU delegations, women do remain underrepresented, particularly in decision-making positions within the EEAS Brussels management, EUSRs and as heads of EU delegations (and those to the EU's Strategic Partner Countries in particular). Moreover, the distribution of female EU ambassadors across third countries is uneven and women who previously worked for the European Commission have much higher chances to be appointed to senior posts than those from EU member states.

Having an equal share of women and men among staff in any organisation is not a value in its own right. It should arguably not be pursued merely to even out the numbers. This chapter has argued that if the EU aims to support disadvantaged women in other parts of the world, it must first start at home, making sure that women are proportionately represented in its EU foreign policy apparatus. Only by sending a strong signal in this way can the EU promote women's rights and project a credible image abroad. Federica Mogherini, the successor HR/VP to Catherine Ashton, should thus arguably follow in Ashton's footsteps. Closing the gender gap within EU foreign policy bodies and within the EU in general ought, for the sake of overall EU coherence, to remain a priority. In foreign policy, actions frequently tend to speak louder than words; but in this case if policy is more frequently articulated through female voices, the narrative will be very clear and the message will be strong – not just to the world, but also to citizens of the European Union.

Table 21.1 Gender balance in the EEAS Brussels HQ and EU delegations worldwide (%)

	EEAS Brussels HQ						EU delegations						Total					
	Men		Women		Total		Men		Women		Total		Men		Women		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
September 2011	354	68	165	32	519	251	79	67	21.1	318	605	72.3	232	27.7	837			
June 2012	370	68	174	32	544	258	76	83	24	341	628	71	257	29	885			
July 2014	364	65.8	189	34.2	553	279	73.4	101	26.6	380	643	68.9	290	31.1	933			

In sum, only the achievement of a fairer gender balance among EEAS staff in the traditionally male-dominated world of diplomacy (cf. Cross, 2007) will signal an appropriate change in the post-Westphalian world.

Notes

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1. For the latest version, see the EEAS website http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/organisation_en.pdf.
2. The EEAS Review (2013, p. 14) and the EEAS Staffing Report (2014) include slightly different numbers than the author has calculated. Nonetheless, the difference is explicable: the author has included each Head of EU Delegation for any given year rather than taking the numbers as of a specific date, such as that used in the internal EEAS database (SysPer).
3. On Reding's proposals for women representation in non-executive board-member positions in the private sector see, for example, here: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/news/121114_en.htm.
4. As of the end of October 2014, there are no female heads of EU delegations who were former Council (or EUSR offices) employees. The text, therefore, only uses the terms 'former Commission officials' and 'EU member state/national diplomats'.
5. The EU Strategic Partners are: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and the United States.
6. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, based on the EEAS website, include: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank & Gaza and Yemen. There is no EU Delegation to Iran, while Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman are covered by EU Delegation in Riyadh. The EU Delegation to the UAE was established and an EU ambassador appointed in 2013.
7. Interview with a Corporate Board Member, Brussels, 17 July 2014.

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