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The EEAS is taking shape

After six months of frustrating turf battles the contours of the European diplomatic service are becoming visible, though there is still no final organisation chart yet.

Formally it will start operating as of 01.12. But it will take until 01.01.11 before the Service will really be operational. It will move into its new headquarters only after the summer break.

It will start with a diplomatic staff of 800, for both headquarters and missions abroad. That will suffice to have two diplomats per mission, totally inadequate to meet the EU needs. By 2013 the staff should rise to 1150, mostly through conversion of existing national experts. That compares to an estimate 3600 national diplomats in the 27 member states, most of whom are Germans and French. There is no question for the EU to compete with these figures, in the medium and probably even long-term.

The 136 Commission Delegations will all become EU Delegations by 01.01.11. This will be a major change. The EU ambassador will represent the Union and chair the regular coordination meetings among member states, replacing the ambassador of the rotating presidency in that function.

There might however be some problems with the coordination role in Geneva, Vienna and New York, where some member states like to retain a special role for the rotating presidency, arguing the large number of coordination meetings and the fact that many agenda items are not in EU or mixed competence. This promises to become the first battle the new EU ambassadors may have to field.

The key role for the EU missions will be to better explain the EU in their host countries. Normally the EU ambassador should rapidly acquire natural prominence, due to his/her status and width of information /instruments at his/her disposal. The 'big' countries should be expected to be less cooperative than the small ones, which will rely increasingly on the EU to defend their interests, because they cannot afford to have missions in all the countries of the earth. The small ones are therefore also more interested in transferring consular affairs, including the granting of visa, to the EU Delegations. This will come in due time, starting with emergency operations (e.g. evacuation of EU citizens in crisis situations).

The High Representative will chair the Foreign Affairs Council meetings and bilateral/multilateral meetings with third countries. It will be up to the EEAS to prepare the necessary briefings, drawing also on the resources of the Commission.

The EEAS should respect one basic principle in order to be successful: it must provide an added value! There must be synergies and specialisation with member states!

The EEAS risks being caught in bureaucratic infighting with the Commission in fields like trade, development assistance or environment that have a bearing to third countries. In addition, member states will carefully survey it! It will therefore have to pay attention not to overstep its limits, but to be useful to all member states. Close

cooperation and permanent coordination with member states will be a condition sine qua non for its success.

It must not turn into the 28th Foreign Service. To this end, the High Representative will have to cultivate intimate links with national foreign ministers. Ideally she should 'employ' them for special functions and missions! She should delegate and insist that each of the 27 pass identical messages.

But above all, the EEAS must provide a long-term strategic approach to EU foreign affairs. The EU badly needs clear priorities. It is lost in too many often secondary affairs that need to be tied up. The EU diplomats must get a vision of what is important and what not! Hopefully the new service will be able to fulfil this mission. As of the beginning of 2011, all staff members should undergo a 'basic training' programme. This is also to create the necessary 'esprit de corps'.