

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

GLOBAL RE-ORDERING: EVOLUTION THROUGH EUROPEAN NETWORKS



Whose Officials and Whose Nationals? The European External Action Service at the End of Ashton's Tenure

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INTRODUCTION

- The policy brief demonstrates a growing overrepresentation of national diplomats over former Commission and Council staff in the European External Action Service (EEAS), particularly at the EEAS management and Heads of EU Delegation levels.
- Even though the overall EEAS staff data correspond to the target of 1/3 of national diplomats recruited to the EEAS set by the Council EEAS decision, by July 2014 EU Member States occupied 17 (out of 34) posts i.e. 50% posts at the senior management level (from Directors up) while holding 12 (out of 21) top management positions (from Managing Directors up).
- Similarly, the proportion of EU Delegations headed by national diplomats increased from 8.3 per cent in 2010 to 62.3 per cent in July 2014, whereas the percentage of EU Delegations headed by EU institution officials decreased from the peak of 91.7 per cent in 2010 down to 37.8 per cent in July 2014. The EEAS Council Decision 1/3 target for EU Heads of Delegations was achieved by 2013 and, since then, it was exceeded and indeed reversed.

- By pointing to this trend, the policy brief argues that it is increasingly EU Member States who are in charge of the EEAS having taken-over the decision-making channels.
- As a result, the policy brief therefore concludes that thanks to the implications, the patterns of EEAS recruitment clearly contribute and reinforce the tendency towards a 'CFSP-ization' of the EEAS managerial structures and hence of EU foreign policy-making.
- In addition, the policy brief identifies which countries were particularly (in)effective in getting their nationals into the EEAS staff with France leading the successful Member States and Finland and Luxembourg being the least successful.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Along with the post of the President of the European Council, the birth of the new European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Delegations around the world is one of the most significant institutional innovations coming out of the Lisbon Treaty. Much of the current debate focused on the gender, nationality and party affiliation of the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) in Jean-Claude Juncker's soon-to-be-formed Commission with Italy's Federica Mogherini as the forthcoming HR/VP. In contrast to the media's preoccupation with the horse-trading and deal-making of who will fill which post, this brief takes the end of Catherine Ashton's term in office as an appropriate juncture to assess the development of the EEAS and its recruitment.

Although much attention has been focused on the role played by the HRVP and her performance,¹ with notable exceptions,² and on the more specific issue of gender balance,³ the inner workings and staffing of the EEAS have not been much explored. As with any large organization, the operation and conduct of the institution is not just down to the person at the top and her strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, in light of debates about the power and influence of Member States and the supranational institutions, it is important to go beyond these superficial (often in both senses of the word) analyses and examine who drives and controls the channels of decision-making within the EEAS, particularly in the areas which were so far kept out of the spotlight, such as EU Delegations.

The balance between diplomats recruited from EU Member States and permanent EU Staff is one of the more prominent staffing questions which has been raised in the corridors of Brussels, but not answered in any systematic manner. Based on a unique data-set drawn from extensive research identifying the nationality and background of EEAS officials (primarily at the managerial level) and 270 Heads of EU Delegations, this policy brief focuses on this relationship and asks: who's in charge of the EEAS? What weight do Member States have and what power was retained by former Commission and Council officials? By mapping recruitment patterns of EEAS and highlighting how these indicate who in fact runs the service, this commentary contributes to our understanding of how EU foreign policy is conducted and implemented. By examining the organization of the EEAS, the policy brief feeds into broader debates about power and influence in EU institutions.

¹ Helwig, N. (2013) 'Foreign Policy and the High Representative's Capability-Expectations Gap: A question of Political Will'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 235–54; Howorth, J. (2011) 'The 'new faces' of Lisbon: assessing the performance of Catherine Ashton and Herman van Rompuy on the global stage'. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 303-23.

² Murdoch, Z., Trondal, J. and Gänzle, S. (2013) 'Building foreign affairs capacity in the EU: The recruitment of member state officials to the european external action service (EEAS)'. *Public Administration*, pp. 71-86; Directorate General for External Policies Policy Department (2013) 'Achieving Geographical and Gender Balance in the European External Action Service' (Brussels: AFET - European Parliament).

³ Novotná, T. (2014b) 'Where Have All the Women Gone? Women in EEAS and EU Delegations'. *ISPI Analysis* (Milan: ISPI).

Despite the initial turf wars where it appeared that the supranational institutions represented both by the Commission and European Parliament held the upper hand and achieved substantial concessions⁴ during the negotiations on the launching of the EEAS, the policy brief argues that examining the make-up of the higher echelons of the EEAS and EU Delegations indicates that increasingly it is EU Member States that run the service. Thanks to the recruitment, we can observe processes that contribute and reinforce a 'CFSP-ization' or even 're-nationalization' of EU foreign policy-making in a sense of a collective 'take-over' of the EEAS managerial structures and decision-making by EU Member States.

Moreover, not only is it instructive to look at Member States/EU officials balance at the Heads of Delegation level, but also a close study of the personnel can show whether this balance is out of kilter with the rest of EEAS. Secondly, we can observe which nationalities dominate, indicating which EU countries used the window of opportunity to increase their geographical representation within the service.

The policy brief, therefore, will proceed as follows. Firstly, it will look at the proportion of Member State vis-à-vis EU permanent staff in the very high positions in the EEAS and EU Delegations, then it will examine the breakdown according to the nationalities and, finally, it will take a closer look at the EEAS personnel as a whole.

Why Staff Issues and How They Matter

When establishing the EEAS, the Council Decision⁵ outlined that staff from Member States 'should represent at least one third of all EEAS staff at AD level', whereas 'permanent officials of the Union should represent at least 60 per cent of all EEAS staff at AD level'.⁶ This target and the question of balance has been the subject of much discussion in EU circles, most notably during the EEAS Review Process culminating in the internal EEAS Review (2013), several sessions of COREPER II, the Foreign Affairs Council and the Council. The General Affairs Council Conclusions in December 2013⁷ 'welcome[d] that the target regarding the minimum (1/3) proportion of EEAS staff at AD level from Member States has been reached'.

Yet as the data in this policy brief show, there is now an overrepresentation of staff from the Member States, which is fuelling concerns that the EEAS is becoming an institution dominated by them. In fact, in one of the Non-Papers produced during the run-up to the EEAS Review, a group of 14 Member States confirmed this view by declaring that 'the "one third" threshold is a minimum level and not an upper ceiling'.⁸ In the words of one EEAS official, 'there is a trend towards "CSFP-ization" of European foreign policy'⁹ in terms of the EEAS decision-making, its structures and outcomes. Although this policy brief can neither provide a full exploration of this view nor examine whether it had any impact on achieving diplomatic successes as with the negotiations with Iran and the Serbia-Kosovo deal, it argues that the recruitment patterns did indeed contribute and reinforce the 'CFSP-ization' of the EEAS management both in its Brussels HQ and EU Delegations.

⁴ Christoffersen, P.S. (2012) 'The Creation of the European External Action Service'. A Man for All Treaties. Liber Amicorum en l'honneur de Jean-Claude Piris (Brussels: Bruylant); Lequesne, C. (2013) 'The European External Action Service: can a new institution improve the coherence of the EU Foreign Policy?'. In Telò, M. and Ponjaert, F. (eds.) The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action? (London: Ashgate); Raube, K. (2012) 'The European External Action Service and the European Parliament'. The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, Vol. 7, No. 7, pp. 65-80.

⁵ Council of the European Union (2010) 'Council decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service', Art.6, Section 9, (Brussels: Council of the European Union).

⁶ In the 'eurospeak', the 'AD level' designates officials who are responsible for policy formulation rather than any secretarial tasks.

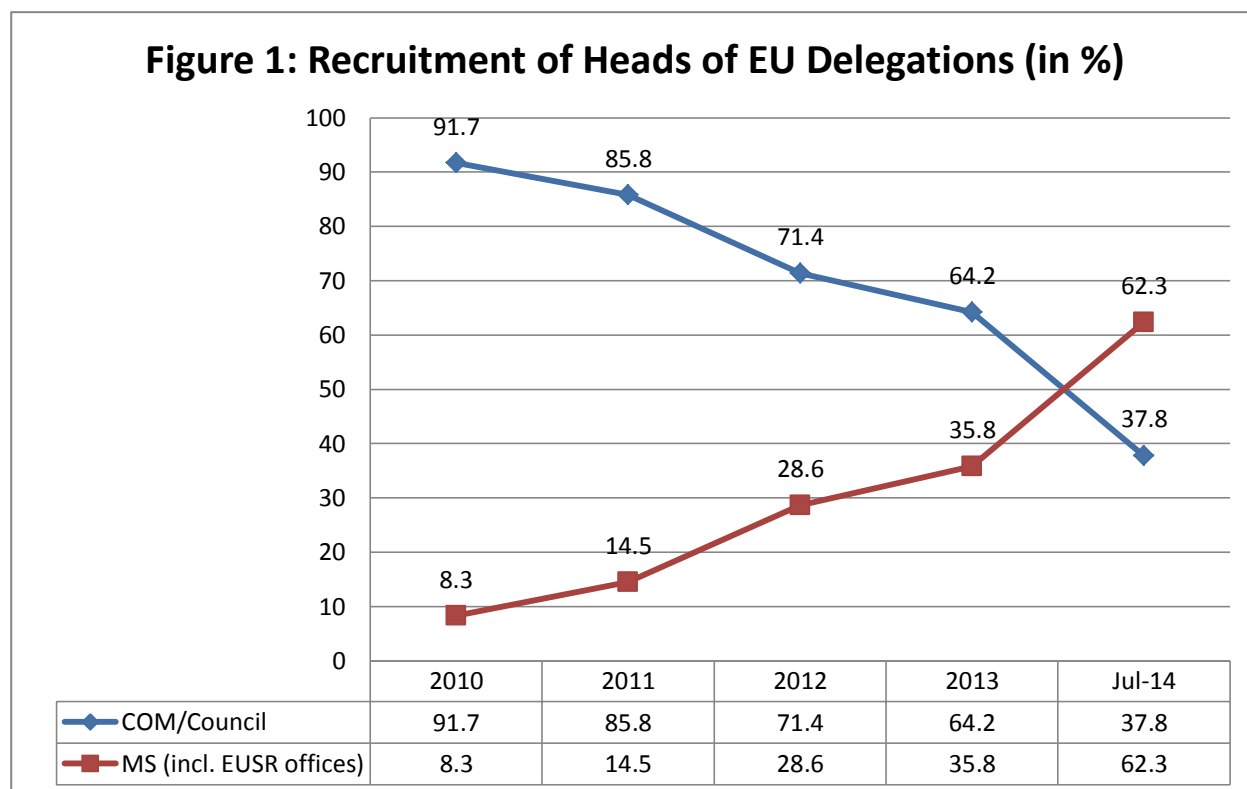
⁷ Council of the European Union (2013) 'Council conclusions on the EEAS Review'. (Brussels: Council of the European Union).

⁸ The Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, (2013) Non-paper. Strengthening the European External Action Service.

⁹ An informal discussion with a senior EEAS official, Brussels, 21 January 2014.

Member States vs EU Permanent Staff: Heads of EU Delegations and EEAS Management

Figure 1 shows the backgrounds of the 270 Heads of EU Delegations from 2010 when the first appointments by Catherine Ashton were made until July 2014, including EU Delegations to multilateral organizations.



The graph shows a clear trend: an increase of Heads of EU Delegations who have their background in national diplomatic services from 8.3 per cent in 2010 after the first rotation up to 62.3 per cent in July 2014. The trend in EU institution officials heading the EU Delegations in third countries and international organizations is reverse: it decreases from the peak of 91.7 per cent in 2010 down to 37.8 per cent in July 2014. The EEAS Council Decision target for EU Heads of Delegations was achieved by 2013 when Member States diplomats represented 35.8 per cent. However, as the graph shows, after the 2013 rotation, the target was exceeded and indeed reversed, with nearly two-thirds (62.3 per cent) of national ambassadors running the EU business in third countries and at international organizations. As one of the Corporate Board members confirmed to the author, these outcomes are results of an intentional effort on the part of the EEAS to meet the 1/3 target by placing national diplomats in EU Delegations where vacancies arose much more frequently than in the EEAS HQ.¹⁰

Not all EU Delegations, however, are of the same importance. We might assume that Member States have a strong interest to have their national ambassadors representing the EU in prestigious postings. Washington, Beijing and Moscow, for instance, are likely to be viewed as more significant than Windhoek, Bridgetown and Managua. If we pick only EU Delegations that are based in the EU's ten strategic partners,¹¹ we can nonetheless see a nearly identical trend and percentages. The proportion of EU permanent staff versus Member State Heads of Delegations in these countries was 7:3 in 2010, reached 5:5 in 2012 and reversed to 4:6 in 2014.

¹⁰ Interview with a Corporate Board Member, Brussels, 17 July 2014.

¹¹ Strategic partners include: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and the United States

In a similar vein, we may expect that Member States would prioritize senior management posts in the Brussels HQ. Here the numbers are not as clear-cut partly because of the lower numbers in the EEAS top personnel and partly because of the need to retain certain skillsets (such as budget management by the ex-Commission staff or defence expertise by the Member State military). Nonetheless, the overall trend is the same. In the early days of the EEAS, out of 21 posts from managing directors up (with two vacancies), 9 Member State staff occupied the top jobs, while in 2014, Member States took up 12 posts. If the director-level is included, the number increases even more from 9 to 17 out of 34 posts (i.e. 50%) for Member States in the EEAS senior management.

Geographical Representation: Heads of EU Delegations and the EEAS Management

Putting aside concerns over the balance between those recruited from Member State diplomatic services or from EU permanent staff, have particular countries done well or better than expected in getting their people into top positions? Journalistic accounts and the mutterings of new member state leaders have indicated the low level of officials from the 2004/7 entrants¹² (EUbusiness, 2010), but is that true? Moreover, if there is tendency towards a CFSP-ization of EEAS, we might expect to see the traditional leaders of EU foreign policy, France and Britain, dominating, plus perhaps the largest by population size, Germany. Furthermore, we might expect that as the Head of EEAS is a Brit, Britain would be overrepresented.

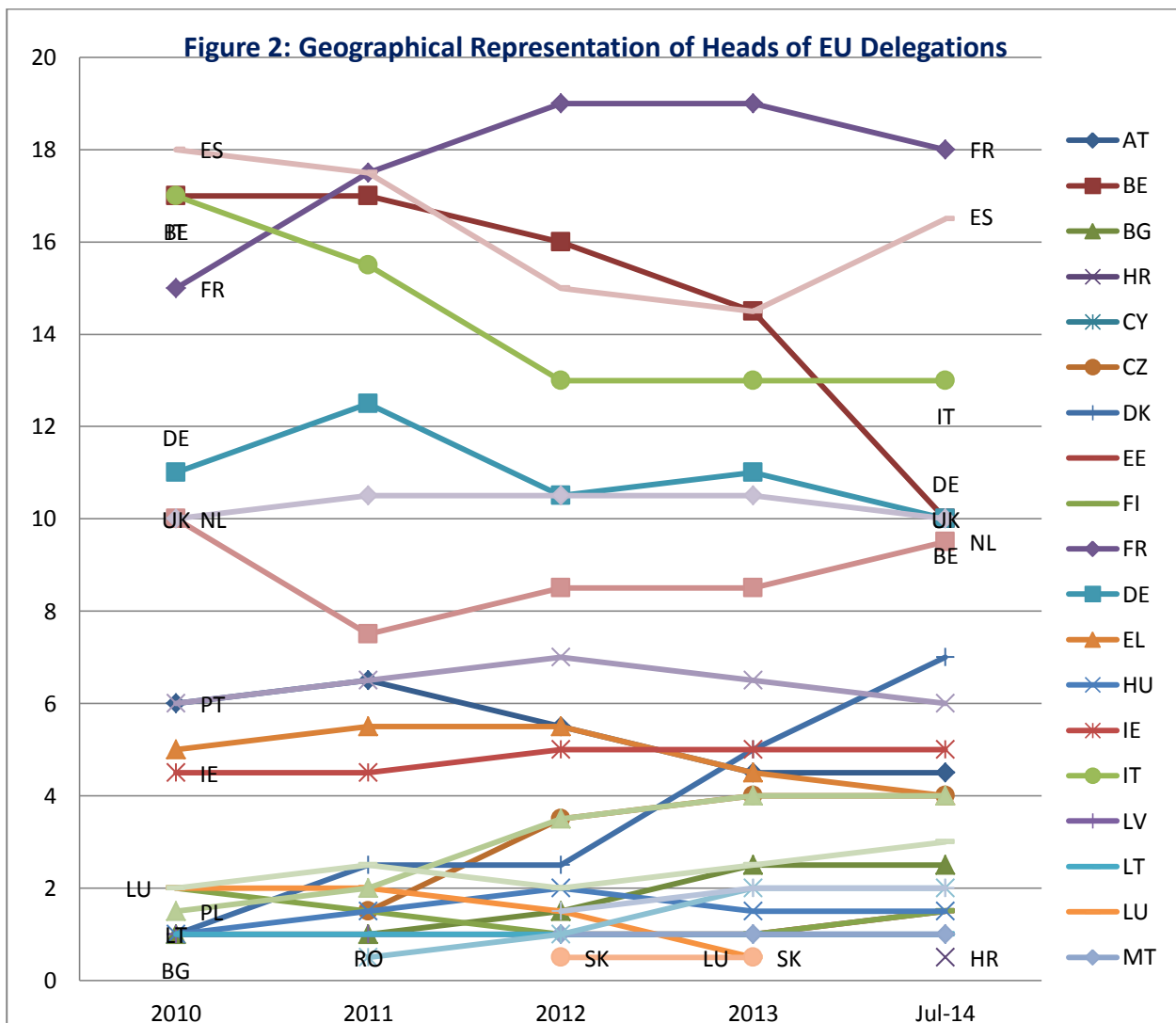


Figure 2 confirms some expectations, but confounds others. Perhaps unsurprisingly, France which has been adept at promoting its officials has been the most successful, maintaining a disproportionately high number of EU Delegations (based on its population size). In contrast, the UK has only managed less than 7.5 per cent of the ambassadors over the four year period (despite holding around 12.6 per cent of the EU-27/28 population) and Germany has had less than 8 per cent of EU ambassadors, although its population size (16 per cent of EU) would merit twice that much. Although the German lack of numbers could be further illustration of its position as a 'Reluctant Hegemon',¹³ it may owe more to Germany's traditional lack of focus on foreign policy. As for the UK, the low figures are to some extent counterbalanced when we look at the very highest echelons of the EEAS. Of the top 21 posts in EEAS (i.e. from Managing Directors up), the

¹² EUbusiness (2010) 'Big European nations grab majority of EU ambassador posts'. EUbusiness.

¹³ Paterson, W.E. (2011) 'The Reluctant Hegemon? Germany Moves Centre Stage in the European Union'. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 49, pp. 57-75.

UK held five of them in 2014, far in excess of its population proportion. If the director-level is added on to the managerial posts, Germany also starts doing better: Germans were recruited for 4 director-level posts which is the highest figure out of all Member States.

Elsewhere, Figure 2 shows that new Member States were not particularly successful at filling posts in the early years, but the trend does appear to be moving upwards in a number of cases. Nonetheless, in the case of Poland, the percentage of EU ambassadors (less than 3 per cent) still lags behind its population size (about 7.6 per cent). Given the low numbers of EU Delegation heads for many of the 2004 and 2007 entrants, we have to acknowledge individual circumstance in some of these cases. Indeed, as the Czech case illustrates, the appointments are probably more due to particular individuals than to the policy of the government, especially given the anti-Brussels rhetoric in previous governments in Prague.¹⁴ The new member states have not been particularly successful in promoting their nationals into senior management. The group of 9 countries that until July 2014 had never held any senior managerial post in the EEAS (directors and higher) includes eight out of the 2004/2007/2013 entrants (plus Portugal).

Overall Staff Balance and Nationalities: EU Delegations and EEAS Headquarters

To what extent is this picture from high management reflected at the AD level as well? In the EEAS 2014 Staffing Report,¹⁵ out of 933 AD posts, the overall percentage of national diplomats is much larger in EU Delegations (45.2 per cent) than in the EEAS HQ (25.3 per cent). Table 1 shows the proportion of Member State diplomats by their nationality as a percentage of the total staff and compares it with the percentage of the EU permanent officials. To contrast data from the previous years, the policy brief takes an EP report on geographical and gender balance,¹⁶ which includes similar data on geographical representation from June 2012. If a column indicates '+', the figures increase; if a column indicates '-', the figures decreased. An empty cell or '0' indicates no change.

¹⁴ Novotná, T. (2014a) 'Po letech negace EU chce být vláda u toho'. Lidové noviny (Prague).

¹⁵ European External Action Service (2014) Staffing Report 2014 (Brussels: European External Action Service).

¹⁶ Directorate General for External Policies Policy Department (2013) 'Achieving Geographical and Gender Balance in the European External Action Service' (Brussels: AFET - European Parliament).

Table 1: EEAS Geographical Composition in EU Delegations and the Brussels Headquarters

Countries	Member State Diplomats		Trend	AD Officials		Trend	Total		Overall Trend	% of EU Population
	% of total staff	Number		% of total staff	Number		% of total staff	Total Number		
Austria	1% (9)		-	1.9% (18)		+	2.9% (27)		-	1.7%
Belgium	1.4% (13)		-	5.5% (51)		+	6.9% (64)		0/+	2.2%
Bulgaria	1.1% (10)		+	0.4% (4)		+	1.5% (14)		+	1.4%
Croatia	-			-			-			0.8%
Cyprus	0.1% (1)			0.2% (2)		-	0.3% (3)		-	0.2%
Czech rep.	1.3% (12)			1.1% (10)		-	2.4% (22)		-	2.1%
Denmark	1 % (9)		+	1.7% (16)		-	2.7% (25)		+	1.1%
Estonia	0.9% (8)		+	0.4% (4)		-	1.3% (12)			0.3%
Finland	0.7% (7)		-	1.3% (12)		-	2% (19)		-	1.1%
France	4 % (37)		+	8.7% (81)		-	12.6% (118)		-	12.9%
Germany	2.4% (22)		+	7.8% (73)		+	10.2% (95)		+	16.1%
Greece	1% (9)		+	2.6% (24)		-	3.5% (33)		0/+	2.2%
Hungary	1.4% (13)		+	1.1% (10)		+	2.5% (25)		+	2%
Ireland	1% (9)		+	1.7% (16)			2.7% (22)		+	0.9%
Italy	1.9% (18)		+	9.3% (87)		-	11.3% (105)		+	12%
Latvia	0.6% (6)		+	0.4% (4)			1.1% (10)		+	0.4%
Lithuania	0.5% (5)		+	0.4% (4)		-	1 % (9)		-	0.6%
Luxembourg	0.1% (1)		-	0.2% (2)			0.3% (3)		-	0.1%
Malta	0.5% (5)			0.2% (2)			0.8% (7)			0.1%
Netherlands	1.1% (10)		+	2.2% (21)		-	3.3% (31)			3.3%
Poland	1.3% (12)		+	2.8% (26)		-	4.1% (38)			7.6%
Portugal	1% (9)		+	2.1% (20)			3.1% (29)		+	2.1%
Romania	1.5% (14)		+	0.4% (4)		+	1.9% (18)		+	4.2%
Slovakia	0.3% (3)		-	0.3% (3)			0.6% (6)		-	1.1%
Slovenia	1.0% (9)		+	0.2% (2)		-	1.2% (11)		+	0.4%
Spain	2.6% (24)		+	6.3% (59)		-	8.9% (83)		-	9.1%
Sweden	1.3% (12)		+	2.7% (25)		-	4% (37)		+	1.9%
United Kingdom	2.7% (25)		+	4.4% (41)		-	7.1% (66)		-	12.4%
Total	33.4% (312)		+	66.6% (621)		-	100% (933)		0/+	100%

As with the Figures 1 and 2 on Heads of EU Delegations, France is relatively successful with its overall staffing strategy. Despite numbers of the French *fonctionnaires* retiring (and thus a substantial decline in the category of permanent staff), the French have managed to more or less stabilize their representation. This is no surprise given that the French pro-active and comprehensive method has been hailed as one of the most successful approaches to EEAS recruitment.¹⁷ Although the Germans improved their overall position, as with the Heads of EU Delegations, their proportion within the EEAS staff is far less than their population. The total

¹⁷ Balfour, R. and Raik, K. (2013) The European External Action Service and National Diplomacies (Brussels: EPC).

numbers for the Brits look bleak: not only did the numbers of their nationals in the service decline, the total number is much lower than the UK would deserve based on its size.

Beyond the 'Big Three', Table 1 indicates that some countries have been more successful than others in getting their people into the EEAS. The success of Hungary, Denmark and Romania - which deserves the label of the 'best mover' through nearly doubling its representation in all the categories (including EU ambassadors) - contrasts with the decline in levels for some Member States. For instance, Spain but also Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Lithuania have experienced a drop in AD permanent staff numbers, but have not been able to compensate for that by incoming national diplomats, while Italy and Sweden did manage to increase their overall numbers despite a decline in AD permanent officials. Belgium is an interesting case which goes against the trend for countries that are traditionally overrepresented: in terms of Heads of EU Delegations, Belgian numbers are declining but they have kept climbing up for the overall EEAS personnel.

There are two clear 'losers', Luxembourg and Finland, whose representation has sunken to a minimum at all levels. We may speculate that increases and decreases may be due to starting from a high/low base (Spain and Luxembourg c.f. Romania), a change of government (Denmark), the location of the EEAS (Belgium) and/or a more active recruitment drive on the part of the Member States, but further research is needed.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Data in this policy brief show that although there were dramatically underrepresented in the early years of EEAS's existence, Member States are now over-represented. Such a finding chimes a chord with fears expressed by the guru of EEAS Poul Skytte Christoffersen, who told this author in March 2013 that EEAS will not face the problem of reaching the one third target, but retaining the 60 per cent of the permanent staff.¹⁸ Indeed, the recruitment patterns outlined here do feed into the tendency towards CFSP-ization of the EEAS that is worthy of further study. Whether the increasing dominance of Member State diplomats helps explain the successes of EEAS in recent times (e.g. Kosovo and Iran) remains to be seen. Moreover, the increasing role of national officials may make it harder to foster the esprit de corps that Juncos and Pomorska (2014) argue has been hard to manufacture in EEAS.

Nevertheless, we would be wise to caution against thinking the dominance of national officials is now cast in stone. Although she is far from an omnipotent figure, no other body in the European Union depends as much on the person at the helm. These data are drawn from Catherine Ashton's tenure as HR/VP. After a new HR/VP will take office he/she may reshuffle the entire EEAS set-up, including the Heads of EU Delegations. We may, therefore, discover what looked like a trend was merely a blip.

¹⁸ Interview with Poul Skytte Christoffersen, Brussels, 13 March 2013.

This research uses a number of different sources. In the first instance, it draws on various available EEAS, Member State and European Parliament statistics for the overall staff data, its origins, backgrounds and levels. Secondly, the policy brief uses a series of organizational charts (or 'organigrammes')¹⁹ from February 2011 until July 2014 out of which individuals holding managerial posts in the EEAS HQ can be identified and classified. All EEAS managers were split into two groups: top managers and senior managers. The top management includes anyone who has a direct reporting line to HRVP, including Managing Directors, Corporate Board members, the EU military and civilian managers, the Head of the Cabinet, the head of the Foreign Policy Instruments and the chair of the Political and Security Committee, while senior management includes in addition the EEAS Director level. Neither of the two groups includes EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) and Heads of EU Delegations (who are examined separately).

For Heads of EU Delegations, a unique database was created which maps the personnel who have held the positions of Heads of EU Delegation, combining informal information from EEAS and EU Delegation staff with official EEAS documents and public internet sources (such as linked-in profiles). Although the primary focus of the research was to identify whether an EU ambassador was recruited from EU institutions or a Member State, the by-product of collecting the data also sheds light on the relative 'success' of particular Member States in getting 'their' people into significant positions within the EEAS.

Four methodological points are worth mentioning regarding the database of 270 Heads of EU Delegations. Firstly, each Head of Delegation received a full point for each year in the office. In case there was a change of personnel during the course of the year, a half point was assigned to each Head of Delegation. Secondly, given the fact that the Council Decision on establishing the EEAS combines both former Commission and Council officials into a group of permanent officials of the Union, the numbers for former Commission and Council officials were also merged. They also include officials from the European Parliament (and other EU institutions and agencies) who could be recruited from July 2013 on. Thirdly, in case an EU ambassador previously worked for an EU Special Representative's office or an EU's military and civilian mission, s/he was considered to be a Member State diplomat. Fourthly, the number of EU Delegations fluctuated thanks to the opening of new Delegations (e.g. South Sudan), upgrading to full-fledged Delegations (e.g. Swaziland), but also cost-saving closure (e.g. Surinam) and EU accession (Croatia), hence percentages rather than absolute numbers are used. The numbers include EU Delegations led by *chargé d'affaires*.

¹⁹ Available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/organisation_en.pdf (accessed on 15.2.2011, 13.10.2011, 30.1.2012, 10.12.2012, 26.3.2013, 17.10.2012, 24.2.2014, 15.4.2014).

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