



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



GLOBAL RE-ORDERING: EVOLUTION THROUGH EUROPEAN NETWORKS

Matching skills to a new diplomatic context

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INTRODUCTION

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is a significant innovation in international politics. Nevertheless, claims about its novelty and distinctiveness are overstated. Foreign ministries and international organizations have historically faced and are currently facing very similar challenges to those of the EEAS. Foreign ministries have constantly wrestled with line ministries over control of policy decisions in important issue areas such as energy, finance, and climate. Additionally, international organizations have a long history of trying to build a cadre of civil servants that forego their national loyalties and become professionally committed to the mandate of the organization.

Most importantly, much like the EEAS, both international organizations and foreign ministries find themselves having to adapt to a new diplomatic context in which the task of representation is being gradually replaced by that of governance. To succeed among other competitors, both internally and externally, the EEAS needs to build a culture in which skills are matched to ever changing contexts.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The EEAS is surely a unique creation. It functions as the EU's diplomatic corps, yet it does so alongside the work of the Commission, with which it shares many important tasks, such as development policy. It has a staff that is comprised both of international (European) civil servants, loyal solely to the EEAS on permanent contracts, and diplomats seconded from member states on fixed term rotation. The former group dominates, being staff from DG RELEX and the Council. Moreover, the EEAS is seeking to devise what the EU calls a “comprehensive approach” by building on and coordinating a host of foreign policy initiatives from EU's supranational and intergovernmental bodies. However, it is at the level of institutional structures and the division of authority between actors that the uniqueness of the Service primarily resides. In terms of the contents of its work, there is a lot to learn from other types of actors.

It is important, therefore, to take a step back from the immediate turf wars and institutional complexities of the EU and ask what it is that “external action” or “diplomacy” consists of in the contemporary era. What does it mean to engage in diplomacy in the 21st century? What tasks does it involve, and what types of skills are needed? Answering these questions cast the challenges and opportunities of the EEAS in a different light. I first discuss the transformation in diplomacy where governance is emerging as a central task alongside that of representation, and then proceed to reflect on other international organizations' experiences, focusing in particular on why some of them, like the World Bank, are seen as authoritative, whereas others, such as the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, are not.

Diplomacy is conventionally understood as a practice organized around the representation of one state vis-à-vis others. Representation implies negotiation, communication, and information gathering. Diplomatic services are therefore predominantly organized along geographical lines, with different divisions being responsible for different regions and countries, with some functionally defined divisions operating alongside the geographical ones (on trade, multilateralism, development, etc). This is also the case with the EEAS, as it has five regional divisions and one “functional” division on “Global and Multilateral issues.” Since diplomacy is organized around the idea of representation, the question of how to balance generic skills in representation, negotiation and communication with in-depth geographical or issue-specific skills or expertise has generally tended to privilege the former. This is part of the reason why there is system of circulation between postings, so as to avoid the tendency for diplomats to “go native” if they stay too long in one particular country or area.

Increasingly, today’s diplomacy is organized around governance, which is distinct from representation.¹ Governance involves acting together with others to achieve certain outcomes – i.e., it is acting *on* some object, such as development, security, poverty, or climate, which transcends territorial borders. Governance obviously includes representation, but it involves much more, such as policy dialogue on and competition over how, and by whom, something is to be governed. “Development,” “climate” or “human rights” are all high on the agenda of the EU, and the EEAS is, in the first instance, not about “representation”, but governance. Insofar as diplomacy revolves around negotiations with others about how to govern – that is, about how to define and address phenomena that transcends borders – the qualities of the “ideal diplomat” changes with it. As issue-centric or geographically specific expertise or skills become more important, the extensive reliance on different types of expert groups in virtually every international policy negotiations can be witnessed. In this image of diplomacy, a range of non-state actors play a much more relevant role as they possess the expertise, networks, or resources that are necessary to establish specific governance arrangements.

¹ Sending, Ole Jacob, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann (eds) *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics*. Forthcoming. (Cambridge University Press).

One important implication of this development is not only that a range of non-state actors are engaging in diplomatic processes, but that there is more intense competition between both state and non-state actors over who has authority to define what is to be governed and how. Those that prevail are typically those that have invested in and been able to develop a set of core skills and attendant practices that others recognize as either authoritative or necessary. States, for example, compete with one another for positions of authority in a range of issue areas, such as development and climate. Importantly, the terms of this competition revolve around much more than military or economic power, and include a significant element of how to build and institutionalise skills and expertise of relevance for governance.

This is good news for the EEAS, as it means that its long-term investment in and commitment to some issue-areas may pay off in terms of authority both within and beyond the EU, given that such investment is focused on the development of skills in the variable task of governance, and not solely representation. For example, the single most important reason why Denmark or Norway has a level of authority on humanitarian issues that is well beyond that of Russia and China is that these small countries have invested resources in and built skills within their diplomatic service and in humanitarian organizations that are now internationally recognized.

The same logic underlies the competition over positions of authority between international organizations.² These organizations face similar challenges to the EEAS's in that they work within given mandates and under the control of several (state) principals. Nonetheless, investments in expertise and skills in some issue-areas and not least adapting the skills and expertise in-house to cope with new governance challenges has enabled some international organizations, such as the World Bank, to become the single most authoritative institution on development issues. Again, the focus of the analysis has to shift from representation to governance in order to see how and why this is the case. The UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs is a small player in the area of development, in no small part because it has not, for a variety of reasons, been able to develop and harness expertise and skills that are seen as relevant by other actors. This is in marked

² Sending, Ole Jacob, *Competing for Authority in Global Governance*. (University of Michigan Press, Forthcoming)

contrast to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which houses considerable international expertise on crisis management and building peace.

If diplomacy is about representation, then we tend to privilege states' power and their bargaining capabilities. These factors are still, of course, of central importance. But inasmuch as these states have to rely on the expertise of the World Bank or of the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations for advice and operational expertise on key governance issues, these organizations are in a position to shape outcomes in distinct, albeit often indirect, ways.

Since governance is to an ever-larger extent the register of diplomatic work, there is arguably less *stability* in the needed skills and expertise by a competent and authoritative actor. The World Health Organization is a case in point. The WHO has traditionally been regarded as an important actor by virtue of the uniformity of its public health expertise. Over time, however, new actors, such as GAVI, partly funded by the Gates Foundation and with large pharmaceutical organizations on board, have emerged as equally if not more significant in health governance. The shift of the focus towards the economic effectiveness of health projects indicates that health expertise alone has proved insufficient to gain authority in the field. Similarly, in a recent paper on the IMF, Leonard Seabrooke and Emilie Nilsson have demonstrated that there has been a significant change in the type of expertise proven to be the most valued in financial markets activities, with a shift from academic expertise to practical experience.³

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the shift from representation to governance implies a number of challenges and opportunities that are shared across the ecology of organizations involved in the managing of world politics. Foreign ministries, international organizations, corporations and non-governmental

³ Seabrooke, L. and E.R. Nilsson. 2014. 'Professional Skills in International Financial Surveillance: Assessing Pre- and Post-Crisis Policy Teams', *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions*, 27, forthcoming.

organizations are continually adapting to the changing contexts in which they are operating. But it is arguably the case that foreign ministries and international organizations have been slow to reflect on and seek to capitalise upon the emergence of governance as a significant framework for diplomatic work.

For all the institutional – and political – challenges that it is facing, the EEAS does have the possibility of building a reasonably effective diplomatic service for the 21st century. Achieving this goal, however, requires a shift in thinking from representation to governance. This entails, above all, a focus on issue-specific and geographically specific expertise, and on building a culture where skills have not only to be continually created, but also adapted to changing governance contexts. This is particularly true as there is arguably more complexity in identifying effective ways of tackling important global problems, as when development problems cannot be seen in isolation from those of climate change, and where organized crime and migration are similarly intertwined with those of security.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

This Policy Brief draws on research performed under Work Package 1 in GR:EEN, focused on the changes in the skills and expertise that dominate in different types of transnational networks, conducted together with Professor Leonard Seabrooke. It also draws on some of the findings from a collaborative research project with Iver B. Neumann and Vincent Pouliot about the character and evolution of diplomacy in world politics. Both projects are based on analyses of archival material, on interviews, and on participant observation.

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FURTHER READING

All working papers, policy briefing papers and other publications are available on our website: www.greenfp7.eu/papers