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A close look at the EU foreign service staff reshuffle



Mogherini has diminished the disproportionate influence of member states (Photo: consilium.europa.eu)

By **TEREZA NOVOTNA**

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Even though the latest personnel changes introduced by Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign policy chief, were the results of the behind-the-closed-door deals between the European Commission and the EU External Action Service (EEAS), many of them move the EU's diplomatic service in the right direction.

Mogherini was mandated by the EU Council to revamp the top-heavy EEAS by the end of 2015. In organisational terms, she visually rearranged the EEAS chart.

But on closer inspection, Mogherini's reforms appear to be much less extensive. Although she reordered the geographical and thematic directorates and slimmed down the administrative department, the number of top officials - four - remains the same .



EEAS building in EU district in Brussels
(Photo: EUobserver)

The backgrounds and portfolios of Alain Le Roy, the French secretary general of the EEAS and his three deputies - German Helga Schmid, Spaniard Pedro Serrano and Swede Christian Leffler - also remain similar to what was before.

Structurally, Mogherini really shook things up only in the security policy, or CSDP section by putting the “defence ministry” part of EEAS on an equal footing with other sections - a move that the French had initially resisted.

At the lower level, through the annual rotation between the EEAS HQ and EU delegations and internal promotions, Mogherini decreased the number of directors from two to one by, for instance, dispatching some directors to head EU delegations (e.g. Gerhard Sabathil from Asia and Pacific to Seoul).

From now on, directors can deputise for their bosses, the managing directors, alleviating travel burdens and turf battles. If we include all senior posts, Mogherini cut down the overall number of EEAS managerial jobs from 34 (under her predecessor Catherine Ashton) to 30. This decrease is not a huge leap but represents a step forward.

Shenanigans

The most significant changes took place thanks to personnel shenanigans with the European Commission.

It seems Mogherini might have arranged for an interchange between EEAS and commission officials by hiring Gianmarco Di Vita from the commission's

secretariat general and Lotte Knudsen from the aid bureau, DG Devco, in exchange for outgoing EEAS managing directors Hugues Mingarelli and Patrick Child, who may trade their places with the incoming commission executives.

Such reshuffles between EEAS and the commission should in fact be the rule, strengthening the EEAS-commission link and helping to foster a more cooperative environment between the institutions.

It is however a shame that these swaps were much more a product of behind-closed-doors personal deals arranged by Stefano Manservigi, Mogherini's head of cabinet, rather than a result of transparent structural tradeoffs between EEAS and commission officials at equal levels that would be run by human resources departments in both organisations.

It remains to be seen whether the upcoming rotation to EU delegations will reflect similar inter-institutional political deals as the nominations of Markus Cornaro (former deputy Director General of DG Devco) to head the delegation in South Africa and Patrick Simonnet (former deputy head of unit in DG DEVCO) to lead the delegation in Iraq may suggest.

Ashton's tenure was marked by competition among EU states to put as many of their nationals into as many key jobs in EEAS and delegations as possible.

Tackling imbalances

Under Mogherini, the overall composition of the EEAS management is evenly split (with two more posts to be filled) and with the very top ranks favouring EU officials (nine) over national diplomats (five).

So far, the Italians lead the way (as much as the Brits did under Ashton), followed by Germans and, perhaps surprisingly, Swedes and Austrians.

However, the French are obvious but remarkable losers of the personnel reshuffles: except for Le Roy, there is no other French diplomat in the top hierarchy of the EEAS.

Moreover, there remains a stark under-representation of member states that joined the EU after 2004. In fact, the situation has slightly deteriorated with the departure of Poland's Maciej Popowski from the CSDP structures under Mogherini.

Even if the results are a product of political exchanges between the EEAS and the commission, Mogherini has tackled the organisational and staff imbalances in the EEAS.

She has diminished the disproportionate influence of member states on the EEAS and tilted back towards a better balance with supranational institutions.

But she should watch out that the EEAS does not move too close to the commission, as some member states have started to warn that she might risk alienating them along the way, potentially hampering the effectiveness of the EU's external action.

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