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Not a Leap but a Step in the Right Direction: Mogherini's Structural and Personnel Reform of the EU's Diplomatic Service

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- **Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign policy chief, has recently been praised for mediating the Iran nuclear deal. However, policy action (or inaction) should not be the only metric by which to judge Mogherini's successes and failures. Any High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HRVP) is also responsible for the effective organization and management of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and its officials. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that it is the EEAS personnel who prepares HRVP's foreign policy proposals and represents the EU in third countries.**
- **Given the structural and staff imbalances that resulted from the ways in which the EEAS was created and the recruitment policies of Mogherini's predecessor, HRVP Catherine Ashton, following the EEAS's own 2013 Review, the Council mandated the current HRVP to revamp the top-heavy EEAS by the end of 2015. In organizational terms, although Mogherini's reforms appear to be visually quite comprehensive, on closer inspection they are much less extensive. On the other hand, Mogherini has introduced significant changes in personnel, many of which are moving the EEAS in the right direction. In effect, the necessary changes are being implemented but an institutional reticence remains a challenge for the HRVP to overcome.**



Structural Reforms within EEAS

Comparing Mogherini's internal restructuring of the EEAS¹ with that of Ashton, the latest EEAS organizational chart looks rather different.² Under the new HRVP, instead of a four-member Corporate Board, the EEAS is headed by a single Secretary General with three deputies. The reporting lines are clearer than before, creating a pyramid-like hierarchy. Yet from a closer look, we see that the number of these top officials, four, remains the same as well as their similar backgrounds and portfolios. Alain Le Roy replaced Pierre Vimont, another French top diplomat, as Secretary General while Helga Schmid, a German former Council official, kept her job of political affairs Deputy Secretary General. Pedro Serrano, a Spanish diplomat and ex-advisor to the European Council President van Rompuy, took over the CSDP and crisis management section from the Pole Maciej Popowski who was not only from Central and Eastern Europe but also an 'agent' of the European Parliament (EP), given his previous work for the EP's president Buzek. Moreover, Mogherini abolished the post of Chief Operating Officer which was occupied by David O'Sullivan, an Irish Commission official (now head of the EU Delegation to the US) while at the same time promoting Christian Leffler, an EEAS Managing Director and long-term Swedish Commission fonctionnaire, to the newly created position of Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global Issues.

Mogherini implemented the most thorough changes in the security directorate of the EEAS. By shifting the CSDP structures under the full responsibility of a Deputy Secretary General and eliminating the managing directorate for crisis response, she put the 'defence ministry' part of EEAS on an equal footing with other sections, a move that had been resisted by the French in the past (Lequesne, 2013). Moreover, Mogherini reordered the geographical and thematic managing directorates and slimmed down the administrative department. With the exception of Europe

and Central Asia, Managing Directors have a Director each (rather than two) who can from now on deputize for them, alleviating the travels and turf battles. Nonetheless, HRVP also added a general affairs directorate. If we include the remaining senior posts such as chair of the Political and Security Committee, Mogherini cut down the overall number of EEAS managerial jobs from 34 under Ashton to 30. This decrease is not a huge leap but represents a step forward.³

Personnel Reshuffles within EEAS

Using the annual rotation between the EEAS HQ and EU Delegations, Mogherini vacated several posts in Brussels by appointing directors to head EU Delegations (Gerhard Sabathil from Asia and Pacific to Seoul and Vincent Guérend from finance to Jakarta) while bringing EU ambassadors back to Brussels (Angelina Eichhorst from Lebanon to head the Western Europe directorate and Thomas Mayr-Harting from the UN in New York to be Eichhorst's Managing Director for Europe at large). Moreover, various personnel moves took place within EEAS: apart from Christian Leffler (see above), Koen Vervaeke and Gunnar Wiegand were promoted from directors to Managing Directors, Patricia Llobart Cussac from head of division to director, Fernando Gentilini became an EU Special Representative and Peteris Ustubs joined Mogherini's Cabinet. In addition, rotation also occurred out of the EEAS through Member State officials returning back to national diplomacies (e.g. director Frans Potuyt, appointed as Dutch ambassador to Kuwait).

Finally, it seems that 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 DG DEVCO who would trade their places with outgoing EEAS Managing Directors Hugues Mingarelli and Patrick Child. Such a 'Schuman Shuffle' (Novotná, 2013) between the EEAS, the Commission (and Member States) should in fact be the

¹ Mogherini presented the internal EEAS reorganization in June 2015 and nearly all posts were filled by 1 March 2016.

² The author has been collecting the EEAS organizational charts since its establishment. For the latest version, please visit the EEAS website at:

http://eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/organisation_en.pdf.

³ The graphic streamlining of the EEAS is aided by the fact that the Council Working Group chairs no longer feature in the organizational chart, making the organigramme look leaner albeit this is only another optical change since these positions still exist.

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rule, helping strengthen the EEAS-Commission link and inducing more cooperative environment between the institutions (Spence and Batora, 2015).

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Even though these swaps are likely to result in improved Commission-EEAS ties, it is however a shame that they were much more the product of behind-closed doors personal deals arranged by Stefano Manservigi, Mogherini’s head of Cabinet, rather than an outcome of transparent structural tradeoffs between EEAS and Commission officials at equal levels. By resorting to opaque political reshuffles, any natural upward mobility for EU officials who were initially transferred to the EEAS but currently lack any political backing by the Commission (or Member States) becomes more difficult, making them ‘foot soldiers’ of Mogherini’s service with limited career prospects within EEAS. It remains to be seen whether the upcoming rotation to EU Delegations will reflect similar interinstitutional political deals at various levels as the latest 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.

Geographical and Gender Issues within EEAS

Ashton’s tenure was marked by competition among EU Member States to put as many of their nationals to as many key jobs in EEAS and Delegations as possible (Novotná, 2014; Ivan, 2011). Exacerbated by the fact that Ashton needed to fill up one-third of posts assigned to Member States quickly, national appointees were in a clear majority in the high-ranking posts (as of June 2014, out of 21 top

EEAS posts, 12 were occupied by national diplomats). Under Mogherini, the overall composition of the EEAS management is so far evenly split (with two more posts to be filled) and with the very top ranks favoring EU officials (9) over national diplomats (5).

Although the EEAS staff should not represent their home countries, ‘the geographical balance’ matters both to sending Member States and thanks to the diplomatic cultures that national diplomats bring with them (Juncos and Pomorska, 2014; Henökl, 2015). So far, in the EEAS management, Italians lead the way (as much as British did under Ashton), followed by Germans and, perhaps surprisingly, Swedes and Austrians. In contrast to the past, Belgians and Spaniards have increased their numbers as well.

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Unlike Ashton’s period when they held one of the highest percentages of senior posts, however, the French are obvious but remarkable losers of the personnel reshuffles: except for Secretary General Le Roy (whose nomination was allegedly secured by a deal between President Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Renzi to nominate Mogherini as HRVP), there is no other French diplomat in the top hierarchy of the EEAS. This perhaps goes in line with the trend that the French National Assembly has recently pointed out to: the decreasing fraction of French nationals working within EU institutions.

HRVP Mogherini has enlarged the number of women at all senior levels, including creating a special post of gender advisor (Maria Marinaki), from four to seven women which at 23% is still far below parity with men but marks significant progress. By recruiting Edita Hrdá to Managing Director for the Americas, Mogherini hired the only female managing director under her watch and, in addition, the first

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Czech appointed to the EEAS management. Nevertheless, there remains a stark underrepresentation of Member States which entered the EU since 2004, a situation that even slightly deteriorated by already losing one senior post under Mogherini with the departure of Polish national Maciej Popowski.

Bringing the Balance between the Commission and Member States Back In

Mogherini was determined to tackle the organizational and staff imbalances in the EEAS decision-making structures. Even if the results are less groundbreaking than they might appear at first glance, particularly in structural terms, they are broadly on the right track. Through the new recruitment strategies, and together with resuscitating the Group of External Action Commissioners (Blockmans and Russack, 2015), HRVP Mogherini has diminished the disproportionate influence of Member States on the EEAS, shifting the balance with supranational institutions back to where it should belong according to the Treaties. Mogherini should nevertheless watch out that the EEAS does not move 'too close' to the Commission, as some Member States have started warning she might risk alienating them along the way, potentially hampering the effectiveness of the EU's external action.

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Setting the right structures and a mix of staff within EEAS remains a challenge six years after its launch. It is therefore imperative that Mogherini continues stepping in the right direction, ensuring the changes to her service are effective, efficient and sustainable over time. By taking the advantage of the EEAS's diverse toolkit, the HRVP's chances of achieving foreign policy successes through exercising soft and hard power will be enhanced, as the Iran deal negotiations illustrated.

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