

# Fit for Purpose?

## The European External Action Service one year on

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One year after the launch of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the first phase of setting up the bureaucratic structure of the European Union's (EU) new foreign service has been completed. The EEAS has changed the way in which the EU conducts foreign policy. The structures and tools created by the Lisbon Treaty have the potential to develop a more coherent, effective, and visible EU foreign policy that ensures that the different strands of the EU's external policies – including diplomacy, economic co-operation, development aid, and crisis management – are co-ordinated and consistent.

During its first year of operation, the EEAS has been learning by doing, for example by responding to the revolutionary changes brought about by the Arab Spring, political instability and the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa, and the ongoing shifts in the global balance of power. Drawing on the experience gained by both Oxfam and its partners on the ground, this paper intends to shed a first light on the strengths and weaknesses of the new EEAS. We encourage the EU's institutions and Member States to come together and embed a coherent and progressive EU foreign policy that champions an international order premised on respect for human rights and international law, the principles of equality and solidarity, the eradication of poverty and trade that is fair.

# Executive summary

The first anniversary of the European External Action Service (EEAS) finds the European Union (EU) in the midst of an economic, financial, and identity crisis that has aggravated the ongoing decline in Europe's stature on the global scene as new political and economic actors emerge. The new diplomatic service provides the EU with an opportunity to address its shortcomings in foreign policy by bringing greater coherence to external policy making; by enhancing consistency across EU instruments; and by adopting a more comprehensive and strategic approach to global challenges.

Since the very beginning, the EEAS has faced major policy challenges. No sooner had it come into being – while still in the process of being built – than it had to react to the unprecedented wave of protests in Arab world, a NATO intervention in Libya, and a humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa – to name just a few. Supported by the new Service, Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), has worked to galvanize the EU's collective and multifaceted response to these international crises. After a shaky start, the EU foreign policy chief now gives a consistently improved performance, both in Brussels and abroad.

However, one year on, the procedural problems and structural weaknesses that have come to light are yet to be addressed. With the first phase of setting up the bureaucratic structures of the EEAS complete, disconnects between a top-heavy management, the expert desk officers, and staff in EU Delegations are still to be fixed. Moreover, the cooperation between the EEAS and the European Commission (EC) will need to be transformed in order to achieve a genuine two-way interaction in policy shaping and policy execution.

In addition, not all the Member States have genuinely co-operated with the EEAS to allow the EU to speak with one coherent voice, especially in multilateral settings. Other worrying trends include the risk of politicizing development co-operation and humanitarian aid. These trends betray a clear danger that 'coherence' could just become a cover for the instrumentalization of soft power for politically motivated security gains.

With the right institutional setup and vision, and with unambiguous support from Member States, the EEAS could represent a contribution to, rather than a deviation from, the EU's treaty mandate to promote its values and champion an international order premised on respect for human rights and international law, the principles of equality and solidarity, the eradication of poverty, and trade that is fair. The findings in this paper show that in the changing global balance of power, an EU foreign policy driven by these values will help deliver the EU's strategic interests and build its reputation and credibility as a leader in finding solutions to global problems.

# Recommendations

## To the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission:

- **As High Representative**, develop and lead a common EU foreign policy that offers a vision and an overall strategy that reaffirms the expectations that the EU is a global actor that delivers on its commitments.
- **As Vice-President of the European Commission**, use this role fully to create better synergies and greater coherence between EU external relations that are managed by the EC (trade, energy, climate change, humanitarian aid, and development), while making sure that all the EU's external action instruments are consistent with its declared aim to reduce poverty around the world and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Engage more with other Commissioners who hold portfolios relevant for EU external policy by reactivating the group of External Relations (RELEX) Commissioners.
- **As permanent Chair of the EU Foreign Affairs Council**, further engage in increasing coherence and co-ordination among Member States as well as between Member States and EU institutions. Create a space for civil society actors to interact with the Foreign Affairs Council in order to enhance the much needed accountability of its decision-making process. This model should also be replicated by the Heads of EU Delegations as permanent Chairs of Member States' Missions in capitals.

## To the European External Action Service:

- **Design a clear vision for EU foreign policy**, responding to the question of where the EU wants to be in 2015 as a global actor that responds to global challenges. This vision – driven by EU values such as respect for democracy, human rights, and international humanitarian law – will deliver on the EU's interests, building its reputation and credibility as a partner in developing solutions to global problems. This vision will provide clarity on the role of the EEAS, give it a sense of purpose, and renew its standing vis-à-vis Member States.
- **Develop an overarching strategy** for EU foreign policy that underpins this vision and guides external action to make sure it champions the eradication of poverty within a rules-based international order. This strategy requires strong co-operation between EU institutions and determined support from Member States so that the EEAS can carry out the EU's ambitious Lisbon Treaty mandate in the world.
- **Move from a reactive to a proactive attitude** in order to fit all EU external policies into one overarching strategy, and guide contingency plans for future developments. Such an overarching strategy will include the following basic principles on which to build operational strategies: uphold universal values, set mutual accountability, foster multilateral solutions, engage with civil

society, and promote a gender perspective so that policies are informed by their possible impact on women. These principles would guide both thematic and geographical strategies and connect them in a coherent way.

- **Avoid politicizing development aid** as this undermines its effectiveness, gets in the way of poverty reduction, and often fails to build long-term economic security for recipient communities and their governments, as well as donors themselves. In co-ordinating development programmes, poverty reduction should remain the main purpose. Development aid should not be used to respond to other foreign policy objectives.
- **Respect the independence of humanitarian assistance.** While there is a need for co-ordination across external policy tools, humanitarian aid must remain part of a separate budget, while decision-making must be fully independent from political or security interests, in accordance with humanitarian principles and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.
- **Give Europe one strong and coherent voice**, with stronger alignment between Member States and EU institutions for a greater impact on the international scene. This is particularly relevant in multilateral forums.
- **Bring together EU institutions and Member States** for a comprehensive EU response. Make better use of the toolkit of policies and instruments at the EU's disposal to deliver on the Lisbon Treaty, through country-level joint programming in, for example, tackling climate change and capital flight, protecting civilians in conflict, and preventing irresponsible arms transfers.
- **Increase operational coordination with other EU institutions** by seeking greater value-based policy, institutional coherence, and a focus on core priorities. Coordination does not mean superseding the objectives and roles of other institutions, but being sensitive to the added value they bring, relying on their expertise and experience, and supporting their contributions. For example, this involves relying on updated reports from the field in humanitarian crises for relevant political analysis.
- **Streamline EEAS internal coordination, responsibilities, and communication** by reducing disproportionately heavy internal processes (i.e. servicing the top layer) and duplicated services within the EU family (i.e. briefings for all the Presidents), and entrusting middle management with direct responsibility for reaching out to bi- and multilateral partners.
- **Strengthen the role of EU Delegations** by devolving powers from Brussels and empowering EU Ambassadors to play a leading role in coordinating and defining a consistent EU policy regarding action in relations to developing countries. Instruct Delegations to actively engage with local civil society organizations (CSOs) for better context analysis, programming, and implementation.

- **Be clear on the different responsibilities and reporting lines for EU Delegations, the EEAS, and the EC.** Clarity on the role of development staff in EU Delegations is needed, and interaction between headquarters and Delegations must improve to better shape and execute policy. Good inter-service cooperation is key for the smooth and effective functioning of development cooperation on the ground.

#### **To the European Commission:**

- **Seize the opportunity** to benefit from more coherent external action to create space for political influence that matches the EU's important funding role and provides a stronger impetus for common European responses to global challenges. Inter-service co-operation with the EEAS should be guided by this common goal, leaving behind historical territories and bureaucratic jealousies, and building on this new way of working.
- **Rise to the challenge** and ensure that the purpose of aid allocation and development policy remains – first and foremost – to tackle long-term poverty and provide direct, rapid, and effective assistance to those in urgent need.

#### **To the EU Member States:**

- **Throw more weight behind the EEAS and genuinely support** the role of the HR/VP in the external representation of the EU, allowing the EU to speak with one voice, especially in multilateral settings. Member States have a duty to sincerely co-operate with EU institutions, fleshing out the EU's capacity as a peacebuilder through the triple areas of diplomacy, crisis management, and development initiatives.
- **Rise to the challenge** and implement aid effectiveness principles by embracing joint development programming, and provide better co-ordination of national engagement to provide complementarity to EU aid policies in all recipient countries by 2014. Make the move towards integrated implementation, so that, in practice, commitments translate into concrete benefits for people living in poverty.

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