28 Countries, One Voice Abroad? The crucial role of the EU ‘Embassies’ in bilateral Diplomacy

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**Abstract**

More than five years after its creation on 1 January 2011, the evaluations of the European External Action Service (EEAS), in giving the European Union ‘one voice’ are still rather pessimistic (see e.g. Barber 2010; Dworkin, Korski, and Witney 2011; Smith, Keukeleire and Vanhoonacker 2015; Spence and Bátorá 2016). Considering the uncertainties about the division of labour and responsibilities, which have led to genuine ‘turf fights’ among the different EU institutions and Member States, some of the criticism is justified. Therefore the Council conclusions of 17 December 2013 invited the next High Representative to assess progress achieved in the context of the EEAS Review and to present by the end of 2015 an evaluation of the organisation and functioning of the EEAS, accompanied, if necessary, by appropriate proposals, including for a revision of Council Decision 2010/427/EU, in accordance with Article 27(3) TEU.

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini (2014 - 2019) responded by pointing out that “increasingly EU Delegations (...) reinforce the coherence, visibility and effectiveness of the EU”. Just like any other foreign or diplomatic service, the EEAS consists of a central office in the ‘capital city’ Brussels and a network of diplomatic antennas, called ‘European Union Delegations’ (EUDs), that are located in capital cities of 139 non-EU countries all over the world.

Most research on the EEAS has focused on the leadership structures in Brussels. Meanwhile, the EU’s diplomatic system of European Union Delegations (EUDs) has so far received surprisingly little attention. First analyses draw a positive picture: Wouters and van Vooren call the EUDs “the most conspicuous success of the new set-up” (2013, 4, July, 20). Rosa Balfour agrees by claiming that the “Delegations are saving EU foreign policy” (Balfour 2013). Nonetheless, one should be cautious. As Hayes points out, despite their decisive role in instilling coherence, effectiveness and continuity in EU external relations, scholarly analyses and explanations for the apparent success of the EUDs are still rare (Hayes 2013, 27-39).

This paper attempts to contribute to filling this research gap. Based on a Principal-Agent approach, the central message is that the EU Delegations have contributed to strengthen the EU’s voice in global politics. There are three main reasons for this: first, the historical development of the EU Delegations; second, the institutional make-up of the post-Lisbon EU

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Delegations in relation to their headquarters; and third, the pressure of external actors on the EU to integrate its diplomatic system.

This central message will be unpacked as follows: after setting the theoretical framework, I first give a short historical background of the dynamics of the EU Delegations network. I will then turn to the mandate and the current role of the EUDs. The pivotal role in external representation of the Union by EU Delegations finds its basis in Art 221(1) TFEU, which was newly inserted into the Lisbon Treaty. The purpose of this Treaty provision is to strengthen the potential to speak with one external voice on behalf of a single legal entity (Blockmans and Hillion 2013, 56). Duke highlights that the European Union Delegations are still in a learning process regarding their exact role but are becoming increasingly important in the eyes of third countries and other EU partners. Given their practical role they can already be considered in many ways to be prototype EU “embassies” (Duke 2012, 45-68).

**Case Study Arab Peninsula: EU Delegation to the Republic of Yemen**

Finally, I will substantiate my central claim with a closer investigation of the bilateral EU Delegation to the Republic of Yemen. Although it has no coastline on the Persian Gulf, Yemen lies on the Arab Peninsula. Since the EU is regularly criticised for its policy toward the oil producing countries, Yemen is a good example to test the effectiveness of the EUDs.

In contrast to some critical voices, I find that the EUD in Sana’a has been quite apt to help strengthening a one-voice policy towards this country. Due to the ongoing civil war the EUD is closed right now. Yet, the The European Union remains one of the few actors to be viewed positively by all key stakeholders in Yemen, putting Europe in a strong position not just to aid ongoing talks, but also aid key factions in building an inclusive, post-conflict government.

Yemen sits in a strategic position for the entire region and for the Horn of Africa: it is a crucial hub on the route connecting the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. Since October 2012, Bettina Muscheidt, has been the EU Head of Delegation to the Republic of Yemen. She represents the EU in areas such as political, trade, and development cooperation. Consular protection of EU citizens is provided by individual EU Member States' Embassies and their Consulates. The seven EU Member States represented in Sana’a are: Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom.

In addition to the historical development, and the acute civil war crisis, the case of Yemen also reveals the influence of external actors (e.g. UN) on the EU to integrate its diplomatic system. Such impact is commonly known under the notion of ‘externalization’ (Schmitter 1969, Haas and Rowe 1973). This concept helps explain the impact of outside stimuli on the development of EUDs as emerging strong political actors within the EEAS institutional framework.


Literature


