

# European External Action Service (EEAS)

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is the EU's foreign policy arm. It functions as a diplomatic corps and foreign ministry, and has the responsibility for planning, implementing and overseeing the EU's relations with external bodies.

## History

Established by the Lisbon Treaty, the EEAS was designed to assist the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, currently Catherine Ashton. The EEAS was created by merging a number of existing EU external relation departments with new ones, to construct a new foreign policy body.

Its design was left open by the Lisbon Treaty, and it became the subject of much heated-debate with the different EU institutions vying for power over the final creation. The European Commission was reluctant to relinquish its say over foreign policy through its Directorates General (DGs), for example DG External Relations and DG Development, and the European Parliament was determined to establish oversight powers.

There was also much speculation surrounding the slow progress of the EEAS. On a number of occasions it appeared that the EEAS would miss its target launch date of December 2010, one year after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. This was due in large part to political wrangling over its design. However, the long drawn-out negotiations were finalised in June 2010, with 549 MEPs voting in favour of the service, and the EEAS was unveiled, on schedule, at a ceremony at its Brussels headquarters.

## Operations

EEAS staff are drawn from three main sources: the relevant Commission and Council departments or seconded from the national diplomatic services of member states. To ensure there is adequate representation of all member states, Catherine Ashton has, until 2013, the right to prioritise the appointment of candidates from member states that are underrepresented. Original plans to source the majority of staff from member state diplomatic services were not followed through.

The EEAS is divided into 6 departments: Africa; Asia; Americas; the Middle East and Southern Neighbourhood; Russia, the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans and Global and Multilateral Affairs.

The Commission has also suggested merging the European Development Fund (EDF) into the EEAS mechanisms from 2013, but this has not yet been agreed by member states.

## Budget

The EEAS budget has been subject to much controversy. Initially the service was advertised as a *budget neutral* development. However, it was agreed that budget neutrality would hamper its ability to achieve real results. Before the unit was finalised, it became obvious that there was some shortfall in the budget and Catherine Ashton asked for an additional €34 million. This was approved by the EP in October 2010.

## Action so Far

Since its launch on 1 December 2010 the EEAS has been intimately involved in the EU's foreign policy. From statements on the actions of foreign governments to military action in Libya, a number of foreign policy actions have been

taken by the EEAS, such as developing strategic dialogues with China and Russia and applying significant sanctions against Syria.

Events in the *Arab Spring* were the first big test for the EEAS. For example, the civil unrest in Libya forced the EEAS to adapt its proposals for a new partnership for democracy with the Southern Mediterranean countries. Negotiations between the EEAS and Libya on an EU-Libya framework agreement were suspended on 22 February 2011, and many sanctions have been imposed on the country, including the banning of Libyan aircraft from European airspace, and a visa ban on Libyan individuals deemed to be involved in human rights abuses. Delegations have also been deployed to Libya's borders with Tunisia and Egypt in order to assess the humanitarian situation and administer aid to those who need it. Furthermore, in May 2011, the EEAS set up an EU office in Benghazi, Libya, to provide support to the Libyan people, and a further one in Tripoli in August.

## Arguments For

- The EEAS gives the EU a united foreign policy presence on the world stage.
- It is not a usurpation of member states roles in foreign policies – indeed it can only act when member states have unanimously agreed to CFSP decisions taken in Brussels.

## Arguments Against

- The lack of a national quota system means some countries are over-represented. The service has also been criticised for the lack of women in high profile positions for example, in 2011, 23 out of the 26 senior roles are held by men.
- Its scope to act is too broad.
- The creation of the EEAS has removed a role from the member state holding the rotating Council Presidency, as EEAS delegations have taken on a coordination role in many third countries.
- The EEAS represents an encroachment into national decision-making.

## Facts and Figures

- The EEAS budget for 2011 was €476 million. An agreed budget increase of €23.5 million (5%) for 2012 was widely criticised by member states.
- In January 2011 there were a total of 1643 EEAS posts. Of these, 1,114 have been moved from Commission positions, 411 from the Council and 118 are new roles.
- The EEAS Headquarters are rent free until 2013, at which point it is estimated that they will cost €12 million per year.

## Quotes

*"The EEAS needs to define its priorities and stick to them. If it tries to do everything it will fail."* UK Europe Minister, David Lidington, 2011

### Technical Terms

**Budget neutral:** A policy that neither costs money nor saves money.

**Arab Spring:** Series of revolutions sweeping through the Arab world, after the toppling of Tunisian leader Ben Ali.

### Links

- <http://eeas.europa.eu/>
- <http://euractiv.com/en/security>