



EU Commission and Member States battle for control of EEAS

The turf war between the European Commission and the Member States over the new European External Action Service (EEAS) has stepped up over the past week, following the leaking of a draft paper on the EEAS and a "vision paper" by High Representative Catherine Ashton which proposes giving a dominant role to the Council of Ministers (representing Member States) in the new diplomatic service.

On the issue of what role the EEAS will play in development policy, Ashton has outlined three possible options for cooperation with Latin America, Asia and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Option one and two are proposing so-called horizontal splits regarding the division of responsibilities for the programming cycle between the EEAS and the Commission. The first would be that the EEAS becomes the major actor in EU development policy, deciding overall strategy, country allocations and indicative programming of national and regional activities. The second possibility would set the split higher with overall strategy and country allocations agreed by the EEAS and gives the responsibility of national and regional indicative programmes to the Commission. In the third option the EEAS is taking responsibility for Latin America and Asia while the Commission continues to manage development cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. In all options, the implementation of all development policies would remain under the responsibility of the Commission.

The Commission is strongly opposed to any reduction in its competency over development policy, particularly the programming of ACP cooperation through the European Development Fund (EDF). It also wants to retain its own country desks for European neighbouring countries, while Ashton proposes to include European Neighbourhood policies in the EEAS. Moreover, the Commission wants to have delegation staff continue to report back to their Commission directorate-general rather than to the EEAS headquarters.

Meanwhile, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have complained that they are being shut out of the negotiation process for setting up the EEAS. The working group advising Catherine Ashton on the setting up of the EEAS contains no MEPs. Following pressure by MEPs, Parliament was at least granted indirect access to the group via an official from the secretariat of the Parliament's foreign affairs committee who is attending the meetings as observer.

This Wednesday at the plenary session in Strasbourg, Parliament will debate and vote on a report drafted by Italian MEP Gabriele Albertini which calls for a greater Parliamentary role in shaping the EU's foreign and security policy. In particular, the report demands that staff appointed to the EEAS be put through Parliamentary hearings in the same way that Commissioners are.

Sources:

- [EUobserver](#)
- [European Voice](#) (1)
- [European Voice](#) (2)
- [European Voice](#) (3)

EU sets out new "2020" economic strategy

On Wednesday 3 March, Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso launched the EU's new ten-year economic strategy, including targets on higher employment, greener growth and greater research spending to be met across the 27-country bloc. The "2020" strategy has been met with widespread cynicism, with many commentators pessimistic of the chance that it will be translated into significant concrete action. The EU's last "Lisbon" strategy was widely perceived as containing excessive targets and weak implementation mechanisms.

"For me this is like a broken record. I've heard it for 10 years. It's all words and no substance," commented Daniel Gros, director of the Centre for European Policy Studies. "This idea that the EU can fundamentally change the growth prospects of its member countries, via the EU, always struck me as being fanciful."

Barroso recognised that political will was essential for the success of the strategy. "We have to be quite honest with you, there are 27 member states and if they don't want to play ball nothing will happen," he said.

The new strategy sets the target of reducing the number of people in the EU at risk of poverty by 20 million by 2020.

"We warmly welcome the target on poverty reduction," Conny Reuter, president of the European NGO network Social Platform. "The question is whether the member states will accept the target."

Sources:

- [EUobserver](#) (1)
- [EUobserver](#) (2)

Annual conference of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) began its annual 12-day conference in New York on Monday 1 March. Speakers are debating the issues set by the Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995, which range from the political and economic under-representation of women, to sexual violence, to maternal mortality.

A statement by Social Watch, through its host organization the Third World Institute, has been circulated at the conference. "Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and 15 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, women all around the world still struggle for gender equality and respect for their human rights and freedoms", it begins.

The statement notes that in terms of legislation, many countries made "notable achievements" in the areas of "women's political participation and establishing gender quotas, inclusion in the labour market, developing institutional mechanisms for gender equality and legislation to address gender equality and violence against women, in particular domestic violence and trafficking."

However, the gap between legislation and implementation is wide, and the global economic downturn has set back progress on gender equality, with cut-backs in social services and many women falling into vulnerable, low-waged employment. The statement therefore warns of the risk of a "feminisation of poverty" following the financial crisis.

Sources:

- [IPS](#)

CIDSE and Caritas host North–South Forum

On 2-4 March, the two European development NGOs CIDSE and Caritas jointly hosted their fifth North–South forum, attended by representatives of global civil society and of the European Commission. The title of the meeting was “European Commission cooperation with civil society & cooperation between Northern and Southern Civil Society Organisations — exploring roles, space and added value”.

The meeting resulted in a number of recommendations being made to the European Commission and Parliament, focusing on strengthening the capacity and coordination of Northern and Southern civil society organisations so that they can contribute to “democratic, just and sustainable development”.

The organisations called on the EU to “create sustainable long-term and predictable funding arrangements built around the enhancement of the policy, analytical and advocacy capacities of civil society organisations and enhancing their roles as a countervailing power”.

They also urged the replacement of “risk-averse short-term financial arrangements and a project-based approach by the EC with more flexible mechanisms and long-term investments that allow strengthening of CSOs and deeper cooperation between the European Commission, its delegations and CSOs, in the North and the South”.

Sources:

- [CIDSE](#) (1)
- [CIDSE](#) (2)