



EU's new diplomatic service to control development budget

The EU Foreign Affairs chief unveiled her proposals for the establishment of the EU's new diplomatic service on 25 March. The European External Action Service (EEAS) is being established as a result of the Lisbon Treaty. Its objective will be to develop a more consistent and effective European foreign policy.

Under the proposal Ashton, and her diplomatic service, would be in charge of the EU's multi billion development budget, controlling the strategic overview, and use of the funds. The European Commission, which has up until now managed the use of the budget, would only be charged with implementation.

MEPs were quick to criticize the proposals saying that they were "a recipe for incoherence". Civil society organizations have also criticized the proposals. Social Watch, a global network of civil society organizations said it took exception to the deal between the Commission and the High Representative to incorporate development cooperation into the new foreign service.

"Public resources earmarked in the budget for poverty eradication in poor countries will be spent for the promotion of Europe's strategic interests in foreign policy and security" said Social Watch's Coordinator Roberto Bissio. Professor Edward Oyugi of the Social Development Network in Kenya added that "his sounds like a move to undermine the democratic integrity of the European Union."

Eurostep has questioned the legitimacy of the proposals. "It goes against the spirit and the letter of the Lisbon Treaty which puts development co-operation clearly under Commission responsibility with Parliamentary oversight".

Sources:

- [EUobserver](#)
- [DevWire.eu](#)
- [Eurostep](#)

Making Women's equality a key target of the EU's "Europe 2020" strategy

Speaking at a conference on "Women for a Better World" Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has called for Women's equality to be part of the EU's 'Europe 2020' strategy. He stressed that during its EU presidency, Spain would continue to support the inclusion of the "complete affirmation of equality between men and women" within the Union's new economic strategy. The aim was to increase the level of female employment to 70% by 2020 and to reduce the salary gap by as much as possible.

"When we encourage equality throughout the world, we are building a fairer future, and when we cut back on discrimination, we are gaining ground for the dignity of everyone," he said.

Spain's EU Presidency's also plans to take decisive action against gender violence. Some of Spain's laws are unique in Europe, such as a law on comprehensive protection from gender violence, which has been in force since 2005.

During its EU presidency, Spain plans to promote initiatives such as an EU centre for monitoring gender violence, to gather Community-wide information and to diagnose the problem at European level. This should allow comprehensive solutions to be found.

Sources:

- [EurActiv](#)

EU to kick off citizens' initiative with tougher rules

The European Commission is preparing proposals on defining the way in which the Lisbon Treaty's provision for a citizen's initiative can be pursued. However there are growing concerns that this procedures that will be put in place, and the amount of personal detail required from those signing on to proposals will constitute an almost insurmountable barrier.

According to Article 11 of the treaty, "not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of member states may take the initiative of inviting the [European] Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the treaties". The proposal was adopted as a major innovation to strengthen the democratic fabric of the European Union.

The European citizens' initiative would therefore enable European citizens and civil society organisations to directly influence the political agenda of the EU for the first time in history.

The Commission is likely to propose that the one million signatories must come from at least one third of EU nations with a minimum number of signatories for each participating country. This number "should be degressively proportional to the size of each member state," the draft regulation states.

Each citizens' initiative would also need to be first registered and then subject to an admissibility check by the Commission, once the organisers have collected at least 300,000 statements of support.

Each signatory of a statement of support will have to provide a variety of personal data, including name, street address, email address, date and place of birth, nationality and personal identification numbers (passport; ID card; and social security).

It is expected that the draft regulation will be adopted by the Commission on 31 March.

Sources:

- [EurActiv](#)