

THE UNBORN EU DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY

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Top level education and training have acquired geopolitical importance for they are key to transmitting values and forging identities. It should thus be recognized by the European External Action Service, which, at its tenth anniversary, shows limited results. It is time to rethink the creation of a European Diplomatic Academy. Considered a must by some and a threat by others, it would inject a soul to a body in need of it to face challenging times.

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High level education is now viewed as a political, if not geopolitical asset. France appears to shy away from its loved/hated *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA), which it wants to reform. The Hungarian government is taking control of the largest state universities, while the Chinese Fudan University, close to the communist party, negotiates the creation of a mega campus in Budapest. With the same Viktor Orban that evicted the prestigious Central European University, linked to the Open Society Foundation of George Soros, considered an ideological threat, forcing its relocation to Vienna. Paradoxically, ten years since the inception of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the eventual creation of a European Diplomatic Academy to underpin it, remains in a limbo.

The EEAS was created by the Treaty of Lisbon to bring backing and coherence to the Union's external action. The discrete commemoration of its 10th anniversary seems in tune with the results attained. The external service has contributed, to some extent, to rebalance a growing trend towards a pure intergovernmental Union in the field of foreign policy, as Pol Morillas has shown in *"Strategy-Making in the EU: From Foreign and Security Policy to External Action"*. Yet, its achievements are limited. A recent analysis by a group coordinated by the former secretary general, Pierre Vimont, notes: "its institutional vagrancy has not gone without tension between the different players. In the absence of clarity in the EEAS' mission, mistrust has crept in. It has left the diplomatic body with no clear and firm institutional or professional identity and hampered on the EEAS' esprit de corps, while perplexing the outside world." This has prompted scepticism about its added value, particularly among big member states.

The same document recommends, inter alia, that the existing diplomatic academy programme at the EEAS should be developed. It also acknowledges ongoing reflexions about the possible creation of a European Diplo-

matic Academy, but falls short of supporting the idea. Moreover, this reference is surrounded by caveats on the need to avoid duplications, reduce costs and capitalize on the experience of existing diplomatic academies within Member States.

The reasons for the EEAS's lacklustre performance in its tripe role as coherence-builder, policy initiator/implementor and EU representative are manifold: original design flaws, unprecise nature of its mission, lack of ownership from various players, weak leadership at times.... Their analysis falls beyond the scope of this note. The matter is that the EEAS has fallen short of its potential to act as the blender of cultures, that the merger of Commission and Council external relations services into one single service was meant to bring about.

The creation of a pan-European institution devoted to diplomatic training, as a means to forge a European identity, shared diplomatic culture and sprit de corps, has been an old aspiration for some, but anathema for others. It is worth noting that both the ill-fated Constitutional Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon had remained silent on the matter. France and Germany tabled a non-paper proposing the creation of a European Diplomatic Academy, at an informal Council working group in 1999. In the face of reluctant delegations, it was scaled down to a modest European Diplomatic Programme, limited to sharing some national training resources. Similarly, a report by the European Parliament in 2000 on the creation of a College of European Diplomacy had no follow up. Recently, new voices are raised in the European Parliament in support of a European Diplomatic Academy that would prepare European diplomats to convergence towards shared interests and values.

If shared sovereignty has progressed in matters as sensitive as the euro or external borders, thus securing greater strategic autonomy for the Union, why not aim at gluing together a common diplomacy, through more ambitious diplomatic training, instead of keeping an amalgam of national diplomacies within the EEAS?

While the EEAS was being set up, I contributed to the discussion with a paper published by the European University Institute in 2001. The document was examined by its then president, Josep Borrell, who deemed that diplomatic training was beyond the remit of the institute. It had some repercussion in academic circles and was known to the College of Europe in Bruges, which pondered its possible role in this respect. The text was also transmitted to Mrs. Catherine Ashton, whose position at the helm of the EEAS fairly reflected the British intentions about it. There was no acknowledgement of receipt and, if ever read, no reaction followed. As I reread the paper 10 years after, I feel I was right in assessing the strategic importance of diplomatic training for the then new service and in identifying its requirements. However, as a then European civil servant, fully

aware of the political, administrative and budgetary constraints, I was too shy in claiming a key role for the European Diplomatic Academy.

EU foreign and security policy is slowly advancing in the face of growing and multiform external threats. The treatment received by High Representative Josep Borrell in his recent visit to Russia or by president Ursula Von der Leyen in Ankara are mere indicators. They point to the need of reviewing the functioning of our foreign policy instruments, including decision-making mechanisms. Admittedly, this may be for the long haul as it impinges on cherished notions of national sovereignty. Diplomatic training, unfortunately, seems to also fall in this category and raises eyebrows. But, if shared sovereignty has progressed in matters as sensitive as the euro or external borders, thus securing greater strategic autonomy for the Union, why not aim at gluing together a common diplomacy, through more ambitious diplomatic training, instead of keeping an amalgam of national diplomacies within the EEAS? The creation of a European Diplomatic Academy would certainly constitute a powerful instrument towards a common European (geo)political mindset.

There now appears to be a favorable combination of stars to make it possible. Josep Borrell is the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and his predecessor, Federica Mogherini, is the rector of the College of Europe. With Brexit we have lost the strongest diplomatic service within the Union, but have in turn removed an obstacle to the realization of the project. The post pandemic world demands a fight for values, interests and identity.

The unborn European Diplomatic Academy is not a matter of bricks and mortar or a huge budget, but of political will and imagination in the first place. There is already a wealth of experience within Member States and European institutions. It would be paradoxical that foreign actors train our elites, while we remain incapable of creating our own platform for a genuine EU diplomacy.