

The Treaty of Lisbon makes provision for the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to be assisted by a 'European External Action Service'. This will be an official European diplomatic service formed by European officials and national diplomats. The Belgian Presidency will ensure that the legal instruments needed in order to establish this service and the specific measures to implement it are adopted and that it is fully operational as quickly as possible.

External action by the Union following the Treaty of Lisbon

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced very important reforms to strengthen external action by the European Union. It is indeed vital that the Union's power of attraction as the most important regional organisation in the world and as a force for peace and prosperity remains intact.

Although some of the differences between the rules and procedures that apply, on the one hand, to the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and, on the other hand, to the Union's other policies have admittedly been maintained, the Treaty makes provision for the mechanisms needed to prevent these differences from having adverse repercussions on the Union's external action.

The main objective of these institutional reforms is, in fact, to ensure both **coherence between the Union's various fields of external action** (especially between foreign and security policy, trade policy and development policy) and coherence between these policies and the Union's internal policies (such as agricultural policy, transport policy, the internal market, etc.).

This objective has predominantly resulted in clear rules on representation of the Union and international negotiations on behalf of the Union.

- **At the level of the heads of state and government**, the Union is represented by the President of the Commission or, on CFSP issues, by the President of the European Council.
- **In all other contacts at political level and in negotiations on international agreements**, the Union is represented by the European Commission, except on CFSP issues, on which the Union is represented by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Mrs Ashton). However, as the High Representative is also both Vice-President of the Commission in charge of external relations and President of the Foreign Affairs Council, she alone fronts the external representation of the Union and guarantees its continuity and efficacy.
- **In third countries and international organisations**, the Union will be represented by Union delegations answerable to the High Representative.

European External Action Service

In order to help the High Representative perform her various duties, the Treaty makes provision for a new 'European External Action Service' (EEAS), an **official European diplomatic service** that will work in collaboration with the diplomatic services of the Member States.

The EEAS will fundamentally be responsible for preparing proposals on CFSP issues, which the High Representative will then table before the Council, and for following up the Council's decisions. The High Representative will also be assisted by this service in the performance of her duties as Vice-President of the Commission in charge of external relations, especially in connection with representation and international negotiations, as well as programming the Union's financial instruments for third countries.

Union delegations in third countries and in international organisations will form part of the EEAS.

Composed of European officials and national diplomats

As provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon, the European External Action Service will be composed of officials from the competent services of the Secretariat General of the Council and the Commission and by personnel seconded from national diplomatic services. Thus, the Treaty not only makes provision for the various services of the European institutions, previously in charge of external relations, to be integrated into a single service but also adds a third vital component: national diplomats.

National diplomats will indeed be seconded to work at the EEAS for several years, either in Brussels or in one of the Union delegations, before being replaced in the EEAS by other national diplomats and continuing their career in their national diplomatic service. In time, national diplomats should account for a third of the staff of the EEAS.

These staffing arrangements are an innovation which will definitely strengthen the Union's external action. It is important for the EEAS to be able to benefit from the expertise and skills of the various national diplomatic services. However, it will be equally important for national diplomatic services to have diplomats with in-depth and specific knowledge of the Union's external action and professional experience in working with colleagues from other Member States or European institutions.

Creating the European External Action Service

Although the creation of the EEAS will be a highly complex operation, it will need to be completed as quickly as possible in order to guarantee the coherence of the Union's external action.

In the first phase, the Council will need to pass a unanimous decision on the organisation and operation of this service, at the proposal of the High Representative, following consultation with the European Parliament and approval by the Commission. The creation of the EEAS will also require changes to the Union's financial regulations and to the Staff Regulations for European officials, which will be made through the ordinary legislative channels. The Belgian Presidency will do everything in its power to ensure that these legal instruments are adopted as quickly as possible.

The next phase will be to successfully set up the EAAS. This will primarily be the responsibility of the High Representative, who will need to make specific decisions on the organisation and operation of the service, but it will also require close collaboration between the High Representative, the Council and Commission services and the national diplomatic services. The Belgian Presidency will assist the High Representative so as to ensure that the European External Action Service is fully operational as quickly as possible.