

“Zagreb, EU - Lunch and Debate”

European Diplomacy and European External Action Service (EEAS)

Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI), Hanns Seidel Foundation and the Institute for International Relations (IMO) organized on the 1st of June 2010 in Zagreb the first lunch and debate round table “European Diplomacy and European External Action Service (EEAS)”. This programme of round tables, envisaged to be held during the 2010 and 2011, aims to foster and intensify cooperation between academia and professional public in order to analyze the newest dynamics and development of the EU integration and Croatian position at the European level. Mr. Mladen Andrić, Director of the Diplomatic Academy at the MFAEI, moderated the event that was opened by Mr. Hans-Friedrich von Solemacher, representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, which stressed Foundation's contribution on improvement of Croatian-German relations. Furthermore, Ms. Višnja Samardžija from IMO emphasized the importance of communicating the EU integration aspects, especially taking into consideration the upcoming Croatian EU membership. The opening section was concluded by German Ambassador to Croatia, H.E. Bernd Fischer. He stated that Croatia enters final and crucial phase of the EU negotiations and from that point of view the EEAS can serve as a platform to deepen Croatian ties with the EU. H.E. Fischer argued that the inauguration of the EU diplomatic service can also spark stronger Croatian-German ties because diplomats and officials from both states can jointly work within the EEAS framework.

In the following part of event, Mr. Andrej Plenković, State Secretary for European Integration at the MFAEI, elaborated the background of the EU goal to establish its diplomatic service that is being implemented with the EEAS. The establishment of the EEAS, in his words, represents the last step in the process that was launched with the European Political Cooperation (EPC) in the 1970s. This process was further institutionalized with the Treaty of Maastricht that established Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and got added value with the Treaty of Amsterdam that introduced the post of High Representative for the CFSP. The main drive of this process is to secure credible and efficient EU position on a global scale, since the EU wants to achieve greater cohesion and relevance on the international scene led by the principle of its universal global presence. EU makes a new step nowadays with the Lisbon Treaty and establishment of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The design of this post aims to remove Henry Kissinger's famous objection about the missing European phone number in foreign policy. Position of High Representative, currently held by Ms. Catherine Ashton, is inherently connected with the EEAS because the main task of the EEAS is to help and assist the High Representative in its work. Consequently, that means that the EEAS will serve as a foreign ministry and diplomatic corps for the EU. Furthermore, Ms. Ashton besides being a High Representative is also Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for external relations and chairs the Foreign Affairs Council. Hence, this integration of various important functions seeks to achieve greater coordination and consistency of the EU foreign policy in general. Finally, the EEAS staff will be drawn from Commission, Council and seconded staff of the EU Member States' diplomatic services, which opens possibilities for Croatian diplomats to participate fully in this new era of EU diplomacy.

Main part of the round table was devoted to the lecture “European External Action Service – Challenge for the Lisbon Treaty?’, delivered by Professor Eckart D.Stratenschulte, Director of the European Academy Berlin. He argued that the EEAS has to be analyzed within the framework of entire EU foreign policy, its basic values and goals. That framework is very wide and encompasses different areas outside of the CFSP like development and international aid. However, what is indisputable is that the High Representative together with the EEAS became central and pivotal position of the EU foreign policy. In other words, autonomous role of Ms. Ashton and her juncture with the Commission and Council secures existence of the EU telephone number. Furthermore, the EEAS will have both thematic and regional structure and it will be additionally empowered with the establishment of the EU diplomatic representations across the world. That means that the EEAS structure will be visible in the EU Delegations to third countries and international organizations because EU Delegations will constitute integral part of the EEAS network. Finally, the EEAS will possess important financial and staff autonomy which would further advantage its capabilities.

Professor Stratenschulte stated five disputable points in the EU that are related with the emergence of the EEAS because the whole process of its creation is still under way and has not been concluded. First dispute deals with the EEAS headquarter because its location has not been determined and also with the relation towards Commission over budgetary and administrative issues. The doubt is expressed here because the European diplomatic service should be functionally independent body but it is not clear how this would be secured in reality. Secondly, the European Parliament wants to exercise control over the EEAS in the budgetary and political domains and seeks full supervision over these issues, while Ms. Ashton refuses that level of subordination. Third and fourth issues are interlinked and they deal with the staff acquisition and High Representative Deputy. Regarding the staff, nobody knows how “one third rule”, that envisaged designing diplomatic staff from Council, Commission and EU Member States, will actually function in reality. Also, the question of High Representative Deputy is important political question because the MEPs strongly refused suggestion where High Representative would be replaced by the EEAS General-Secretary, a civil servant that would not be politically appointed or accountable. However, probable solution is that Ms. Ashton's deputy in the Commission will be drawn from the Commissioners that deal with the EU external relations while her deputy in the Council will be drawn from the rank of foreign affairs ministers of the EU Presiding Country. Finally, the last dispute deals with consular issues because it is not clear whether the EEAS will possess authority over this important area. This puzzle sheds light on the basic doubt whether the EEAS will have more supranational or intergovernmental features and how the interests of the EU Member States will be balanced.

Tension between supranational and intergovernmental character leads to the set of practical questions like for example the projected time when the EEAS will have autonomous capacities and be able to deploy its capabilities. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see reactions of the EU Member States towards High Representative’s propositions to appoint Heads of the EU Delegations, as this nominating right now becomes parts of its exclusive rights. Also, it will be compelling to analyze relations between the EEAS and EU Member States’ representatives in the third states. On the end, the education platform on which the EU diplomats would be trained is also not determined. Their education would be done either solely on the basis of national practices or by merging national and EU practices.

However, despite these open questions, Mr. Stratenschulte stated that the EEAS is large and important EU project whose success will be obvious in the following years. Crucial factors of its success are attitude and behaviour of the EU Member States that can occupy two contrary positions. On the one side, they can perceive EEAS as the competing element to their own foreign affairs ministries or on another, they can consider it as an opportunity to pool resources and secure greater EU efficiency and credibility on the global scale. This implies greater responsibility of the EU citizens because national political elites will cooperate and support EEAS more if they would be influenced from the side of civil society to behave like this. However, this potential impact fundamentally stems from the wider societal awareness of the EEAS importance for the EU foreign policy and overall EU position in the world. Therefore, it is important to analyze the EEAS in the framework of the EU foreign policy, EU values and norms but also to emphasize citizens' responsibility for the success of the EEAS.

Ms. Samardžija stated in her comment that the establishment of the EEAS is still open process accompanied with many unresolved questions. For example, the Višegrad Group of states has expressed concern that the new EU Member States might be underrepresented in the EEAS structure. Also, there is a general lack of analysis of the EEAS within the Lisbon Treaty and the future perspectives for the European diplomatic service. Ms. Samardžija pointed out future Croatian EU membership and the possible contribution to the common European diplomacy, that was supported by Mr. Stratenschulte. He noticed that the EU will employ the best and most qualified human resources with special-know how, so mere criteria of quality will prevail over any particular quotas. Consequently, this yields opportunity for Croatia as well because Croatia has confirmed itself as a confident partner in the international community so it is likely to expect Croatian diplomats and staff involved in particular initiatives like for instance the EU engagement in the South-East Europe. Short debate that emerged addressed some of the major elements of the new diplomatic service and its possible outcomes. Finally, round table was concluded by Mr. Stratenschulte's words that in order for the EEAS to succeed it will have to inherit the spirit of the EU, namely the spirit of cooperation and solidarity. All participants have agreed on the importance of these events for rising awareness about the trends in the EU integration dynamics and expressed hope for continued dealing with the newest topics on this agenda as well.

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