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## WHERE HAVE ALL THE WOMEN GONE? WOMEN IN EEAS AND EU DELEGATIONS

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On International Women's Day, this policy brief examines the recruitment of women to leading positions in the European External Action Service (EEAS) in the Brussels HQ and EU Delegations. By closing down the gender gap, the EEAS will not only promote female participation in EU foreign policy-making, but also set an example for other parts of the world where women do not have equal opportunities. Despite the general progress made in ensuring the gender balance among the personnel in the EEAS and EU Delegations, this policy brief argues that:

- in spite of a female HR/VP, the EEAS key decision-making positions remain dominated by men with currently only three female top managers and with only between 11.8% to 16.7% of women in the EEAS senior management (from the directorial level up) since the launch of the EEAS until today
  - although the numbers of female Heads of EU Delegations increased from 15.1% in 2010 to 23.2% in 2014, parity with male EU ambassadors remains far off. Either EU Member States can be blamed for shortlisting few good quality female candidates, or the EEAS recruitment procedures prioritize male national diplomats
  - women who get recruited to be in charge of EU Delegations increasingly tend to have their background in the European Commission rather than in EU Member State diplomatic services
  - French women, particularly in contrast to those from Germany and the UK, are most successful in competitions for EU ambassadorial posts, while, contrary to expectations, no Scandinavian woman has ever run any EU Delegation since 2010. Perhaps thanks to the post-communist egalitarian legacies, women from new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe have an above average level of representation as Heads of EU Delegations who are coming
  - female EU ambassadors are disproportionately running more 'soft-power' EU Delegations to multilateral organizations rather than 'hard power' posts in Delegations to EU Strategic Partners
  - female EU ambassadors are concentrated in Central Asia and Southern Caucasus and, primarily in the Middle East and North Africa
- Once a new, possibly male, HR/VP is chosen, he should continue in women's recruitment and distribute them more evenly. Such a strategy will send a strong message to women both in the EU and in third countries.

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*Where have all the young girls gone, long time passing?  
Where have all the young girls gone, long time ago?  
Where have all the young girls gone?  
Gone for husbands everyone.  
Oh, when will they ever learn?  
(Pete Seeger)*

On 8 March, International Women's Day is celebrated. Catherine Ashton, the EU's first High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) is one of the most prominent European women in current international politics. While setting up the European External Action Service (EEAS), she stated that it was one of her goals to increase the number of female staff. With Ashton's term of office coming to an end and her announcement that she will not run again, how did she fare in the 'women's question' in the EEAS? To paraphrase Pete Seeger's famous song: where have all the females that she recruited to the EEAS and EU Delegations gone? How many women have been employed, from where were they hired and what jobs have they been given?

Despite a noticeable progress in the overall gender balance within the EEAS, this improvement is in a sense badly structured. The increase in women staff was insufficient in the key decision-making positions such as in EEAS senior management. Moreover, female Heads of EU delegations have not been spread across the globe, but tend to be concentrated. Furthermore, many more women were recruited from EU institutions rather than EU Member State diplomatic services and from few EU Member States.

This is however not to downplay the progress made. In fact, Catherine Ashton deserves a credit for taking up the issue of gender equality and clearly acting upon it. This policy brief may rather serve as guidance for a future HR/VP who could look at the gender issue within the EEAS from a different angle and start giving jobs to women according to more nuanced categories than simply their sex. Such attention may be particularly needed if the next HR/VP will be male as seems highly likely.

### **The Women's Issue in EU Foreign Policy-Making: Long Time Passing**

An underrepresentation of women in the EU's foreign policy-making bodies is as old as the European Union and its predecessors. In December 2010, just before the transfer of staff from the European Commission to the newly established EEAS, women at the AD level, i.e. those working on EU foreign policy formulation, represented just over a third (i.e. 28%) of the entire staff at the Directorate-General for External Relations (or DG

RELEX), whereas nearly three quarters (i.e. 73%) of secretaries at the AST level were women (Policy Department at the Directorate General for External Policies, 2013: 67). Within the most senior grades, (i.e. AD 14-16), only 17% of the DG Relex's managers were females (Formuszewicz and Kumoch, 2010: 23).

In 2010, the Council Decision (Council of the European Union, 2010) establishing the EEAS acknowledged the need for an adequate gender balance within EEAS staff, whilst the July 2013 EEAS Review (European External Action Service, 2013: 14) that evaluated the first two and half years of the Service's existence declares the 'HR/VP's strong commitment to progress towards gender balance in the EEAS'. Although the EEAS Review does not provide any substantial data on female representation in the Service, this general pledge is further emphasized by EU Member States in their Council conclusions on the EEAS Review from December 2013 (Council of the European Union, 2013). How does then the affirmed commitment to equality between men and women in the EU's foreign policy machinery look like in practice? Where have all the women in the EEAS and EU Delegations gone?

## **Women in the EEAS and EU Delegations: Gone for Less Sexy and More Soft-Power Posts Everyone**

### ***EEAS Management***

If we first consider the top echelons of the EEAS (from the Managing Directors up), the level of female representation looks rather poor. Notwithstanding Ashton, there were only two other women running the Service in February 2011<sup>1</sup> after the EEAS had just been launched, while their number increased only by one to three female managers by January 2014, including, as the EEAS (European External Action Service, 2013: 14) itself points out, the most senior woman in the Service i.e. Political Director Helga Schmid. She is also the only female member of the main EEAS's decision-making body, the Corporate Board, consisting of her and other three male colleagues.

Even if we add the director-level to the mix, the percentage of women in the EEAS leadership does not rise up but oscillates somewhere between 11.8% and 16.7%, depending on the exact moment in time and the number of vacancies that may or may not be factored in. Nonetheless, if Ashton's fellow Commissioner, Viviane Reding, were to scrutinize the EEAS

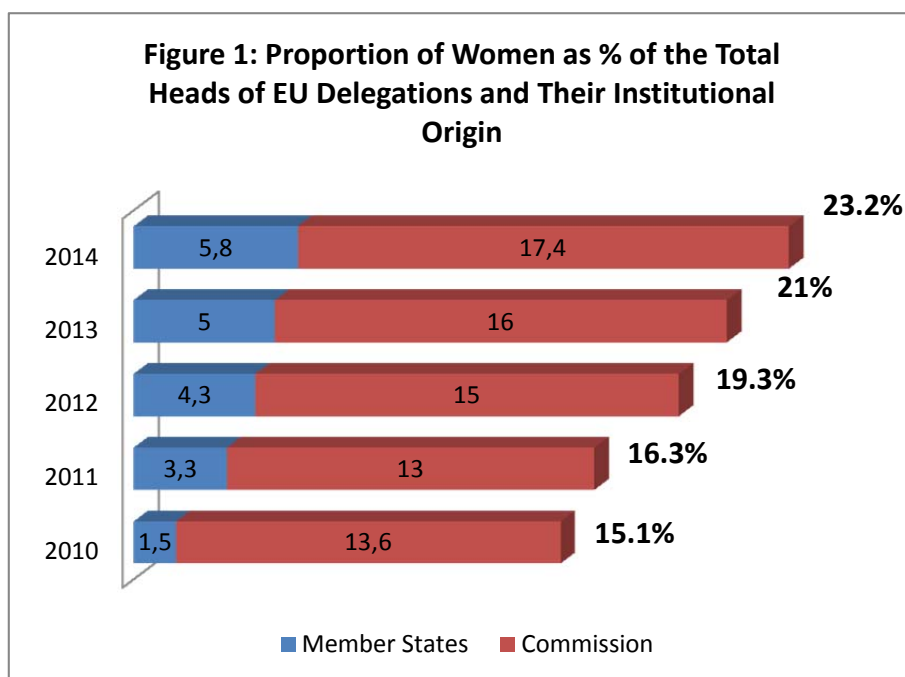
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<sup>1</sup> The numbers in the EEAS HQ were collected based on series of the EEAS organizational charts, or organigrammes, which are regularly posted and updated on the EEAS website. For the latest version, see [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/organisation\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/docs/organisation_en.pdf).

management, she would certainly not be pleased with the outcome: it does not look very promising that Reding’s aim of attaining a 40% female representation of the board members in private businesses<sup>2</sup> could be replicated in the EEAS management anytime soon. Despite a woman, Ashton, being in the driving seat, the EEAS leadership remains dominated by men.

***Heads of EU Delegations***

Moving from the EEAS Brussels HQ to EU Delegations representing the EU across the globe, has the ‘glass ceiling’ been broken at least when it comes to the posts of Heads of EU Delegations? Or does it continue to, as in the private sector, ‘bar female talent’ from top positions in Europe’s ‘embassies’ around the world? Since the EU promotes the rights of women and their equality to men to the outside world, it is important that Europe does what it preaches, particularly in places where EU Delegations represent the Union’s face to those countries.



As Figure 1 above illustrates, even in the area of Heads of EU Delegations, the gender gap persists albeit it is narrowing down. As the total figures on

<sup>2</sup> On Reding’s proposals for women representation in non-executive board-member positions in private sector see, for example, here: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/news/121114\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/news/121114_en.htm).

the right hand side of graph show, the aggregate percentage of women among the Heads of EU Delegations increased from about 15.1% in January 2010 to 23.2% in January 2014. Although this progress is commendable and has been highlighted by the EEAS<sup>3</sup>, the total number of women as heads of EU Delegations in 2014 is still far from parity with men.

However, what is perhaps more striking than the mere proportion to male colleagues is it the institutional and national background of EU women ambassadors. As the 2010 Council Decision sets out, a third of the EEAS staff should be recruited as temporary agents from EU Member State diplomatic services both in the EEAS Brussels HQ and EU Delegations. As a result, increasingly more and more national diplomats run the daily business of EU Delegations. Out of all female ambassadors, about 10% of them came from EU Member States after the first rotation in 2010 whereas about a quarter of them come from national diplomatic services in January 2014. This is roughly in line with the total figures (for both sexes) as the bar chart in Figure 1 further indicates.

Yet what is rather surprising than this overall trend towards to the 1/3 target is the distribution of women among two separate groups: Heads of EU Delegations who are former Commission officials<sup>4</sup> and Heads of EU Delegations who were hired from EU Member States.

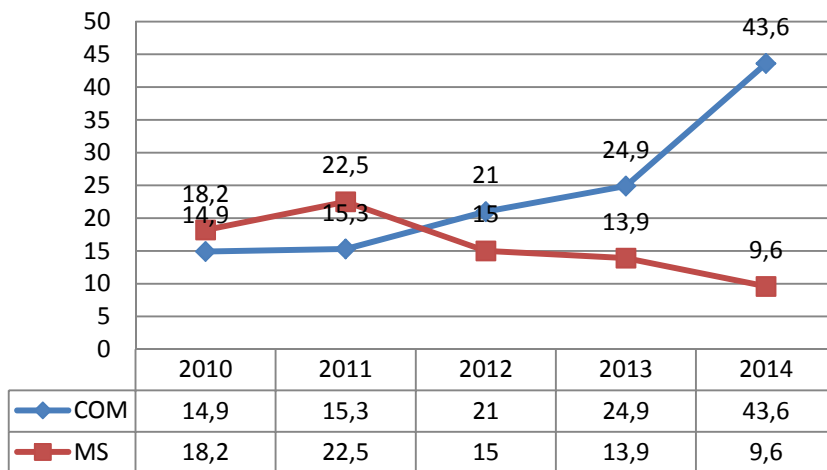
As Figure 2 suggests, the percentage of women among the group of EU ambassadors who have their background in the European Commission is steadily increasing; so much so that we may soon be experiencing the same numbers of male and female EU ambassadors who used to work for EU institutions. On the other hand, after an initial increase, the percentage of women among the newly recruited national diplomats to head EU Delegations is rapidly declining.

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<sup>3</sup> The EEAS Review (2013: 14) includes slightly different numbers than the author has calculated. Nonetheless, the difference is likely given the fact that the author has included each Head of EU Delegation for any given year rather than taking the numbers as of a specific date as included in the internal EEAS database (SysPer). If there were two Heads for the same EU Delegation during a year (due to rotation, resignation, etc.), a half point was assigned to each. As a result, the author has created a database of the total of 247 Heads of EU Delegations from January 2010 to January 2014 that can be split up by gender, nationality and institutional origin.

<sup>4</sup> As of the end of February 2014, there are no female Heads of EU Delegations who would be former Council (or EUSR offices) employees. Therefore, the text only uses the terms 'former Commission officials' and 'EU Member State/national diplomats'.

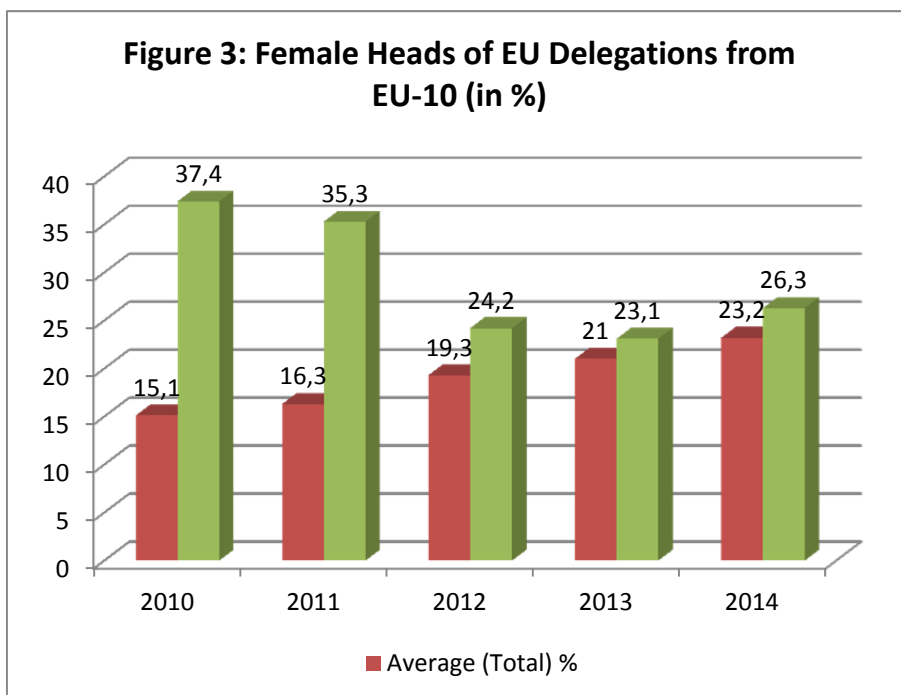
**Figure 2: Women as Heads of EU Delegations with EU Institutions Background (%) and with National Diplomatic Services Background (%)**



These two rather unexpected trends may have the following explanations. Firstly, although the overall number of EU Heads of Delegations from national diplomatic services may be rising and even significantly surpassing the one-third target as the author argues elsewhere (Novotna, 2014), women are not well placed among those candidates from national diplomatic services. It may be the fault of EU Member States who do not send enough qualified female applicants, or of the EEAS recruitment system which may be favoring male national diplomats. However, it seems unlikely the blame lies with the EEAS given the higher proportion of women retained from the pool of former EU institutions officials. In any case, the fact that only 9.6% of women are among the group of national diplomats at the top of EU Delegations in January 2014 is rather worrying.

The national backgrounds of women at the top of EU Delegations are more difficult to assess given their limited geographical spread across EU Members States. Nonetheless, there are a few judgments that can be made. As with the overall success of the French in the EEAS recruitment (see e.g. Balfour and Raik, 2013; Novotna, 2014), French women have clearly won the contest with the largest number of female EU ambassadors (seven) currently at helm. This figure stands in stark contrast to the ‘other Big Threes’, the UK and Germany, who currently have only one Head of EU Delegation each which certainly neither corresponds to their population size nor to their clout.

Contrary to what we may expect given the general high gender equality and participation of women in their workforce, the Scandinavian countries (i.e. Denmark, Finland and Sweden) have never had any woman in charge of any EU Delegation within the 2010-2014 period. Although the case of the Finns may be explained by the very low overall numbers, it is rather astonishing among the usually well- or even over-represented Danes and Swedes. A legacy of an egalitarian society seems to play a role in the share of women EU ambassadors from the new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as Figure 3 below illustrates. Although the initial high percentage of women among the Heads of Delegations from post-communist countries is due to overall very low numbers, once the interest (and success) of the CEE candidates grew, the male-female gap grew as well. Yet even after the numbers have stabilized, the average proportion of women among the CEE EU ambassadors has always been by two three percentages higher than the total representation of women among the Heads of EU Delegations.



Last but not least, it is not only important who gets nominated, but also where she gets posted. The EU Delegations to the EU Strategic Partners<sup>5</sup> are arguably the placements with most political power. In these ten

<sup>5</sup> The EU Strategic Partners include: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and the United States.

destinations, women held the EU ambassadorial posts in two cases for more or less the entire period between 2010 and 2014. Thus the men-women ratio is in these 'hard power' postings quite high, i.e. 5:1.

On the other hand, the concentration of women running the EU Delegations to international organizations, such as to the UN bodies (with the exception of another 'hard power' post in New York with responsibility for the UN Security Council), Council of Europe, UNESCO, is increasing: since 2012, women were in charge of nearly two thirds (63%) of these 'soft power' multilateral EU Delegations.

Despite a relatively small sample, women are above average represented as Heads of EU Delegations to states in Central Asia and Southern Caucasus. Nonetheless, out of other geographical regions, an interesting trend is developing in EU Delegations to the MENA<sup>6</sup> countries: about 23.1% of them were led by women in 2010, about 34.6% in 2012 and, in 2014, 42.9% of them were led by female EU ambassadors. Although this may be a product of coincidence rather than design, Catherine Ashton should keep it going not only for the sake of gender balance within the EU Delegations, but because of the on-going concerns about the treatment of women in the MENA region. If the EU wants to set an example and encourage female education and political participation, having a large number of female EU ambassadors in the areas where women can be grossly oppressed is a good thing and can help emancipation of the MENA women and girls.

### **Oh, When Will the EEAS (and the EU) Ever Learn? The Future of Women Representation in the EEAS and EU Delegations**

Despite generally good progress towards a higher recruitment of female staff in the EEAS and EU Delegations, women remain under-represented, particularly in the decision-making positions within the EEAS Brussels management and as Heads of EU Delegations (and those to the EU's Strategic Partner Countries in particular). Moreover, the distribution of female EU ambassadors across the third countries is uneven and women who previously worked for the European Commission have much higher chances to be appointed into senior posts than those coming from EU Member States.

Having an equal share of women and men among staff in any organization is not a value on its own and should not be pursued just to even out the

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<sup>6</sup> As the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, based on the EEAS website, I include: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, West Bank & Gaza and Yemen. There is no EU Delegation to Iran, while Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman are covered by EU Delegation in Riyadh. The EU Delegation to the UAE was established and an EU ambassador appointed in 2013.



numbers. This policy brief argued that if the EU aims at supporting disadvantaged women in other parts of the world, it first has to start at home and make sure that women are proportionately represented in its EU foreign policy apparatus. Only by sending out a strong signal in this way can the EU promote women's rights and project a credible image abroad. It is not just on 8 March when the women should be remembered to be given equal opportunities but throughout the year. Whoever becomes the next HR/VP should follow in Catherine Ashton's footsteps and keep working on the closing down the gender gap within the EU foreign policy bodies and the EU in general. Although it is often the case in foreign policy that actions do tend to speak louder than words, in this case if more often articulated in female voices, the words will both speak very clearly and send out a strong message not just to the world, but also to citizens of the European Union. By interpreting the verses of the song-writer, hopefully the EEAS (and the EU in general) will indeed learn.

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