

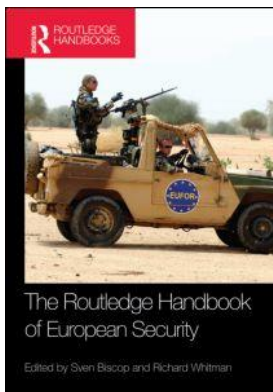
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PART II

Institutions, instruments and means

6

DIPLOMACY AND THE CFSP

With new hands on the wheel, have we
something that's real?¹

Geoffrey Edwards

Diplomacy and its role in the international system have been under continuous challenge from changes in the structure of the system, particularly from the advent of new technologies as well as new actors. Traditionally, diplomacy has been defined as the organized dialogue between states, its practices embedded in a Westphalian inter-state system. New challenges have meant that international relations, in the words of Der Derian, have been shifting 'from a realm defined by sovereign places, impermeable borders and rigid geopolitics, to a site of accelerating flows, contested borders and fluid chronopolitics. In short, pace displacing space' (Der Derian, 1992: 129). Within that reconstructed space, Europe, far from being any longer the 'centre of international gravity' that characterized Harold Nicolson's 'old diplomacy' (Nicolson, 1953: 77), has, nonetheless, assumed a new actorness.

With the Lisbon Treaty, the EU rather than simply the European Community (EC) gained legal personality. Under the Treaty of Rome, the EC had competence in the field of trade and aid and steadily accumulated responsibilities, whether wholly or partially in a growing range of other issues. This means that the EU can negotiate, sign agreements and treaties in line with the competences granted to the Union (Article 216 TFEU). Even if the EU's competences fall short of those of the traditional state, they reflect the widening concerns of the Member States and their perceived need to act on a more common or cooperative basis. That is inevitably reflected in the EU's external relations, many of which concern domestic as well as cross-boundary issues ranging from agriculture through education and public health to visas and the management of the EU's borders. At the same time, the EU, especially through its High Representative for Foreign Affairs, has sought – for both European as well as global consumption – to promote an identity distinguishable from that of its Member States, often described in terms of its normative or transformative power, a power to be exercised through, in particular, 'effective multilateralism' according to the European Security Strategy of 2003. If, in 1838, the Vicomte de Chateaubriand could lament that: 'Transactions are nowadays delayed by hindrances of which previously we were free. Yesterday it was only a question of material interests, of an increase in territory or commerce; now one deals with moral interests; the principles of social order figure in dispatches' (cited by Hamilton and Langhorne, 1995: 89), the subjects covered by today's European diplomats extend probably

well beyond what might have been considered appropriate subjects for detailed discussion among the diplomatic elite.

But questions remain about the nature and mechanics of the political entity that the new legal persona reflects and what sort of dynamic it has created in the international system. On the one hand, foreign policy within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains intergovernmental. On the other hand, CFSP has become increasingly institutionalized in Brussels with its High Representative and, since 2010, a European External Action Service (EEAS), a European diplomatic service.

The EU's High Representative, under the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, was charged with representing the Union, to become at least the voice of a more united European foreign policy. While often working alongside the President of the Council and the President of the Commission in the so-called *troika*, the first High Representative, Javier Solana, far surpassed the expectations of many member governments in establishing a distinctive EU presence. The Lisbon Treaty seemingly endorsed this strengthened role of the High Representative – not least through the creation of the EEAS to fulfil the traditional functions of the diplomat, of representing the Union, promoting it, negotiating on its behalf and reporting back through the High Representative to the European institutions and the Member States. However, Lisbon also added certain potential constraints as well as leaving unresolved issues of representation. The Union, for example, is now also represented, at the level of heads of government, by a new President of the European Council. That the EU may still in certain circumstances be represented by the President of the European Commission and/or the country holding the six-monthly Presidency may add a degree of confusion to the EU's presence and certainly raises questions about its coherence and even legitimacy. This is compounded further by the fact that individual Member States continue to retain their own diplomatic services and, in many cases, remain determined to use them to protect and promote what they regard as their national interests. And, to make matters even more complicated, there have been frequent instances of the bigger Member States acting in concert, as a *directoire*, acting in or as if in the name of the EU.

Faces and reflections

This variable representation of the Union and its Member States may in some respects be peculiar to a highly complex regional entity. In other ways, though, this multiplicity of faces and voices simply reflects some of the complexities of the contemporary international system. States are no longer the only actors in the international system but have been joined by a proliferation of actors seeking to influence events, whether international organizations, sub-national governments, multinational corporations, NGOs, transnational movements, both legal and criminal, and so on. What these disparate elements create is a challenge to the traditional hierarchical intergovernmental diplomatic process, creating a much more networked model of diplomacy in which states have perforce to seek different, sometimes transient allies (Hocking, 2008). As Hocking has also suggested, this 'multi-stakeholder model of diplomacy' raises further questions about the rules and norms of behaviour that lie behind it: 'The diplomatic system remains one founded ultimately on principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, however much these have become modified in practice. Non-state actors, such as NGOs, work to different norms, often rooted in the rejection of these principles' (Hocking, 2008: 72).

The resulting tensions create a much more complex and difficult environment with diverse actors pursuing their own diverse interests interacting at different levels and with each seeking

to legitimate their position with both their own and other audiences in public. There is a resulting paradox, as Constantinou and Der Derian have suggested, in that:

[C]onventional inter-state diplomacy is sustained by the very thing it defines itself against, or distinguishes itself from, namely sub-state or non-state diplomacy and this is because it needs to find a way of dealing with the plurality of voices around the world and to mediate more effectively the multiple forms of estrangement, which are never just interstate.

(Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010: 12)

At the same time, the growing number of states in the international system – and the costs of maintaining diplomatic posts in them – has deepened the paradox, for, as Paul Sharp put it:

[I]n international politics, as in domestic politics, there is a high expectation that governments can and should solve problems and a widespread reluctance to pay the price. The result is a dangerous cycle in which governments embark on difficult international projects with inadequate resources because a major mobilization of them cannot be justified.

(Sharp, 1998: 100)

The resulting ‘disjuncture between champagne tastes and beer budgets’ (Sharp, 1998) has led governments towards greater collaboration with others – as in the EU – and/or to shrinking diplomatic services. After all, the speed of contemporary transport and communications allows a prime minister, a variety of ministers and officials to conduct negotiations personally, perhaps providing Harold Nicolson with a rather different answer to his question of ‘Does this mean that a diplomatist today [i.e. 1953] is no more than a clerk at the end of a line?’ (Nicolson, 1953: 82). And yet, some individual states, most explicitly perhaps the UK, have sought to buck this trend, confirming Nicolson in his view that ambassadors remain a critical source of information and interpretation and the chief channel of communication. A fundamental element in the UK argument is the belief that national interests can only be protected and advanced by national diplomatic services rather than a European service – with Hague adding somewhat typically that even if such a diplomatic service could be ‘an extension of our influence in the world ... it is not a substitute for it’ (Hague, 2011). That scepticism has created a wariness of ‘competence creep’ on the part of the EU.² Yet this has been the case despite continued recognition – even if in the UK sporadically challenged – of the value of the EU’s diplomatic effort in support of its ‘structural power’, to use Keukeleire’s term (Keukeleire, 2003), the objective being to shape structures, rules and processes not simply in the EU’s neighbourhood but globally, too, in the interests of ‘maintaining competitiveness, dealing with climate change, combating global poverty and even dealing collectively with foreign policy issues’ (Hague, 2010).

Circumstances, it has been argued, have not been shifting in Europe’s favour. As the French foreign minister put it:

We are acutely aware of the rapidly changing balance of powers in the world; emerging powers want a place at the table and if we in turn really want to continue to have a say in world affairs we must join forces with one another, acquiring with that the ability to act at the European level. The European Union, which is the foremost economic power in the world and is home to half a billion people, should

be in a position to play a consequential role on the international stage. Because it is only at European level that we will have the same diplomatic weight as China, India or Brazil.

(Juppé, 2011)

But, as one former British ambassador described it, the EU is ‘the world’s principal underperforming asset’ (Marshall, 2008). So, as Juppé’s predecessor, Bernard Kouchner, declared:

The European Union must do a better job of asserting its influence and its interests in the world. Catherine Ashton must have the tools to fully carry out her tasks and thereby wholly live up to the expectations placed in her. This is of vital importance to Europe’s future position and the success of our common values and interests on the international political stage.

(Kouchner, 2010)

Response and delivery

Such diverse statements in some respects reinforce Constantinou and Der Derian’s paradox. Intra-EU diplomacy has been qualitatively changed rather than merely becoming perhaps an exaggerated form of institutionalized dialogue, for whether as a result of the range of issues covered or the continuousness of the interaction, diplomacy within the Union has evolved its own set of norms and procedures (Bátora, 2005). While allowing for a degree of downgrading of representation in other Member States, it has, of course, led to a strong focus on resources in Brussels as well as among the private offices of prime ministers, but not on the part of foreign ministries; other ministries have become so familiar with the Brussels policy-making process that they see little need for professional diplomats as intermediaries. But if MFAs have ‘lost’ the game in Brussels, they now face the dilemma brought about by both participating in and resisting the establishment of a strengthened CFSP.

In the pursuit of Juppé’s ‘consequential role’ and to achieve the success of ‘common values and interests’, the EU inevitably reinforces change in diplomatic practice or at least its further development. Given the nature of those common values, it necessarily tends to move well beyond relations with governments to engage with economic interests (‘a consumer-oriented diplomacy’ to use Bruter’s phrase (1999: 183)), and with civil society etc. a process subsumed within the term ‘public diplomacy’. The process is hardly new, with much having been written about it, especially in the United States during the Cold War. Since then, as Hocking has suggested (2008: 63), in addition to globalization and regionalization and the revolution in communication and information technologies, ‘Events following the wave of terrorist attacks that began in September 2001 have focused attention on the centrality of identities and values in world politics and, consequently, on the significance of images and ideas.’ Together they not only emphasized the added complexities of diplomacy but pointed up the critical need for further attention to be given to public diplomacy. As Jim Murphy, when one of the UK Labour government’s many European ministers, declared, ‘public diplomacy must become an integral part of policy-making and delivery. Governments must go beyond simple messaging, towards dialogue and cooperation, in collective effort to find solutions to the global challenges exemplified by climate change, violent extremism or poverty’ (Murphy, 2008: 5).

The ‘delivery’ of public diplomacy now involves not just communicating to government or civil society through speeches, visits or appearances on or in the media, but also through an increasing use of ‘social media’, blogging even tweeting, from foreign ministers

to, presumably with departmental approval, first secretaries. For those in post, it creates, perhaps, a new dimension to Neumann's second or 'heroic' script for individual diplomats: they can indulge an element of individual braggadocio and report as close to the action as possible, even while continuing the more monotonous everyday routine or, with even more difficulty in many circumstances, being the self-effacing mediator (Neumann, 2005: 73).

But public diplomacy is undertaken in varying political environments where access to any public audience can be constrained. Indeed, access by the public to such information and diplomacy can often be highly restricted. One of lessons of the 'Arab spring' was just how important social media can be among demonstrators. The use of smart-phone cameras and videos has allowed the world to see a good deal more than governments may have wanted (as in Syria's case during the spring and summer of 2011), particularly when they have been disseminated globally by the electronic media. The immediacy of broadcasting these images within hours of events taking place re-emphasizes the challenge to diplomacy of speed. It raises once again what in the 1990s was often discussed under the label of the 'CNN effect'³ (see, for example, Strobel, 1997 or Jakobsen, 2000), the impact of 24-hour news reportage on foreign policy. Whether such 'telediplomacy' (Ammon, 2001) changes policy is disputed, but it certainly creates additional pressures on governments to be seen to be doing something. It also, particularly in its coverage of disasters and crises, raises expectations that diplomats on the spot will be reporting back on radio if not television to assure home audiences that something is being done to protect nationals etc. The absence of such reportage by either diplomats or even more by governments can undermine reputations – events in Libya in 2011 being only the latest in a long line of crises reaching particular intensity during a summer vacation to cause problems for governments. Hocking, in fact, has gone further to suggest that the speed of an institution's reactivity and the intensity of its interaction has a more significant meaning in so far as 'the ability to respond speedily to the ever-quickenning flow of events is deemed a key measure of actor capacity' (Hocking, 2004: 97)

Such speed and the possible adverse publicity surrounding such crises has often brought heads of government (HOGs) rushing back from their holidays to negotiate possible solutions or at least stop-gap measures with their counterparts in the Union (and beyond), whether bilaterally or multilaterally, by telephone or video-conferences. Such discussions, of course, take place in secret even if much is made of the fact that they have taken place and their outcomes are often widely disseminated. They take place in addition to increasingly frequent summit meetings. These, however regular they become, are still accompanied by a build-up of expectations beforehand and press conferences or reports to parliament afterwards with national victories perennially won or at least national interests protected. Such involvement of HOGs in summer summits would have been anathema to, say, Harold Nicolson, who, in his Chichele lectures in 1953 on the evolution of diplomatic method, had bemoaned what he labelled 'new diplomacy', especially conference diplomacy. These appeared then as sporadic and intermittent episodes, occasioned by crisis or war but which undermined the consistency and continuity of a long-term process carried out by professionals in confidence (1953: 76). In his view open diplomacy raised the prospect of continuous public controversy and immovable positions, whereas private negotiation allowed for concession and negotiation.⁴

Breadth ... and depth?

It is not simply a question of either traditional diplomacy or open diplomacy. Whereas the pressures for greater accountability as well as technological facilitation are likely to ensure that HOG diplomacy continues to intensify, their continued interaction is reinforced by

the complexity of the range of different issues that have become so inter-linked within the national and international systems that only HOGs have the political weight to coordinate them. Within the EU framework, the Lisbon Treaty acknowledged these inter-dependencies and the problems of continuity by establishing a more permanent President of the European Council (TFEU 15 (6)). Herman van Rompuy, a former Belgian prime minister, was appointed President in December 2009, not only to chair meetings of HOGs but to 'drive forward its work', facilitate cohesion and consensus in the European Council and to represent the EU at HOG level abroad.

Such discussions at summit level may engender their own familiarity and so on and clearly have an impact on diplomatic representation and the traditional role of mediation, particularly within the EU – though they are at the same time usually only too conscious of their political standing at home. But there are few, least of all in ministries of foreign affairs, who do not argue that for success at European Council and other summit meetings, they need more than a degree of authoritative knowledge and assessment of the context within which they and other HOGs are working. The classic role of the diplomat – and therefore of foreign ministries – of acquiring information and human intelligence therefore remains key. To cite William Hague again:

It is necessary to know countries in detail – to know them geographically, to know personally their leaders and potential leaders, to know their languages and to understand their history – in order to be able to influence events. Those skills now need accentuating again. That is the clear and constant signal that I am sending out from the Foreign Office.

(Hague, 2011)

Often, of course, diplomats may exist in a metropolitan bubble, talking mostly to those within the governing elite or to whom they have been directed by those in power. Certainly some of the diplomatic reports from posts suggest that they had been taken unawares by the Arab spring of 2011. But their reports remain of critical importance in constructing the framework within which political leaders interact.

The threat to domestic populations from terrorist attacks has inevitably meant not simply interaction at the level of HOGs but among interior ministers and intelligence agencies – the last from a multitude of different ministries as well as more autonomous agencies such as those who meet in the semi-formalized framework of the Berne Group of Interior Intelligence agencies. The impact of terrorism on diplomacy was one of the issues taken up by Der Derian, who pointed to two interrelated challenges: first, terrorism and counter-terrorism together raise problems of legitimate orders (Der Derian, 1992: 81); second, an increased dependence on intelligence, particularly the use of surveillance via satellite and cyber space, can be seen as a structural challenge to traditional diplomacy (Der Derian, 1992: 73). As Hocking, too, pointed out above, terrorism has raised concerns about portraying European values more effectively through more public diplomacy. It has also focused greater attention on gathering intelligence and, with the invasion of Iraq, the quality of that intelligence. If public diplomacy almost by definition has involved a highly sensitive balance between promoting a state's interests and interfering publicly in the domestic affairs of another, there has always been an uneasy *modus vivendi* between the overt and covert means of gathering of information. But Der Derian's point that technology has made a structural difference in terms of diplomacy by creating hyper vigilance and intense distrust, a veritable 'cyber paranoia' (1992: 32), has been strongly reinforced by the cyber attacks on, for example, Estonia in 2007. The immediate

Estonian response was to blame Russia, both reinforcing and deepening Estonian suspicions and undermining any moves to improve wider EU–Russia relations. By 2009, ‘intelligence chiefs’ were warning ‘that China may have gained the capability to shut down Britain by crippling its telecoms and utilities (*Sunday Times*, 29 March 2009), making relations with China as well as Russia even more sensitive.

And CFSP?

Covert intelligence-gathering and its assessment may not be a foremost characteristic attributed to the EU – whether accurately or not its institutions have always been held to be particularly leaky – yet its capacity for assessment was significantly enhanced with Solana as High Representative. The EU’s Joint Situation Centre (SitCen), for example, offers strategic advice based on intelligence shared by the Member States on issues such as terrorism. Such intelligence may already have been assessed by Member governments; it may nonetheless provide a potentially useful, even vital basis on which to take or approve decisions for those with limited intelligence services of their own or who are not in a privileged position vis-à-vis the United States, from whom several of the bigger Member States receive restricted intelligence. It also provides the analysis on which the High Representative can recommend policy (Duke, 2006: 617). That intelligence may be reinforced by the information gathered more overtly by the EU’s Special Representatives, who have been appointed usually in areas of especial interest to the EU as well as of high tension (Grevi, 2007). That information in the past was further augmented by information from Commission delegations, which now form a part of the EU’s delegations/embassies.

The grounds on which William Hague justified the revitalization of British diplomacy in his diplomatic excellence initiative (the necessity ‘to know countries in detail’ etc.; see above) are presumably equally applicable to other diplomatic services, including that of the EU. Gathering comprehensive knowledge of local circumstances can lead to gaining an advantage over competitors. Better information, it is assumed, leads to better decisions. Much, of course, depends on the quality of the diplomatic service – even a Rolls Royce of a service if driven by madmen can still come off the road – but for some Member governments, the creation of the EEAS is something of a challenge. The concerns of the UK’s minister for Europe about ‘competence creep’ is a case in point. But the UK is not alone; for France, too,

there’s no question of the EEAS becoming a 28th diplomatic service. The diplomatic service will give greater weight to Europe’s action, in cooperation with the States. Baroness Ashton receives mandates from the States. The European Parliament, will, admittedly, try to put its stamp on this EU foreign policy, but – I stress this – there won’t be a 28th EU foreign policy.

(Lellouche, 2010)

Such statements reflect the continuous dilemma of Member States about how to influence international events that can be traced back to the establishment of European political cooperation in 1970 (Nuttall, 1992). For the UK and France in particular, EPC/CFSP has always been regarded as complementary to their national policies. And yet, at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, they have constantly led or allowed the greater institutionalization of CFSP. The result has been that the creation of a common policy expressed by a single representative has been pursued in a somewhat crab-like manner and always under the shadow of complete immobilism when Member States cannot agree on an

appropriate policy. Indeed, it has been suggested by Bickerton that, in part at least, ‘what lies at the heart of EU foreign policy are a series of internal concerns, namely the need to broker agreement among the member states (damage limitation) and legitimize the inactivity of member states in foreign affairs’ (Bickerton, 2011: 32). Certainly Juncos and Reynolds in their detailed examination of the Political and Security Committee concluded that ‘the journey is as important as the destination: the process of Brussels-level information gathering, consultation, cooperation and consensual decision-making is essentially what the CSFP/ESDP is all about’ (Juncos and Reynolds, 2007: 147). ‘Procedure as substitute for policy’ (Allen and Wallace, 1977) has a long conceptual and practical history, continually setting the European and national discourses at odds with one other.

The Solana phenomenon

Nonetheless, it can be argued that Solana both raised the costs of inactivity and created a wider base on which consensual decision-making could take place. He had begun, as he readily admitted, relying on the Member States, ‘their diplomatic networks, their logistic capabilities, and their expertise in specific areas’ (Solana, 1999). However, within only a few years, largely informally and on a personal basis, he had begun to institutionalize a significantly more effective foreign policy-making infrastructure in Brussels. Even allowing for a certain exaggeration, he could thereby claim that:

As time goes by I do whatever I want. I know what people think. I pursue my own agenda. I don’t have to check everything with everyone. I would rather have forgiveness than permission. If you ask permission, you never do anything.
(Crowe, 2005: 15)

Such an approach might have been expected of a former Spanish foreign minister and NATO secretary general. It was complemented by a determined effort to make the EU a more visible world actor, especially by means of personal diplomacy. As he put it after a year in office:

At the risk of sounding simplistic, I can quantify my own contribution in figures. Over the last 12 months I have travelled to 40 countries – not including the Balkans, which I have visited practically every month – clocking up more than 450,000 kms in the air. I have taken part in 17 Summit and political dialogue meetings, as well as over 20 other meetings at Head of Government and Ministerial level. One of my priorities is to maintain a substantive dialogue with a wide range of third countries. Equally, I put a considerable amount of effort into ensuring that the European Union is sufficiently present and active in international organisations, particularly the United Nations and the OSCE.
(Solana, 2000)

But, as he went on:

Travelling is of course not an end in itself. But I will continue to accumulate air miles for as long as I believe I can make a contribution to prompting the interests of the European Union in the world. We should be present and actively involved whenever and wherever issues of international order and security are on the agenda.
(Solana, 2000)

Solana's highly personal diplomacy, his frequent visits to the United States, to the Balkans and to the Middle East were seemingly acceptable to Member States only in so far as his agenda did not appear in contradiction to their own. But while it raised the visibility and the sense of presence of the EU, it did not always result in Member State consensus. That tended to come under severe strain during moments of crisis when EU agreement was found lacking. Despite his close personal relations with Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian leaders, for example, Solana was effectively silenced during the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2008 when the EU Member States failed to agree to a response.

And the Ashton ... impact?

Even if sometimes silenced, much that Solana had established was codified and extended under the Lisbon Treaty. Indeed the role of the High Representative was now double-hatted to take on that of a Vice-President of the Commission responsible for much of the Community's external relations. But Solana's achievement meant that his successor was left with a particularly difficult legacy, even if one seemingly strengthened under the Treaty. What Member States appeared to give with one hand, they seemed determined to take back with the other – rather as few Member States wanted another Jacques Delors in 1995, for example, so even fewer of them were prepared for Solana to be succeeded by another former foreign minister from one of the larger Member States.

Prompted perhaps by some poor decisions, or at least some poor PR, as well as some difficult international events to which the EU as such had only limited responses, Lady Ashton appeared initially to be reluctant to engage in personal diplomacy to quite the same extent as her predecessor. The French appeared to be particularly critical from the outset. In the aftermath of the devastating Haitian earthquake of January 2010, *The Times*, for example, quoted Pierre Lellouche: “There is no doubt that Mrs Ashton should have taken herself to Haiti immediately to wave the flag for Europe,” he said. “I guess that not everyone is a Nicolas Sarkozy” (*The Times Online*, 30 January 2010). Whether her presence, following that of the US Secretary of State and many other prominent visitors, would have helped the victims of the earthquake is a moot point, but the issue was clear: whether or not it was practical, raising Europe's visibility in the eyes of Europe's public if not of others was regarded as of critical importance.

Except that visibility was not everything at all times. Despite the fact that she was visiting Moscow and later attended the inauguration of the Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, she earned the opprobrium of the French defence minister (among others) for missing an informal meeting of defence ministers.⁵ Hervé Morin appeared incensed that, unlike Solana, Ashton had missed the meeting, declaring: ‘Isn't it rich that this morning, to display the ties between NATO and the EU, we have the NATO secretary general (Anders Fogh Rasmussen) here but not the high representative for the first meeting since the Lisbon treaty came into effect’ (*EUBusiness*, 25 February 2010). And even the British, initially (under Labour) defenders of her appointment, became critical during the Conservative government, citing her budgetary request – which resulted largely from the decision to move into a single building (rather than eight) and the costs of the EEAS – as indicative of over-ambition (David Lidington, quoted in the *International Herald Tribune*, 24 May 2011).

There was also considerable criticism of Ashton's lack of leadership during the ‘Arab spring’ of 2011, especially from many within the European Parliament. The Polish MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, for one, criticized both the EU's inaction and the fruitlessness of holding innumerable meetings and simply issuing statement after statement, adding:

Following Member States and waiting for permission from Foreign Ministers to go ahead has become Lady Ashton's doctrine and she treats it as virtue. It is the wrong approach. It condemns our foreign policy to the lowest common denominator and to always being late. We want a High Representative to lead, not to follow.

(Saryusz-Wolski, 2011)

Interestingly, even if the reasons might be obvious, since the French had particular reasons to lead in North Africa, and especially Libya, Ashton was encouraged by President Sarkozy not to wait, not to 'try to systematically get the agreement of everyone before acting', adding:

It's necessary to act according to what one believes is right for Europe, while getting the support of some, but while avoiding always having to get the agreement of the entire 27 before acting ... When you believe that something is important, do it. We will always be at your side if you act, if you show your ambition, if you have ideas.

(*Daily Mail*, 16 April 2010)

Whether the High Representative has been ambitious enough or prefers to wait until all 27 Member States are on board, she has, nonetheless, begun to follow Solana's example of entering into personal diplomacy – though often along with foreign ministers still intent on maintaining their own national role and prime ministers and presidents visiting and talking to the same governments and other actors.⁶ She may well prefer 'quiet diplomacy', as she declared on her appointment (Ashton, 2009), but she is also reported to set 'great store by personal diplomacy ... But Cathy's not a diplomat by behaviour or background. She doesn't like the classical diplomat' (Traynor, 2011). She has, however, been strategic in that diplomacy, maintaining frequent contact with the United States and Hillary Clinton – successfully in so far as Clinton declared that 'she now knows who to call when she wants to speak to Europe about "life and death issues" and "children and shopping"' (BBC, 14 October 2010).

A real diplomatic service in the making?

Even if Ashton does not like classical diplomats she has the responsibility to create the EEAS, described by Alain Juppé as 'this unprecedented adventure' that 'will modify the way our diplomatic corps works and it already poses challenges we need to meet head on' (Juppé, 2011). Such was the challenge that France sent one of its most senior diplomats, Pierre Vimont, a former French Ambassador to the United States, to become the Executive Secretary General of the new service. It was a sentiment echoed by William Hague, who was intent on 'ensuring that talented British candidates enter it' (Hague, 2011). Other Member States have followed the appointment of staff to the new service, part seconded national officials, part officials from the Council Secretariat and the third part from the Commission with close interest, sometimes, as in the case of the Poles, convinced that the older Members appeared to be winning the better posts (*Rzeczpospolita*, 28 August 2010). Who makes up the new service, its purposes and its potential impact raise testing questions for Member States and the European institutions as well as for traditional inter-state diplomacy. Pierre Lellouche's remark above, for example, refers to the European Parliament's effort to gain some control over the service via its powers over the budget and staff regulations.

The declared aim to create an efficient and effective diplomatic service was justified by Ashton on the grounds that, as she told the *Washington Post*, 'The EU can be too slow, too

cumbersome and too bureaucratic. I want to help to put that right in the way the EU works with the rest of the world' (27 July 2010). Europe, as she declared to the European Parliament,

cannot afford to act in a disparate manner in a world that is seeing fundamental power shifts and where problems are increasingly complex and inter-linked. We need to defend Europe's interests and project Europe's values in a more coherent and effective way. And we should be ambitious in how we do it. The European Union and the Member-States have an impressive array of instruments, resources, relationships and expertise to help build a better, more stable world. Now we need to bring all this together, to forge joined-up strategies and maximise our impact on the ground. Particularly in the troubled parts of the world, where our action matters the most.

(Ashton, 2010)

The need was 'to build an integrated platform that projects our values and interests effectively around the world'. This would:

Protect our security and prosperity: if we are going to do that, we need to think big and we need to be creative, to build integrated systems, breaking down the old silos that exist and be willing to do things differently to improve our effectiveness. I say more than anything: what matters is what works. We should be pragmatic and make sure that this is the approach we take.

(Ashton, 2010)

Clearly 'breaking down the old silos' to build an integrated system with its own identity and sense of purpose was inevitably a challenge both to the European institutions and especially to the Member States. Ashton did not necessarily allay suspicion by declaring that 'This is not, as some critics say, a grab for power; but it is, unashamedly, a grab for effectiveness. The EAS can make a positive difference – and I am determined that it will' (*Washington Post*, 27 July 2010). To quote Juppé again:

To the extent that each country retains its own diplomatic sovereignty and ability to defend itself (decisions are made unanimously) it is important first to try and distil a common vision of our collective interests. Then we can take action by making our national diplomacies and the EU instruments work together. The role of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is to help us achieve this ... We ... need to create a genuine, joint diplomatic culture within this institution; and of course we must rise to the occasion and provide the diplomatic service with the proper tools for reflection and decision-making so that for each major issue, a shared European interest emerges even while we ensure our national interests have also been taken into account.

(Juppé, 2010)

But French support has not been without its ambiguities. As Pierre Lellouche put it:

Member States' rights will be respected; in particular the EEAS will include staff from national diplomatic services, with these making up at least a third both of

the total EEAS staff in Brussels and the EU delegations. This is very important if we want to instil a common diplomatic culture in countries with great diplomatic traditions, countries with more modest ones and staff who have come from the Commission. The Common Security and Defence Policy structures, whilst being integrated into the European External Action Service, are seeing their autonomy maintained. In fine, the organizational set-up should ensure the new structure operates efficiently.

(Lellouche, 2010)

Tensions between the EEAS and the Member States were exacerbated by ‘turf battles’ between the European institutions. Barroso’s detachment of enlargement, one of the EU’s key foreign policy issues, from the Commissioner for External Policy portfolio (as under Ferrero-Waldner) suggested a policy of at least damage limitation. His appointment of João Vale de Almeida to the ‘embassy’ in Washington in February 2010 after less than a year as Director-General for External Relations (but rather longer as head of Barroso’s *cabinet*) and well before the formal establishment of the EEAS was also generally regarded as an attempt to seize a particularly important post for the Commission.

The extent to which the disparate elements from the Commission, Council Secretariat and the Member States can be welded together to form a professional European diplomatic service with its own *esprit de corps* remains to be seen. If the Commission’s external delegations have often been dismissed as technocrats lacking political nous given their preoccupation with trade and aid issues, they had nonetheless, and despite institutional confusion, become increasingly recognized as ‘real embassies’ (Bruter, 1999: 197). If officials from the Council Secretariat are more an unknown quantity, those seconded to the EEAS from the Member States are under double suspicion. On the one hand, they are suspect to representatives of the European institutions on the grounds that they may retain primary loyalty to, perhaps even continue to report to, their home government. On the other hand, they are under suspicion from home governments lest they ‘go native’. Harold Nicolson suggested that there was always a danger that the diplomat posted abroad ‘becomes denationalized, internationalized, and therefore dehydrated, an elegant, empty husk’ (Nicolson, 1953, cited in Sharp, 1998: 107). Rather than a husk, elegant or otherwise, Sharp and others (for example Checkel, 2001) have made much of diplomats not just representing their capital’s views to their host, but explaining, even pressing on their home government the views of their host government, their circumstances, environment, etc. There is perhaps always a fine line between reportage, explanation and advocacy. But what might be termed socialization may simply reflect a temporary professional commitment to a new service. It could, though, mean a growing identification with European norms (i.e. as distinct from national norms). Whichever might be the case, those seconded may have to reflect on the danger that they may come under suspicion, which might have an impact on their career once they return to their capitals (see Geuijen, Hart and Princen, 2008, for a study on other Commission officials).

The spinning wheel of EU representation

EEAS officials may well be reminded of their provenance not just by their former employers but by two further factors: the multiplicity of bodies that may still represent the Union and the reactions of the host government. A new unified voice and channel of communication is made difficult by the fact that at different times on different missions the EU can be represented by the President of the Council, the President of the Commission and by the foreign minister or

even another minister of the rotating Presidency. Foreign ministers and national HOGs still expect to make their mark on the international scene, whether in traditional areas of national concern or in times of crisis – whether international or occasionally domestic. Although it took place before Lisbon came into effect, the example of the French and Czech EU Presidencies is indicative of the difficulties that remain. President Sarkozy appeared seemingly unbothered by the rotation of the EU Presidency from France to the Czech Republic at the end of December 2008 and continued to seek to negotiate with Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians over Gaza. Both the French President and Czech EU Presidency delegation visited the region, talking to many of the same people but in rather different accents.

It is therefore not surprising (*pace* Bruter, above) that occasionally third countries find it difficult to distinguish between the Commission and the EU and, even with the EEAS and the High Representative, they may well remain ‘baffled by the many faces, names, and telephone numbers that the EU can have’. As was the case in the Sarkozy example, so, too, clarity was not necessarily served by the example of Moratinos during the Spanish EU Presidency, who was reported to have visited the Southern Caucasus “‘on behalf of” Ashton ... to convey the message that the three countries are “‘priorities for the EU”” (*EUBusiness*, 28 February 2010). An active Presidency or an issue covering more than just foreign and/or foreign economic issues allow for confusion of intermediaries – this in addition to the presence of other EU Member State embassies with or without ambassadors with ambition or a strong if somewhat outmoded sense of propriety. The EU is thus likely to remain subject to a degree of exploitation for those ‘who have mastered the intricacies of the European machinery, [who will continue to] be able to work the system to their advantage, making use of disputes over competence or bureaucratic rivalries to further their interests’ (Edwards and Rijks, 2008: 25).

And so?

Even against these odds and however ‘unhusk-like’ an individual EEAS representative might be, he or she is likely to be effective only to the extent that the EU has a common policy. As suggested above, there is an assumption that an EU interest will be reported back to Brussels and so form the basis for proposals from the High Representative to which the Member States react, to ‘provide the foundation for implementing European interests through focused diplomacy’, as the German foreign minister put it (Westerwelle, 2011). Given the frequent criticism that the EU too often cannot act, or cannot react quickly, the assumption that a High Representative even with an EEAS will make a qualitative difference is an optimistic one; there remain too many hands on the wheel. And yet, as is so often recognized by Member States, if the EU can agree and the consensus is firm, despite the efforts of those to whom the policy is directed to unpick the agreement, the EU’s influence can be significant.⁷ This is especially the case if it is known that it had been difficult to arrive at the consensus and would be even more difficult to change it, circumstances remaining largely the same. It is also the case if, in their bilateral relationships, the Member States hold to the common policy. The downside is that if circumstances do change, the policy may stick and the EU becomes marginalized or another decision is made to meet the new circumstances even while the former decision remains, making for inconsistency, which can then be exploited by a third party. And of course, Member States may flake off, leaving the EU and its representatives floundering.

Winning support among 27 states is rarely easy, and this can remain the case in actual negotiations even when the broad lines of policy have been laid down. Karen Smith, among others, was struck by the ‘sheer amount of time member-state diplomats spend in EU

coordination meetings', even if she was also impressed by their dedication to the process (K. E. Smith, 2006: 156). In so far as little time might actually remain for negotiating an agreement, the emphasis does, indeed, seem to be on the process and journey towards the common position rather than effecting its purported purpose. And long hours of coordination can still leave disagreement and inaction.

All of which leaves the EU representatives facing particular difficulties in terms of being the voice of the EU, whether in public or in private. The issues of speedy decision-making and timely decisions, of coherence and consistency remain. There may be no lack of ambition on the part of members of the EEAS – witness the optimism of Ambassador Almeida in Washington declaring:

The new service will ensure consistency and coordination of the EU's external action. It will represent European interests via 136 EU Delegations that work in full cooperation with the diplomatic services of the Member States, as we do here in Washington, DC. The EEAS will consolidate the EU's Security and Defence Policy, crisis management and planning, civilian planning and military cooperation. And with other relevant European institutions and departments, it will work to integrate EU policy on, among others, the European Neighbourhood Policy, energy, climate change, development, democracy and human rights, nuclear safety and non-proliferation.

(Almeida, 2010)

Doubtless many of those appointed will find that public role of critical importance in attempting to establish an autonomous identity for the new service, in addition to explaining the nature of the EU. Much of their time is likely to remain bound up with managing the differences among the Member States, as well as managing those with third countries.

While clearly the novelty of the EEAS makes predictions as to its impact on the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU somewhat meaningless, its establishment has revealed the continuing tensions caused by the pressures for cooperation, if not integration, within the EU to meet contemporary challenges and the determination of Member States to retain as much control as possible. While potentially Europeanized, the EEAS may not be wholly denationalized, stateless and neutered; it could well provide the basis for a new dynamic to come into play in European foreign policy-making as well as in its execution. While not new, the office of High Representative supported now by the EEAS has been strengthened to become yet another actor with at least some sort of voice to add to the cacophony of voices that characterize the EU. The efforts of both Solana and Ashton to further the EU as an international actor continue, with personal diplomacy a critical factor. However powerless, there is a dimension, pinpointed by Nicolaidis following Havel, of the power of the powerless in building networks and setting examples for managing relations, however flawed (Nicolaidis, 2004: 95).

That, of course, has to be set against the frequent incoherence and inconsistency of the EU and its Member States, and, indeed, the incoherence or (deliberate) misunderstanding of others – sometimes disregarding the EU in favour of the continuation of more historical relationships with particular Member States, at other times wanting closer relations yet seeing little value added if the EU is promoting norms that counter governments' vested interests – not least if this means treating with and perhaps even funding civil society groups that are regarded as essentially subversive. Any distinctiveness of the High Representative's voice may easily therefore be muffled. And yet, however flaky Member States may be in terms of their

support, they seem nonetheless to acknowledge that a more coordinated effort is needed to meet some at least of the challenges of the contemporary international system. There is, too, an awareness that the establishment of a High Representative with their own diplomatic service may lead to a modification of national practices and even modify national behaviour, creating a new dimension to contemporary diplomacy.

Notes

- 1 With apologies to Willie Nelson.
- 2 David Lidington, UK minister for Europe, reported in *International Herald Tribune*, 24 May 2011.
- 3 As the German foreign minister told the *Guardian* on the eve of the UN Security Council vote on a no-fly zone: 'Your own instinct is to say "We have to do something". But military intervention is to take part in a civil war that could go on for a long time. Germany has a strong friendship with our European partners, but we won't take part in any military operation and I will not send German troops to Libya' (*Guardian*, 18 March 2011).
- 4 These themes of concession and counter-concession, mediation and negotiation have re-emerged in some of the diplomacy literature as in, for example, Sharp (1998) or Constantinou and Der Derian (2010).
- 5 Under the Lisbon Treaty the High Representative also chairs foreign ministers' meetings – including, when present, meetings of defence ministers. There have been some precedents for Ashton to ask the rotating Presidency to chair particular meetings at foreign or defence minister levels, as was the case with the Spanish foreign minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, who chaired the EU Algeria Association Council in June 2010.
- 6 Ashton was questioned about whether it helped her when in Cairo that her visit coincided with the British prime minister's visit to the Middle East with 'a cohort of arms sellers' (*Newsnight*, BBC, 22 February 2011).
- 7 As *EUObserver* reported (20 May 2011), a paper by the Austrian government on the development of the EEAS began: 'Close co-operation between the diplomatic services of member states and the EEAS in Brussels and in third countries is the prerequisite for the Union's success in joint external action.'