Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 10, Issue 4 (2014)

Research Article

The European External Action Service: Torn Apart Between Several Principals or Acting as a Smart 'Double-agent'?

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Citation

Henökl, T.E. (2014). 'The European External Action Service: Torn Apart Between Several Principals or Acting as a Smart 'Double-agent'?', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 10 (4), pp. 381-401.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is a hybrid and compound institutional actor in the EU's multi-level administration with delegated authority from the member states (MS) to conduct the EU's external action. Substantial competences, notably in the field of Neighbourhood and Trade policies, as well as Development and Cooperation remain under the control of the European Commission (Commission). At the same time, also Members of the European Parliament (EP) are more clearly voicing their interests and ownership in the EU's representation in the world. This article tests the notion of 'double-agent' – or in fact "triple-agent" – as a way of characterizing the position of the EEAS, and in particular of the EU Delegations (as the 'EU field-level bureaucracies') vis-à-vis the MS, the Commission and the EP, as an expression of complex and interrelated chains of delegation, where the EU 'embassies' have to interact with and to answer to (but not in a clear line of delegation) different (sets of) principals, namely the MS, the Commission and the EP. Based on the findings from a series of elite interviews with 47 EEAS and Commission officials and on a survey among 184 EU diplomats, the paper seeks to examine this fuzzy principal-agent relationship and uses the review process of the EEAS as an opportunity to assess the level of autonomy of the new EU foreign policy apparatus.

Keywords

EEAS; EU foreign policy; international bureaucracies; principal-Agent theory; organizational autonomy

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The European External Action Service (EEAS) is frequently characterized as an "organizational hybrid" (Duke 2011: 46; Carta 2012: 167; Liszczyk and Formuszewicz 2013: 144) or as an "interstitial" organization (Bátora 2013), since it operates in multiple organizational fields. It 'works rather like a chameleon' (Blockmans and Hillion 2013: 9), fulfilling different institutional functions, in both the intergovernmental and community spheres. Legally, the EEAS is the recipient of delegated tasks from the member states (MS). Policy prerogatives in the field of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Trade, Development and Cooperation (DEVCO) as well as Climate Action (CLIMA) and the budgetary competences for the EU's external action remain under the control of the European Commission (and the respective DGs). In addition, also the European Parliament (EP) is more audibly voicing its interests and ownership in the EU's representation in the world. In order to shed some light on this complex web of inter-relations, I develop and test a notion of 'double-agency' as a way of characterizing the situation of the EEAS and the EU Delegations (DELs[1]), in between the intergovernmental and the supranational spheres, as an expression of complex and interrelated chains of delegation, where the EEAS and in particular the EU embassies are compelled to interact with and to answer to, at least, two distinct - if not three - (sets of) principals (or "pseudo-principals"), namely "the" MS and COM, and increasingly also to the EP.

The burgeoning literature on the EEAS has emphasized the specificities of EU foreign policy in the traditionally state-centred arena of international relations (Allen 2012; Dijkstra 2013; Raube 2012; M.E. Smith 2013; Thomas and Tonra 2012; Vanhoonacker et al. 2012), where the EEAS has been described as a long missing bridge over the divisions of the old EU pillar structure (see Balfour, Bailes and Kenna 2011; Hug et al. 2013; M.H. Smith 2012). Legal scholars (Blockmans and Hillion 2013; Cardwell 2012; Van Vooren 2010) have discussed the place and role of the EEAS in the EU's institutional architecture and its formal legal status and competences. In addition, some work has been done on organizational questions (Bátora 2013; Henökl 2014; Ongaro 2012; Wisniewski 2012) as

well as on recruitment and integration of national diplomats (Duke and Lange 2013; Juncos and Pomorska 2013a, 2013b; Murdoch et al. 2014; Novotná 2014; Spence 2012). What is missing so far is research on EEAS-officials' actual decision-making behaviour based on solid quantitative data. Drawing on a recent survey carried out among EEAS officials, which investigates the degree of *de facto* autonomy of the organization, this paper adds a public administration perspective and sets out to disentangle the command and control structures governing the EU foreign policy apparatus.

The problem of agency autonomy in international organizations has already been researched (see Hawkins et al. 2006; Vaubel 2006); and principal-agent (P-A) relations in EU foreign economic policy have been dealt with by several scholars (see Delreux and Kerremans 2010; Dür and Elsing 2011; Wessel and den Hertog 2012). The relevance of the principal-agent approach for the EEAS, and, more specifically, an analysis the rationale behind the delegation of power has recently been confirmed by Hrant Kostanyan (2014). The control mechanisms deployed by the EEAS' many principals have been explored by Jost-Henrik Morgenstern (2013a), but also other fields have contributed to this debate; from a development policy angle, for instance, Mark Furness (2013) made a very insightful attempt to provide an answer to the question of 'who controls the EEAS?'. The puzzle is whether and how the EEAS will carve out an autonomous role, defined as relative independence in its actions (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Egeberg and Trondal 2009; Ellinas and Suleiman 2012), from its principals, the MS, on the one hand, but also with regard to the inter-institutional relations with the Commission and the EP, on the other. This question has at least two dimensions: the first dimension concerns the EEAS' bureaucratic integration with the central level EU institutions, notably the European Commission (EC). The issue here is whether the EEAS will be successful in extending its powers *vis-à-vis* other EU institutions, and increase its capacities in terms of resources (budget, staff, competences etc.) accordingly. The second aspect concerns the administrative decision-making in different policy areas in which the EEAS will be more or less successful to establish some degree of independence *vis-à-vis* the EU MS.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), by definition, has competences which fall under the community method as well as intergovernmental decision-making. The EEAS has thus several political masters and works in areas with different decision-making rules and procedures. Furness (2013: 109) claims that 'mixed competence policy areas raise further possibilities", because of the "grey area between them', and that it 'is therefore likely that the EEAS will have opportunities to push for greater autonomy in some policy areas and its options will be limited in others.' The place or the organizational *locus,* where both the intergovernmental and the community competence areas are present and intersect, with the idea of joining forces, in order to increase the "coherence" of the EU's external action, are the EU DELs in third countries, where personnel form different EU institutions is working closely together, sharing intense contacts and exchanging information on a daily basis (Pfeffer 1982: 266; see also Hatch and Cunliffe 2006; Therborn 2006). Organizational geography, the physical location of officials, has been demonstrated to matter for socialization and institutionalization of behaviour, as the 'forming mould for actors' (Therborn 2006: 512; Jacobsen 1989, Egeberg 1994, 2012; Egeberg and Trondal 2011; Henökl and Trondal 2013). Physical presence and proximity relationships have been highly valued in the conduct of diplomacy since the establishment of the first resident embassies in fifteenth century Italy (Bull 1977: 160; Bátora 2008). Especially in contexts of high volatility and uncertainty, as in foreign and security policy, agents have a preference for negotiation and information exchange in face-to-face settings. In diplomacy, even more than in other organizational and governance contexts, information, especially accurate and professionally processed, and often confidential information, is a crucial resource (Berridge 2002: 122; Blom and Vanhoonacker 2015, Dijkstra and Vanhoonacker 2011, Maurer 2014). This predilection for personal contact was also corroborated by the survey data, where more than 80 per cent of respondents expressed their preference for direct, face-to-face meetings, whether formal or informal, as compared to other means of exchange, such as telephone or video-conferencing. Informal face-to-face meetings are particularly strongly favoured by diplomats

in EU Delegations, where 91 per cent consider them as 'important' or 'very important', as compared to 82 per cent of HQ officials.

Adopting a principal-agent perspective, this article sheds some light at the intertwined chains of delegation that run from the political masters in Brussels and the MS capitals through diverse channels of instruction and reporting all the way "down" to the "field-level bureaucrats", i.e. diplomats and officials working at the 139 EU Delegations around the world. The research is based on empirical data from 47 semi-structured interviews as well as from a recent survey among 184 decision-makers in the EEAS and Commission officials posted at EU Delegations. Questions, addressed by the survey, are: Who are the people running the EU foreign policy machinery? Who are these agents in contact with? Whom do they listen to? What are the concerns and considerations officials take into account in the decision-making process? And where do the political signals, agents receive and emphasize actually come from? How does the role of the EU Delegations influence the autonomy of the EEAS vis-à-vis the MS? The survey features an almost equal distribution between officials at HQ and posted at EU Delegations in third countries, which makes it possible to compare the two groups as regards their contact patterns, concerns and considerations, as well as emphasis put on political signals from different institutional sources. Key findings from the survey reveal a number of interesting differences between officials at HQ and those "at arm's length", at Delegations. Staff at Delegations has considerably more contacts outside the organization and emphasizes more strongly signals from central-level EU institutions as compared to signals from member states.

A PRINCIPAL-AGENT PERSPECTIVE

P-A theory builds on rational cost-benefit calculation as the main logic of action, whereby actors engage in wilful institutional design and delegate certain competences, in order to avoid conflict, reduce uncertainty or reap economies of scale (Majone 2001; Tallberg 2002; Shepsle 2006). A vast body of literature on P-A relations has been accumulating since the 1990s when scholars started to apply principal-agent modelling to the European Union to understand the relationship between the member states and the EU institutions (Pollack 1997, 2003; Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002), and to describe the EU and its functioning (Dehousse 2008; Franchino 2007; Kassim and Menon 2003; Scharpf 1997 and 2000; Pierson 1996). A number of authors have framed EU external relations and trade policies in a P-A perspective and as a problem of incomplete contracting (see Delreux and Kerremans 2010; Dür and Elsig 2011; Wessel and den Hertog 2012). According to the P-A logic, the EU member states as "collective principal" choose to establish agents to reduce transaction costs by relieving themselves of certain tasks, by acquiring expertise, or by limiting the complexity of decision-making. Agents can exploit conflicting preferences among their principals or informational asymmetries to their advantage to increase their autonomy. To prevent bureaucratic drift or agency slippage and to make agents accountable, principals aim at creating oversight and control arrangements (Hawkins et al. 2006: 12-20; Koremenos et al. 2001). Autonomy may be enhanced by dysfunctional control mechanisms or if communication among the principals is hampered by bureaucratic politics. But the autonomy of bureaucratic agents not only depends on the structure of political oversight and control, it also has to do with the agent's own characteristics (Hawkins and Jacoby 2006). Organizational characteristics such as the EEAS' boundary position, its geographic spread, fluid organizational membership and behavioural predispositions of officials may be of crucial importance in this context and conducive to the development of increased agency autonomy (Cohen et al. 1972; Aldrich and Herker 1977; Stinchcombe 1965).

Applying the P-A model to the EEAS, however, produces the dilemma of simultaneous presence of *multiple* principals (the member states individually) and a *collective* principal (Council), as well as a number of oversight and control functions assumed by the European Parliament and the Commission, resulting in complex and intertwined lines of delegation. In search for a more sophisticated model,

accounting for this situation of multiple principals, the chapter proposes the image of a "double-agent" to depict the relationship between the EEAS and the member states, on the one hand, and the supra-national EU institutions on the other. Given the more complex and multi-dimensional nature of composite political systems unfolding at the EU level, Renaud Dehousse (2008) has suggested (originally for regulatory agencies) a "multi-principals model," arguing that 'despite its unquestionable relevance, the principal-agent model, in its standard form, is analytically inadequate as it does not take into consideration some of the peculiarities of the EU setting. The most important of these is the absence of a clearly defined "principal" since European institutional architecture has been carefully designed to avoid any concentration of power' (Dehousse 2008: 790).

In the case of the EEAS, and more particularly the EU DELs, the most important delegated tasks are representation of EU interests, maintaining a channel for negotiations and dialogue, as well as for information gathering (Art. 221(1) TFEU, EEAS Decision, Art. 5; see also: Blockmanns et al. 2013: 12, 32-34). In addition, depending on the EUs relations with particular countries, the EU DELs are the liaison offices for DG DEVCO responsible for the management of cooperation and development programmes, as well as footholds in third countries for DGs Trade, Enlargement, and ENP. With the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty (LT) and the creation of the EEAS, the nature of tasks changed from a trade and cooperation focus to more strongly emphasizing foreign policy, characterized by political and security concerns (Maurer and Raik 2014). New responsibilities of the EU DELs include assuming the role of the permanent EU presidency, chairing the meetings of Heads of Missions and other working groups of member state diplomats, political reporting, as well as delivering EU *démarches*.

MULTIPLE PRINCIPALS AND "DOUBLE AGENCY"

Given the multi-level and polycentric structure of the composite political system unfolding at the EU level, the P-A approach has been modified and fine-tuned (see Curtin 2007: 528). Dehousse (2008) has suggested (originally for regulatory agencies) a "multi-principals model," arguing that 'the principal-agent model, in its standard form, is analytically inadequate as it does not take into consideration some of the peculiarities,' in particular 'the absence of a clearly defined "principal," since the European institutional architecture has been carefully designed to avoid any concentration of power.' Moreover, the different principals in the EU system fear to relinquish power, and their main concern is less "agency-drift" than "political drift", 'in which agencies are somehow captured by one of their institutional rivals in the leadership contest' (Dehousse 2008: 796). This leadership contest has been manifest in the area of external policy, since the early days of the European Political Cooperation in the 1970s (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 165-167). Later, during the European Convention preceding, the Intergovernmental Conference, which ultimately led to the Lisbon Treaty, the MS have been divided and were finally opposed to grant additional foreign policy competences to the European Commission (Morgenstern 2013b). In contrast to external relations, the CFSP continues to be driven and controlled by the MS and an intergovernmental mode of decision-making, notably by retaining unanimity also post-Lisbon. Delegation of authority and control of the EEAS involves the Council of Ministers, the national foreign services, the EP (with regard to staff and administrative budget, and newly acquired competences) as well as the European Commission (for traditional external EU policies). Information asymmetries may arise from different contact patterns between HQ and EU DELs, as well as from a lack of clarity with regard to roles and instructions. Potential for drift or slippage may be expected from diverging interests and receptivity to other political signals and inputs. Cultural dynamics can be expected to differ alongside with underlying patterns of conflicts and cleavages.

In parallel, the conceptualization of the multi-level actor/forum relationships in the EU system (see Bovens et al. 2013; Wille 2013; Brandsma 2013), led to elaborate on the increasingly sophisticated European "accountability architecture" and on an "accountability framework for multi-level

governance," where one actor may be in a variety of accountability relationships, and simultaneously answerable to different forums. However, having essentially an "ex-post" character of checking the compliance with rules, the control mechanisms of this architecture and framework are applicable mainly to formal decision-making and the legislative process, and cannot fully account for all stages of the process, in particular with regard to the informal aspects of administrative behaviour, allowing for some discretion of bureaucrats in the policy shaping and implementation, based on values, beliefs, identities, role expectations and perceptions, opinions, organisational culture or "bounded rationality" (Simon 1972). Certain parts of the policy formulation, steering and implementation process may simply "stay under the radar" of the mentioned mechanisms, and it cannot be excluded that these are of significance. Chances are that how and with what kind of mind-set minutes of meetings are written, for instance, or the cognitive capacities, predetermined opinions or a potential hidden agenda of an agent sitting on – or chairing – an evaluation or steering committee or drafting a report, analysis, non-paper or, say, a policy proposal may escape the scrutiny of even the most thorough monitoring instruments. By taking a bottom-up perspective the notion of "double-agent" corresponds to and reflects the existence of multiple principals or multiple forums, creating overlaps, situations of ambiguity and potential problems of "multiple accountability disorder" (Schillemans and Bovens 2011: 6).

In a P-A perspective, agency of the EEAS is "nested," that is there are intricate and variable P-A relationships, where recipients of supra-nationally delegated powers might, in a different constellation, be the principal for another agent (which could at times act as the operational principal for the first), resulting in blurred lines of delegation between Council, EP, the Commission and the EEAS. Thus, there may be room for larger bureaucratic drift and agency loss, especially in a context of asymmetric and incomplete information as well as dual and parallel channels of communication between principals and agents. I adopt the definition of agency loss, suggested by Arthur Lupia (2003: 35); 'Agency *loss* is the difference between the actual consequence of delegation and what the consequence would have been had the agent been "perfect"'; '"perfect" being a hypothetical agent who does what the principal would have done if the principal had unlimited information and resources to do the job herself.' In the case of EU DELs this is particularly intricate, especially in instances where the preferences of the different principals diverge. Such situations may provide the DELs with increased leeway and opportunities for autonomous action, which in turn would feed back into the inter-institutional relationship, and ultimately lead to a higher degree of independence of the EEAS vis-à-vis the political masters in Brussels as well as in the MS capitals. Furness (2013: 117) estimates that 'the EEAS may be able to build its agency through its [D]elegations to third countries and international organizations […and] can be expected to use this "upgrade" [of EC Delegations to Union Delegations] to increase its political influence within the EU system.' Chains of delegation are blurred and intertwined, not least because the Commission is itself a body vested with powers resulting from supra-national delegation by the EU MS. Competences are partly overlapping, instructions are issued by several sources and reporting lines have in many instances been characterized as redundant. The EEAS Review document tabled by HR/VP in July 2013, for instance, speaks of two separate and parallel structures for the coordination of human resources in EU Delegations ("EUDEL" and "COMDEL" working groups), and concludes that 'this dual system leads to multiple debate on the same issues, delays in decision-making and can be an obstacle to direct contacts between the EEAS and Commission service with a stake in Delegations' (EEAS 2013: 11).

METHODOLOGY

In April 2013 an online questionnaire was distributed to 617 EU officials. The recipients were randomly selected, on the basis of available EEAS staff lists and e-mail addresses on EU DELs' websites. Within the possibilities of selection, some attention was paid to a balanced distribution of invitations to

complete the survey according to organizational affiliation, place of assignment, function and hierarchical level. After three reminder e-mail messages and administering 70 paper questionnaires at the EEAS headquarters in Brussels, the survey could harvest a total of 184 responses, comprising 148 completed questionnaires and 36 partially completed ones.[2] For the sample of ca. 680 eligible respondents this results in a response rate of approximately 30 per cent. As can be demonstrated, the data is valid and representative both with regard to officials' previous affiliation, geographical balance (country of origin), place of assignment, educational background as well as age and gender. Most of the officials in this survey (74 persons, 41 per cent) were recruited (transferred) from DG RELEX, 19 respondents (11 per cent) from the Council Secretariat General (SGC), and 24 respondents (13 per cent) from MS Ministries of Foreign Affairs. The 24 seconded national diplomats in the survey come from 18 different member states. About 21 per cent of the respondents were working for other Commission DGs before 2011, i.e. Aid and Cooperation (AIDCO), Development (DEV), TRADE, and Enlargement (ELARG).

Table1: Institutional affiliation and provenance

	Previous affiliation (%)	Present affiliation (%)
EEAS	-	75
Council SG	10.6	-
COM DG RELEX	41.1	-
COM DEVCO	-	12.5
COM DG AIDCO	8.3	-
COM DG ELARG	0.6	2.2
COM DG TRADE	1.1	1.6
COM DG DEV	12.2	-
MS MFA	13.3	2.2
EP	1.1	1.1
Other	11.7	5.4
N	180	184

Institutional affiliation and provenance (mean N=182)
Abbreviations: EEAS: European External Action Service, SG: Secretariat General, COM: European Commission, DG: Directorate General, RELEX: External Relations, DEVCO: Development and Cooperation, AIDCO: Aid and Cooperation (until 2010), ELARG: Enlargement, DEV: Development (until 2010), MS: Member State, MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EP: European Parliament.

The 21 officials having indicated "other" as their previous affiliation mention either various Commission DGs, not listed in the questionnaire, other national authorities or agencies (e.g. defence/civil protection, development or police), as well as international organizations (IOs) or research institutions as their affiliation of origin. Four respondents do not disclose their institution of origin. It may be interesting to trace movements and career trajectories of officials and to see whether where they come from has a bearing on their attitudes, role perceptions and preferences, whether there are differences pertaining to their individual experiences of the changes, or which concerns and signals they choose to emphasize.

Overall the survey features an almost equal distribution between HQ-staff (52 per cent) and officials posted in DELs (47 per cent). Three respondents did not specify their place of assignment. Within the two populations (HQ and DELs) the distribution is also fairly balanced with regard to staff category, level of tasks and gender. The data is less balanced regarding previous affiliation, where there is a slight selection bias in favour of previous Commission staff, which to some extent however reflects also the overall picture of EEAS staff (approximately 1/3 of staff coming from MS MFAs), as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 2: Distribution by HQ and Delegations

		HEADQUARTER % (frequency)	DELEGATIONS % (frequency)	N Total
Affiliation	Previously Commission	65.8 (52)	79.5 (73)	**167**
	Previously Council and / or MFA	34.2 (27)	20.5 (15)	
Staff category	AD	61.8 (55)	66.7 (50)	**164**
	AST	18.0 (16)	13.3 (10)	
	SND	10.1 (9)	14.7 (11)	
	SNE	3.4 (3)	4.0 (3)	
	CA	6.7 (6)	1.3 (1)	
Task level	Political / diplomatic	55.5 (50)	55.7 (44)	**169**
	Administrative / managerial	42.2 (38)	40.5 (32)	
	Operational / technical	2.2 (2)	3.8 (3)	
Sex	Female	30.5 (25)	31.7 (20)	**143**
	Male	68.3 (56)	66.7 (42)	
	Average N	85.0 (52)	76.0 (47)	**161**

Distribution according to affiliation, staff category, task level, and sex in HQ and DELs (average N=161)
Abbreviations: AD: Administrator, AST: Assistant, SND: Seconded National Diplomat, SNE: Seconded National Expert, CA: Contractual Agent.

Representation by Member State

Considering for the moment only the data from the online questionnaire launched in April 2013, the survey gathered officials from 23 EU MS, with countries most strongly represented being: Germany (22 responses), Belgium (14), Italy (13), France (12), the Netherlands (10) and the UK (9 officials). 53 respondents did not disclose their country of origin. Among the respondents, German nationals are somewhat overrepresented in relation to the total number of German EEAS officials (126 officials: 84 AD and 42 AST), as are the Netherlands (10 respondents compared to 55 Dutch EEAS officials in total, 20 AD and 25 AST). Belgium, although a small MS, is strongly represented in the survey sample as well as in the EEAS population (226: 60 AD and 166 AST), whereas Spain and Poland (5 and 4 respondents respectively) score somewhat below their weight in terms of organizational population (Spain: 122 EEAS officials, Poland: 61). France, Italy, and the UK are reasonably well represented within the study compared to the share of their countrymen and women within the EEAS, and the same is true for a

Table 3: Respondents by Member State

MS	Survey respondents	Interview partners	Total	EEAS population (March 2013)	
(By category)	(All)	(AD and SND)		(AD)	(AST)
BE	**14**	1	15	**60**	166
BG	**-**	-	-	**12**	4
CZ	**3**	1	4	**23**	11
DK	**2**	-	2	**23**	16
DE	**22**	9	31	**84**	42
EE	**1**	2	3	**12**	8
IE	**2**	-	2	**22**	14
EL	**1**	-	1	**33**	26
ES	**5**	3	6	**81**	41
FR	**12**	5	17	**12**	56
IT	**13**	3	16	**98**	49
CY	**-**	-	-	**4**	1
LV	**2**	-	2	**10**	3
LT	**-**	1	1	**10**	5
LU	**-**	-	-	**3**	-
HU	**4**	2	6	**21**	10
MT	**1**	-	1	**8**	4
NL	**10**	1	11	**30**	25
AT	**8**	8	16	**28**	11
PL	**4**	-	4	**38**	23
PT	**1**	-	1	**27**	28
RO	**2**	1	3	**13**	16
SI	**2**	-	2	**6**	9
SK	**1**	1	2	**8**	4
FI	**5**	1	6	**22**	18
SE	**7**	3	10	**35**	28
UK	**9**	4	13	**68**	31
Not specified	**53**	1 (NO)	54	**-**	-
TOTAL (N)	**184**	47	231	**899**	649

Number of respondents and interview partners by MS as compared to EEAS population, Survey N= 184

number of medium-sized and smaller member states (see Table 3, also listing the number of interview partners by MS as compared to the total EEAS population).

The questionnaire was designed as a blend of standardized and open questions, gathering some basic biographical information on affiliation and function (Q1-3); moving to questions on previous and present work situations (Q4-6); the interviewee's opinions on the organization of new service, its ways of working and its organizational culture (Q7-11); collecting data on contact patterns, allegiance, concerns and considerations, as well as political signals and sources of political input (Q11-17); and ending on some demographic questions.

ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA

Contact patterns of EEAS officials

While at HQ in Brussels information flow and coordination are hampered by rigid structures, inflexibility and bureaucratic rivalry (ECA 2014: 12; EEAS 2014: 32; Juncos and Pomorska 2013a), one would expect agents at DELs to be driven by the functional need for close cross-institutional cooperation and information sharing, and over time by a tendency to intra- and inter-organizational integration (Trondal and Peters 2013). The EEAS Review underlines this point, stating 'while respecting individual roles and responsibilities' in the working arrangements between the EEAS and the Commission 'there is a degree of flexibility for Commission staff in Delegations to contribute to the political work of the EEAS' (EEAS 2013: 11). The modalities of working relations between Commission and EEAS staff at DELs have been addressed by the "Joint Decision on Cooperation Mechanisms' between the services" (European Commission/HR/VP 2012). When asked whether since January 2011, after the establishment of the EEAS and taking up their new function, they had more or less contacts within their own organization, roughly 46 per cent of HQ staff said they had significantly more contacts, compared to 31 per cent at DELs (overall HQ and DELs: 39 per cent). Outside contacts have evolved slightly differently: 41 per cent of HQ staff say they have more contacts outside, and 47 per cent of Delegation personnel indicate increased levels of outside contacts (44 per cent overall). About 40 per cent (HQ) vs. 47 per cent (DELs) say, it remained the same, and nearly one fifth (19 per cent) at HQ maintain (significantly) less outside contacts, whereas only 6 per cent at DELs report a decreased number of outside contacts. In more detail, these inside and outside contacts, broken down by populations at HQ and EU Delegations, look as follows in Table 4.

The pattern of the survey data suggests that whereas officials at EU DELs have slightly less contacts within their own organization than their colleagues at HQ, and increasingly so moving up the hierarchy, they have a significantly higher level of outside contacts, especially as regards contacts with IOs, their own domestic ministries and agencies, with ministries and agencies of other EU MS as well as those of third countries, but also with NGOs, business and industry, and other, such as media, associations and the civil society at large. This data seems to confirm our expectations that in DELs, more remote from and out of the immediate range of their policy-making hierarchy in Brussels, contacts across organizations and with "the outside" become more frequent or more intense, and therefore more important. These results also support the argument of informational asymmetries, in that HQ officials, who are mainly concerned with strategic aspects of policy-making (including planning and programming), are more remote from the day-to-day implementation business in third countries. Due to the nature of their tasks and the direct exposure to the "field" (notably also because of the EU DELs' involvement in aid and cooperation), personnel at EU DELs have closer contacts and better access to operational-level information. On the development side, this has recently been observed by

Table 4: Contacts in- and outside the organisation

	HEADQUARTER (N=82)			DELEGATIONS (N=75)		
	(Very) frequently (%)	Occasionally (%)	Rarely/ almost never (%)	(Very) frequently (%)	Occasionally (%)	Rarely/ almost never (%)
Colleagues within unit/division	95.3	4.7	0.0	94.2	4.3	1.4
Head of unit/division	84.3	13.3	2.4	75.3	15.4	9.2
Director	50.6	32.1	17.3*	33.3	26.1	40.5*
Other departments	67.1	25.9	7.1	58.0	23.2	18.8
Other institutions	53.0	34.1	13.0	30.5	26.1	33.3
Commissioner/political head of entity	8.6	8.5	82.9	13.0	5.8	81.1
International organisations	18.1	39.8	42.1	58.0	27.5	14.4
Domestic ministries and agencies	12.3	37.0	50.6	40.7	28.4	20.9
Ministries/agencies of other EU Member States	26.5	30.1	43.4	49.3	24.6	26.1
Ministries/agencies of third countries	20.7	26.8	52.5	66.6	14.5	18.8
Non-governmental organisations	23.2	24.4	52.4	57.9	26.1	15.9
Business industry	6.1	22.0	71.9	20.3	31.9	47.8
Universities/ research institutes	12.2	36.6	51.2	17.4	42.0	40.5
Other (media, civil society etc.)	15.5	31.0	53.6	43.8	33.3	22.9

*6% almost never, **25% almost never
Contact patterns (Total N=157). Original codes as used in the survey: 1 = "Very frequently", 2 = "Frequently", 3 = "Occasionally", 4 = "Rarely", 5 = "(Almost) never", 0 = "Can't say"

Maurizio Carbone (2013: 349), claiming that, 'aid practitioners at headquarter level [assume] in a rather paternalistic way that greater EU actorness would be welcomed by aid recipients.' Frequently, it is argued, HQ seems to be lacking crucial information about what is going on in the field. Given the decreasing intra-organizational contacts when moving up the hierarchy, such tendencies are particularly important for decision-makers at the political level (of both the EU and MS sides), and may produce situations of the "tail wagging the dog", since 'information asymmetries turn bureaucrats into knowledgeable experts and their political overseers into the dilettantes Weber describes' (Ellinas and Suleiman 2012: 63). In addition, there is also a need and a tendency for a more flexible and versatile role understanding in EU Delegations, which is also reflected in the behaviour of EU diplomats in third countries (cf. Henökl and Webersik 2014), as confirmed by an official posted at an EU DEL:

> I don't see how else you can go about these things: we, willingly, are European civil servants; at least that is what I am. So our goal is to also serve the wider purposes of the Union, and if it means a bit more about foreign policy, intervening into files that have a broader reach, then

> this is what we are hired for. We are supposed to be versatile in our backgrounds, and to sort things out (Interview #40[3]).

In the same vein, another official emphasizes the team character of staff at EU DELs:

> [M]any of the issues [at HQ], for instance corporate identity and so forth are issues that I am not busy with, because we have an EU *Delegation*. We deal with the colleagues in the Delegation in the country. We have a corporate identity as a team. For example, we have a human rights working group, and I am chairing this group. […] But I also invite the guy who is doing human rights projects, spending money on it. You know, it is not the EEAS – it is the EU *Delegation* really [emphasis on the word "Delegation"] (Interview #18[4]).

The same applies for direct contact and mutual exposure between different staff categories. Interview partners working at EU Delegations in third countries have testified in favour of this hypothesis:

> In our delegation the HoD [Head of Delegation] comes from the Commission he knows all these people, he worked in ECHO and knows everyone. So he feels like he is double-hatted, he is treated like he is double-hatted. He says he is double-hatted. Those who come from the MS see that [it is] more difficult for them to get into that and to accept that (Interview #16[5]).

Even though altogether the integration of national diplomats reportedly works rather well, some problems having to do with a lack of socialization persist, as put by a former EU HoD:

> We have been integrating these national diplomats too quickly, and I think it has been regretted from different sides, because they have not been properly trained. There is a bit of difference between an Ambassador and a Head of Delegation. And they are going out without a network in Brussels [...]. If you drop somebody from a national MFA, first of all, he has problem with understanding his role. In many countries he has to manage a cooperation programme, which he has never done in his life-time. And he has to cope with this complex administration here in Brussels, where people are fighting with each other, and if you don't know how to zigzag through it, you are stuck" (Interview #4, former EC/EU HoD[6]).

Connected to this close relationship and with regard to the type of contact and communication considered important by officials, differences between HQ and DELs are not significant, maybe with the exception of "spontaneous encounters", as a particular form of face-to-face contact. These are valued more strongly at DELs, 40 per cent, as compared to 33 per cent at HQ, a tendency that can be explained by physical closeness within smaller office premises, regular direct exchange with colleagues (who are often part of the same "expat bubble") and the day-to-day exposure to common issues and problems.

Multiple principals, double-agency, and "nested delegation"

Diverging or even contradictive signals and instructions from different sources may also produce a lack of clarity or cause confusion on the side of the agent, necessitating requests for clarification and delaying or limiting his/her capacity to act on behalf of the principals. This seems to be the case in EU DELs, where multiple and parallel channels of instructions and reporting lines are not sufficiently coordinated, and individual agents may receive different signals (Duke 2014: 33; ECA 2014: 21-22, para. 58-60). Wouters *et al.* (2013: 39) commented that "[t]he evident confusion in lines of responsibility and communication at the senior echelons of the Service had been noted beforehand, with one report noting the presence of 'several duplicating layers of management, unclear hierarchy in terms of chain of command and opaque relationships between different departments'". And, according to Duke (2014: 33), "[c]onfusion about the precise responsibilities of the most senior levels

was evident in the original Council decision [2010/427/EU] on issues such as budgetary management". This organisational conundrum also finds expression in the survey results: Officials were asked whether, compared to their experiences before the launch of the EEAS, their role had changed with regard to a number of aspects related to their job-profiles and functions. This organizational conundrum also finds expression in the survey results: officials were asked whether, compared to their experiences before the launch of the EEAS, their role had changed with regard to a number of aspects related to their job-profiles and functions. Respondents overall indicate that changes occurring after the launch of the EEAS were important, especially concerning "political exposure" and "political interferences" (more than half of the respondents said "more or significantly more"), but also as regards "clarity of one's own role and function", as well as "clarity of reporting lines" and "clarity of organizational goals and strategy" (nearly half said "(significantly) less"). In one word, the establishment of the EEAS has introduced – at least during the early stages of the new organization – an element of opacity and ambiguity for officials regarding the clarity of their roles and instructions, lines of reporting and especially as regards organisational goals and strategy, where overall more than half of the surveyed staff perceive a rather sharp decline.

Table 5: Perceived changes in the work situation

	HEADQUARTER (Mean N=83)			DELEGATIONS (Mean N=77)		
	(Significantly) more (%)	Same (%)	(Significantly) less (%)	(Significantly) more (%)	Same (%)	(Significantly) less (%)
Political exposure	46.8	32.9	18.3	64.1	29.7	6.3
Political interference	57.2	35.1	7.8	51.6	43.5	4.8
Clarity of role/function	15.4	36.9	47.6	18.8	39.1	42.0
Clarity of instructions	14.2	36.9	48.8	17.4	33.3	49.3
Clarity of lines of reporting	9.6	42.2	48.2	18.8	33.3	47.8
Clarity of org. goals and strategy	14.8	24.7	60.5	14.4	36.2	49.3
Administrative burden	63.1	26.2	10.7	72.4	20.3	7.2

Perceived changes in work situation (Total N=160)
Original codes as used in the survey: 1 = "Significantly more", 2 = "More", 3 = "Same", 4 = "Less", 5 = "Significantly less", 0 = "Can't say"

Key differences between HQ and DELs concern political exposure, where 64 per cent of the staff at DELs perceive "significantly more" political exposure as compared to 47 per cent at HQ, but also the administrative burden has increased more significantly at DELs. This partly has to do with the higher profile of the EU DELs, and their new role as exercising the permanent EU Presidency (see also interviews, e.g. #18, 24, 31, 44[7]), but probably also with the aforementioned redundant and parallel reporting lines as well as multiple sources of instructions. Interviewees further report a multiplication in the generation of reports, notes and briefings (in different versions depending on the addressee, whether, for instance, EEAS HQ or MS MFAs), as well as a proliferation of requests for assistance from various institutional actors besides the HR/VP, namely Council and Commission Presidents, line

Commissioners, MS governments and the EP. Despite decreasing clarity regarding role and instructions, it seems that the "clarity of organizational goals and strategy" has suffered less in DELs than at HQ: 49 per cent at DELs vs. 61 per cent at HQ asserting "(significantly) less". One possible explanation is that the core task of representing the EU is more tangible and more directly experienced in Delegations than at HQ.

In the short term, the EEAS Review proposes to remedy the problem of functional overlaps and organizational ambiguity by recommendation nr. 14: 'Requir[ing] all instructions to [D]elegations to pass by Heads of Delegations, copied to the relevant EEAS geographical desk' (EEAS 2013: 16). The issue, however, originates in the distribution of lead-responsibilities between the HR/VP and the Commission. As pointed out in the Review, 'the division of responsibilities is potentially unclear and should be clarified. The allocation of portfolio responsibilities in the next Commission presents an opportunity for the President of the Commission to review the situation' (EEAS 2013: 8). One official at a key Delegation summarizes the dilemma as follows:

> I have a number of bosses now, they have multiplied with the [institutional] change, and with going from Brussels to a Delegation: there you have an Ambassador and a number two of the Delegation, whom I work for as well. When there is good communication between my ambassador, for instance, and my DG in Brussels, it's not that I can play one against the other, there is no room for that (Interview #40[8]).

This evaluation of having different political interlocutors, different reporting lines and hierarchies in Brussels and also 'significant others' in the MS capitals), emitting messages, signals and instructions is also corroborated by the survey results. Replying to the question, "In average, how much do you emphasize the (political) signals coming from the following?", officials indicated they pay most attention to their "direct hierarchy" (84 per cent - "(very) important") and the "political leadership/senior management of their entity" (92 per cent). Yet, presented with a choice of different political actors outside their own organization, EEAS officials pay most attention to central level EU institutions: the European Commission, 81 per cent; Foreign Affairs Council, 79 per cent; and European Council, 78 per cent, with the first scoring 10 per cent higher at "very important" (40 per cent vs. 30 per cent); and finally the EP, at 65 per cent. They also indicated, "the big EU member states", 58 per cent, "the medium-sized EU member states", 34 per cent, IOs, 26 per cent, "the small MS", 25 per cent, and, finally, "signals from the domestic government of my own member state", 19 per cent (see Table 6).

The emphasis on concerns and considerations as well as the importance given to political signals seems to be fairly balanced at headquarters and DELs, with some notable exceptions. First, as regards the importance of European Institutions: both the European Commission and the EP are ranked (15 per cent and 10 per cent respectively) higher at Delegations than at HQ. In contrast, the influence of MS (in order of their relative weight from "big" to "medium-sized" to smaller MS) is more strongly felt in Brussels than at Delegations. The complexity of the institutional arrangements is also reflected in a quote from an experienced former DG RELEX official, posted at one of the important EU Delegations:

> We have, of course, the formal guidelines from the FAC and there is the functional hierarchy as defined by Lady Ashton and her people. So there is no independence, the guidelines are there, but we have our "marge de manoeuvre" within which we can act here at the Delegation, depending on what we think is right. HQ is formulating guidelines, like in the case of any Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but there is also European Parliament with the Foreign Affairs Committee and the European Council – all of these are our political masters ('Herren und Meister', interview #32, own translation[9]).

Table 6: Which are the political signals emphasized in officials' decision-making?

	HEADQUARTER (mean N=78)			DELEGATIONS (mean N=73)		
	(Very) important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Less/not important (%)	(Very) important (%)	Somewhat important (%)	Less/not important (%)
European Council	75.6	21.6	2.8	80.0	10.9	9.1
Foreign Affairs Council	82.2	13.7	4.1	74.1	14.8	11.1
European Commission	74.7	20.0	5.3	89.8	1.7	8.5
European Parliament	60.3	27.4	12.4	71.9	15.8	12.3
'Big' MS	64.9	20.3	14.9	48.3	21.4	30.3
'Medium-sized' MS	41.1	38.4	20.5	25.0	42.9	32.1
'Small' MS	30.2	42.5	27.4	17.6	38.6	33.9
Domestic Government	22.7	12.0	65.3	14.3	21.4	64.3
Political level/ senior management	92.3	6.5	1.3	91.4	3.4	5.1
Direct hierarchy	93.7	6.3	0.0	93.3	5.0	1.7
International Organizations	24.6	38.4	37.0	27.3	45.5	27.3
Other	21.1	31.6	47.4	22.2	22.2	55.6

Political signals emphasized by officials (Total N=151)
Original codes as used in the survey: 1 = "Very important", 2 = "Important", 3 = "Somewhat important", 4 = "Less important", 5 = "Not important at all", 0 = "Can't say".

Other than a clear emphasis put on signals from EU-level institutions, an interesting observation concerns the relative overall importance that is given to the EP, which echoes that the MEPs by smartly playing their hand throughout the negotiations, which ultimately led to the EEAS Decision of 26 July 2010, have gained influence and political weight vis-à-vis other EU institutions – at least in the eyes of EEAS officials. Commission officials, for instance, also share this observation in a quote, summarizing a trend, '[F]or many years the EP was unimportant and it was ignored. It had the least standing among the institutions of the EU. It is undergoing a process of transition – gaining power and knowing how to use it' (Ellinas and Suleiman 2012: 80).

Although not a principal in the sense of delegated authority, the EP, too, has some degree of political ownership and it exercises control and oversight functions as regards the EU's external policies, last but not least for the EEAS' administrative budget. After the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EP enjoys larger influence on foreign policy than most of its national counterparts in the MS. And it could further strengthen its role and status during the EEAS negotiations, also written down in the preamble of the EEAS Decision, guaranteeing the EP 'to fully play a role in the external action of the Union, including its functions of political control' (Council 2010). Parliamentary hearings of senior EEAS officials (including EU Heads of Delegations prior to their appointment) have become a common practice and 'the HR/VP ensures the views of the EP are taken into consideration'. This is particularly the case for the views, motions or reports issued by the EP's Foreign Affairs committee (AFET). Ulrike Lunacek, (MEP for the Greens) expresses very clearly a growing desire for parliamentary control and oversight,

> We wish that the Parliament would exercise even more control and be more active, for instance that we put reservations on [EEAS] funds. We could for instance release the budget lines for salaries only under the condition, that there will be structural changes in the EEAS. The EP can do that. The question is if the large fractions are ready to let their words be followed by actions. We should think about this in the context of the review (Interview #36, own translation[10]).

But also in the EP's recommendations to the HR/VP (EP, AFET 2013) the desire for co-ownership of the EEAS and particularly the EU DELs is very well documented, in eight specific recommendations (Recommendations 17-25) on EU Delegations and five recommendations regarding the implementation of the 'Declaration on Political Accountability' which was annexed to the EEAS Decision (Recommendations 31-36),

> 32. To ensure full political reporting from Union delegations to key office holders of Parliament under regulated access; 33. To ensure, in line with Article 218 (1) TEU that Parliament is immediately and fully informed at all stages of the procedures for negotiations on international agreements, including agreements concluded in the area of CFSP; 34. In line with the positive experiences of newly appointed Heads of Delegations and EUSRs appearing before AFET before taking up their posts, to extend this practice to newly appointed CSDP Heads of Missions and Operations; 35. To ensure that, once appointed by the HR/VP, the new Heads of Delegations are officially confirmed by the relevant committee of Parliament, before taking up their posts.

The EU MS, the Commission and the EP all have stakes in the European External Action Service and the EU DELs to third countries. Therefore, I suggest the notion of "double-agent" as a way of characterizing the situation of the EEAS and in particular the Union Delegations, vis-à-vis their dual sets of principals, namely on the one side the intergovernmental masters (the MS via the Council and individually), and supranational stakeholders (the Commission when *acting* as a principal, and the EP as the directly elected body, exercising democratic oversight). Double – or, in fact, multiple - agency, characterizes the complex chains of authority and accountability, through which the EU external agents have to interact with and to answer to different forums of principals, functioning within their own competence spheres and according to distinct decision-making rules.

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to unveil and extract the interwoven, sometimes woolly lines of delegation leading from the principals, MS, Commission, and also the EP all the way down to the field-level bureaucrats, the EU diplomats posted at EU Delegations. As demonstrated, the results of the empirical research indicate interesting differences between headquarters officials and DEL staff. Contact patterns are varying significantly between HQ and DELs, with the former showing higher frequencies of intra-organizational and the latter significantly more outside-contacts. Internally, upstream communication and information flows are thinning out, leading to considerable informational asymmetries to the agent's advantage. Political signals are emitted from different sources and received and taken into consideration by EU diplomats to different extents depending on their posting and affiliation as well as their relation with the political masters. EU-Diplomats in third countries tend to more strongly emphasize signals from the supra-national EU institutions, the Commission as well as the EP, whereas signals from MS as well as the intergovernmental bodies are considerably less strongly taken into account. These, in turn, are clearly more present at HQ. Altogether, for the EU's external agents, the institutional change has produced certain ambiguities, necessitating flexibility, adaptability and improvisation in order to make sense of their situation and the sometimes-contradictive demands they are confronted with.

Control is exercised in different ways and at several places, directly or indirectly. MS retain important decision-making powers in the FAC as well as the PSC, and have their own agents seconded to the service, exercising oversight in a way of quasi-monitoring the service from within via their diplomats in key positions inside the organization. The MS are trying to stay on top of the game, which they are the "grand masters" of, since they have been at the origin of delegation to the supranational bodies of the EU in the first place. However, they are not consolidated as a unified, collective principal, and visibly display heterogeneity of preferences, more or less directly and openly conflicting with one another. The Commission, on the other side, remains in charge over important policy competences, budgets and large portions of staff at the EU DELs. It has the advantage of the incumbent supranational bureaucracy, already in place and in possession of many of those competences, expertise and resources, which the EEAS critically needs. Finally, the Parliament, having co-ownership in ex-ante control, through its co-decision powers with regard to the administrative budget and the staff regulations, as well as the formal approval of the nomination of EU Heads of Delegations, the work of the AFET committee, parliamentary reports, motions on particular policy issues or geographical areas and through field visits of parliamentary delegations. We have seen that, in the case of the EEAS, chains of delegation are interwoven and partly overlapping (redundant), involving actors and forums at different levels of governance, within separate jurisdictions, based on their respective constitutional arrangements and modes of decision-making. Control of the EEAS is transversal and crosses national borders, institutional and organizational boundaries as well as sectorial competences. Roles of actors and forums are blurred, allowing for some actors to be forums of other actors at the same time. They behave as principals in certain competence areas or at certain stages of the processes - which is why this analysis tentatively speaks of "nested delegation." In practice, system fragmentation, incomplete contracts, asymmetrical information and diverging (or even opposing) preferences among the principals, together with lack of clarity or conflicting signals and instructions may complicate the work of EEAS officials, but at the same time create the opportunity for agency as well as political drift. Information advantages to the benefit of the EEAS, dividing lines between EU institutions and member states as well as the evolution of a distinct EU diplomatic *esprit de corps* or EEAS organizational culture may further add to the potential for developing agency autonomy.

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[1] To avoid confusion I will consistently, throughout this paper, use the capital letter 'D' for EU-*D*elegations (DELs, the EU-embassies in third countries), and the minor case 'd' for the concept or the act of *d*elegation, as in principal-agent theory.
[2] As completed questionnaires were counted responses that answered all content questions throughout the survey and at least partially the demographic questions at the end of the survey (member state of origin, education, sex and age). Since, in principle, all content-questions were mandatory to reply to in order to get to the end of the survey, missing data in the completed questionnaires is rather limited ('in principle' because, in the case of one question the "mandatory-to-reply" feature was not activated, neither is it applicable to the paper questionnaires returned by mail.)
[3] Interview #40, 09.05.2013, N.N., COM official (AD, other), EU DEL.
[4] Interview #18, 23.11.2012, N.N., EEAS official (AD, ex-SGC), EU DEL.
[5] Interview #16, 23.11.2012, N.N., EEAS official (SND), EU DEL.
[6] Interview #4, 23.10.2012, N.N., EEAS official (AD, ex-RELEX), EU-DEL/HQ.
[7] Interview #18, op. cit. ; Interview #24, 08.02.2013, N.N., EEAS official (SND), EU DEL ; Interview #31, 21.03.2013, N.N., EEAS official (SND), EU DEL ; Interview #44, 30.07.2013, N.N., EEAS official, (AD, ex-RELEX), HQ.
[8] Interview #40, op. cit.
[9] Interview #32, 23.04.2013, N.N., EEAS official (AD, ex-RELEX), EU DEL.
[10] Interview #36, 24.04.2013, N.N., MEP (other), EP.

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