



Truly European diplomatic service needed, says Legal Affairs Committee

Changes in EU staff regulations needed to ensure that the European External Action Service (EEAS) is truly European, inter alia by ensuring staff loyalty and a geographical and gender balance, were debated by the Legal Affairs Committee on Thursday.

The EEAS needs to guarantee "equal rights and equal obligations for all its staff", regardless of the institution or Member State they come from, stressed Parliament's rapporteur on the new staff regulations, Bernhard Rapkay (S&D, DE).

A "true" European diplomatic service: geographical and gender balance?

Discussion centred on the need to establish a "true" European diplomatic body, with staff representing geography and gender in a balanced fashion. Eva Lichtenberger (Greens/EFA, AT) observed that the EEAS "should not be a national service under a national flag, it should be a true European service", adding that "this service is not about increasing national quotas" and that the need for gender balance "needs to be pushed forward more than it is at the moment".

It is "extremely important that this new service reflects the current map of the EU" agreed Lidia Joanna Geringer De Oedenberg (S&D, PL). Citing the European Parliament's example, she added "we are elected following a system of geographical balance. Under this system the various Member States are given a number of seats in the Parliament. It should be the same for the EEAS". On the issue of the gender balance, she called for a "clearer formula with some sort of parity".

Tadeusz Zwiefka (EPP, PL) proposed focusing on the applicants' skills. "I would be perfectly happy to see the service run by women alone, but they should get the job first", he said, adding that "there it is no use trying to set up strict rules on this".

The rapporteur proposed a series of amendments to the legislative proposal on this issue. One states that "all appointments in the EEAS should be based on merit and on the broadest possible geographical basis. The staff of the EEAS should comprise an adequate presence of nationals from all the Member States".

"Loyal" staff needed

The European Commission proposes that, in the case of the staff coming from the Member States' diplomatic services, the decision to extend their contracts be taken by the national diplomatic bodies. Several speakers criticised this initiative, which they said could undermine staff loyalty to the EEAS. To ensure loyalty to the service, "the opinion of the Member States should never be taken into account", observed Mr Zwiefka.

Mr Rapkay agreed, recalling that he had proposed an amendment to delete this prerogative from the regulation.

Background

The European Parliament, the Commission, the Council and the EU High Representative agreed in July 2010 on the organisation and the working methods of the EEAS, a major development introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. A week later, Parliament approved via the

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consultation procedure a series of recommendations to ensure the service's "Community identity" and its political and budgetary accountability. Parliament's negotiators were Elmar Brok (EPP, DE), Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, BE) and Roberto Gualtieri (S&D, IT).

Changes to the Financial Regulation, the Staff Regulation and the 2010 budget, on which Parliament has joint decision-making powers with Council, are currently under discussion, with a view to setting up the new service.

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