

2016 Discharge

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE

Hearing of 25 January 2018

1. The European Union emphasises the practical application of equality policy. However, in 2016, only 33% of women worked in administrative positions, 30% in EU delegations, and only 14% in managerial positions. What measures are being taken to increase women's participation?

SG Helga Schmid took the initiative to launch a network of Women at the EEAS (WEEAS) with the objective to provide an informal platform to share experience and continue working towards gender balance in the EEAS, both at HQ and Delegation level. Several informal meetings have been organised throughout the year.

One of SG Helga Schmid's first actions after assuming her duties as the Secretary-General of the EEAS in September 2016 was to announce her decision to create the EEAS Gender and Equal Opportunities Taskforce with a view to developing ideas and specific recommendations to enhance equal opportunities and support a better gender balance in the service, including gender equality in management positions.

In 2016, work has also started for the new Learning and Development (LEAD) Framework with gender equality as a strategic objective for learning and development in the EEAS. Preparations for two targeted development programmes for women managers were started in 2016: a dedicated training programme and a mentoring scheme.

As regards selection and recruitment and given the low number of female applicants for some positions (in particular management posts), the EEAS encourages qualified female candidates to apply. In our contacts with the EU Member States we invite them to promote more qualified female candidates for EEAS posts, in particular at the management level. In addition, in all selection panels the EEAS aims to ensure a balanced gender representation when possible.

2. The High Representative appointed a task force for gender equality and equal opportunities, which is headed by the Secretary General Helga Schmidt. How many people were appointed to this group and how many of them are women?

The Gender and Equal Opportunities Task Force was created by Secretary General Ms Helga Schmid on 28 October 2016 with the aim to develop ideas and specific recommendations to enhance equal opportunities and support a better gender balance in the EEAS, including gender equality in management positions. Members were chosen on the basis of representation of all EEAS services and staff categories.

The Gender and Equal Opportunities Task Force was chaired by Deputy Managing Director Ms Birgitte Markussen, with the support of Principal Advisor on Gender/UNSCR1325 Ms Mara

Marinaki. Focal point for the Task Force in DG Budget and Administration, Head of Division Ms Barbara Plinkert, provided secretariat support and participated in the Task Force meetings. Members included representatives from each EEAS Directorate, SG and DSG offices, SG.Gender, Staff Committee, the Bureau of Heads of Delegations, the Bureau of Heads of Administration and the AST network.

In total, 54 EEAS staff members participated in the work of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Task Force as members and alternate members, out of whom 41 were female.

The newly appointed Equal Opportunities and Career Officer, who will guide the implementation of the roadmap, prepared as a follow-up to the Task Force recommendations, is also a female staff member.

3. In 2017, 43 ambassadors were appointed of which 12 are women. This amounts to 15.5% of the total number of the ambassadors appointed. How many candidates applied for those positions and how many of these candidates were women?

In the framework of the 2017 Rotation exercise, a total of 274 candidates applied for the 43 posts of Head of Delegation. 53 of them were women (19.3% of all candidates). The appointment of 12 women for the 43 positions constitutes a rate of 27.9 % of appointments going to women.

4. The European External Action Service emphasises the necessity to maintain a geographical balance when appointing the ambassadors. However, in practice from 136 ambassadors only 21 come from the 13 Member States that joined the EU after 2004. This is only 15% of the total number of ambassadors. What is the mechanism for conducting the selection of candidates and who carries out the selection?

The (pre-) selection of candidates for the post of Head of EU Delegation is carried out by the Consultative Committee on Appointments (CCA). The membership of the CCA when it acts as pre-selection panel is as follows:

- the (relevant) EEAS Managing Director who acts as Chair to the panel;
- the EEAS Human Resources Director;
- a representative of the European Commission (of appropriate rank, most often Director level);
- a representative of the General Secretariat of the Council (of appropriate rank, most often Director level);
- two representatives of the Member States (of ambassadorial rank)

All panels are organised by region and decide by consensus. The pre-selection panels decide on which candidates to invite for interview.

Based on the interviews, the interview panels (same composition as the pre-selection panel) establish a shortlist of suitable candidates per post. These shortlists are transmitted to the Appointing Authority and are advisory and not binding for the Appointing Authority.

5. In 2016, 75 cases of harassment were registered, of which 23 remained open at the end of the year. How did these numbers change compared to the previous three years? What initiatives have been undertaken to counteract this phenomenon? Is assistance to victims of such violence provided and to what extent?

For some years, cases of conflict, harassment or poor work environment reported through the informal procedure remained stable, 48 in 2013 and 47 in 2014 before rising to 65 in 2015 and 75 in 2016.

The informal procedure cannot conclude whether there has been harassment or not, only a formal procedure can do that, which is why cases are generally reported in an overall conflict category. In 2016 a majority of cases reported were classified by the EEAS Mediation Service as "cases of conflict involving 2 or more people" with "poor working environment" listed in a third of cases and just 6 particularly problematic cases listed as psychological harassment. There were 2 cases reported of sexual harassment. The latter is an area subject to under-reporting, but most past years did not have more than 2 cases.

The EEAS Mediator considers some of the increase in cases to be positive, being due to increased reporting of cases which formerly were not reported, or only reported at a late stage, to having more trained staff to respond to cases and to providing better information on how staff should respond if they feel stressed or harassed. That 23 out of 75 cases remained open at the end of 2016, compared to 36 cases out of 65 in 2015 also suggests that solutions are being found more quickly in more cases due to mobilising management and support services such as the medical service and psychosocial support.

Providing assistance to those who consider themselves victims of harassment is a priority for management and support services such as the Mediator, confidential counsellors and the medical service through conflict resolution, medical and psychological support, training and awareness raising, staff movements and where appropriate, disciplinary measures. Such support is more difficult to provide at a distance, so problems in delegations may be harder to respond to and take longer to resolve.

6. Public contracts with a value below 60,000 Euro are exempt from the procurement procedure. Have there been cases where a large tender has been broken up into multiple tenders worth less than 60,000 Euro in order to bypass the public procurement procedure? How many of such cases were identified and which types of contracts were concerned?

The Ex-post control carried out for 2016 was based on a representative sampling of 2070 payments made until the end of October worth a total of € 30.3 million. Some exclusion criteria were applied to the control universe such as the salaries paid to (statutory) staff, revenues and regularisation payments that fall under the control remit of the Paymaster's Office (PMO). The Ex-post control is by its very nature not exhaustive, but based on sampling.

The overall material error rate for EEAS Administrative Budget resulting from the ex-post controls in 2016 was 0.05% which is well below the materiality threshold set at 2%, above which a reservation must be considered.

In 2016, the Ex-post control identified 27 cases whereby a large tender could have been allegedly broken up into multiple smaller procedures worth less than 60.000 euro.

These procurements concerns categories of services and works for which it is not always possible to estimate the total consumption and amount over a certain period of time in the future or where it can be new necessities coming up.

All the identified cases were subject to a recommendation and the relevant Authorizing Officers by Sub-Delegation have been invited to put in place an action plan in order to launch a proper public procurement procedure respecting the Financial Regulation and the Directive on Public Procurement. The Ex-post control ensures a regular follow-up of the implementation of such action plans. 8 cases have been regularised by the end of December 2017.

It should be noted, that procurements below €60.000 are also covered by procurement procedures that in the same way aims at ensuring transparency and equal treatment but have a different complexity depending on the value.

7. Why are the team building events in Brussels much more expensive than meetings organised outside of Brussels? In Brussels, these costs amount to 302 Euro per person, and outside of Brussels, 191 Euro per person.

The team building events organized in Brussels are in general more expensive than those organized outside of Brussels depending on the prices of the market. The cost includes the facilitator's service and the cost of the venue.

As an example, a venue in Brussels may have a higher price than a venue in some countries or cities on other continents. The same applies to the fees of the professional facilitators.

For team building events taking place in Brussels, the Commission's framework contract foresaw the use of the Management Centre Europe in order to guarantee the best quality to price ratio. As an alternative, the Inter-institutional Centre in Overijse can also be used. As regards the facilitator's services, the Commission's framework contract with Abilways is used, with the aim of receiving the required quality at the best price.

For all team building events, irrespective of their location, the EEAS applies appropriate procurement procedures or framework contracts according to the Financial Regulation.

8. The negotiations on the modernisation of the trade pillar of the EU-Chile Association Agreement are currently under way. China is Chile's largest trading partner, followed by the United States. The European Union is in the third position. On 22-23 January 2018, I participated in the XXV Meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the European Union - Chile. I was informed that the staff of diplomatic missions of Chile's two largest trading partners consists of several hundred people, while only three diplomats work at the EU delegation in Santiago de Chile. What are the criteria for the number of diplomats employed in the delegations of the European Union? Are there mechanisms to monitor employment needs in EU delegations?

Diplomats in delegations are deployed according to political priorities and the workload of a delegation. The deployment is not measured against specific criteria but based on the analysis of relevant MDs as well as DGBA and is verified for example with the help of Inspection reports and Annual Management Plans of delegations.

The main mechanism to monitor the deployment needs of delegations is the permanent annual review mechanism of resources and scope of the EU Network of Delegations established by the EEAS in 2017. Launched each year in September, the mechanism offers a structured approach to the management of the network of Delegations, allowing for strategic planning and stability and predictability. Whilst offering a structured approach, the review mechanism does not exclude decisions taken outside of the annual review in ad-hoc cooperation between geographic MDs and DGBA in order to meet urgent demands.

As regards the overall number of diplomatic staff with political tasks in delegations it is to be noted that the majority of delegations dispose of few diplomats, i.e. the Head of Delegation and the Head of the Political Section.

The EU Delegation has 7 Diplomats at the Delegation in Chile, which is broadly comparable to that of medium and large Member States represented in Chile. What could be interesting to say though is that in total from the EU, there are 107 Diplomats between the EU Member States 24 Embassies in Chile and there are 7 Diplomats registered for the EU Delegation to Chile.

It should also be noted, that the EEAS has a structure in Headquarters that also provides input, guidance and political steer to the diplomatic staff in Delegations. In addition, for any trade negotiations, this is managed on a daily basis by DG Trade in close cooperation with the staff of the Delegation and our interlocutors.

9. In 2015, the EEAS bought a villa in Tirana (Albania) for 4700 Euro per square meter. However, the average price per square meter in this location was between 1000 and 2000 Euro. Has the EEAS developed a system for verifying the purchase of real estate? If so, what kind of actions does it undertake? If not, is such a system foreseen?

As previously communicated, the EEAS would like to correct the figures regarding the cost per square meter: the value of the building should take into consideration the overall usable area including the area in the basement, which is used for representation purposes. Therefore, the comparison of the market price against only part of the building is distorting the real value of the property (the real calculation should be: $1,649,000/585 \text{ sqm} = 2,819 \text{ EUR/sqm}$).

While this is higher than the price range of €1,000 to €2,000 mentioned, it should be emphasised that such comparisons are only meaningful if they are made on the same or similar basis, i.e. comparable in terms of location, finishing, exposure, surface area, size of the plot, orientation, etc.

Since the purchase of Residence in Tirana, the EEAS has improved the system for verifying the purchase of real estate: in addition to the analysis done locally by the EU Delegations, which includes a market survey, the EEAS is now systematically requesting, for any purchase operation, an external financial valuation and a technical audit executed by recognized experts (connected with the international real estate companies). An ad hoc mission from the infrastructure division is also systemically organised where a purchase operation is proposed.

In parallel, since 2016, the EEAS has contracted a service provider for the provision of benchmarked housing data and information on real estate market and real estate agencies where the EEAS has established Delegations. The data provided are systemically used by Headquarters in order to verify the market information and calculate the return of investment against the existing renting options.

10. Disinformation is a serious threat to global politics. Are the financial resources allocated to counteract these activities sufficient?

Exposing disinformation is an important task that has been recognised by the European Council and the European Parliament. In this context, the work of our East StratCom Task Force has been clearly acknowledged. Over the past two years and despite the absence of a specific budget for this activity, we have built tools and instruments; and developed a much better understanding of the nature of the threat and made significant progress in raising awareness of the issue.

Our work on disinformation is very different and depends on a case by case scenario. Disinformation can be fought through fact-checking and rational arguments, but often also through positive and accurate narratives about the EU and its work in a region, for example in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the Western Balkans and the South.

The additional financial allocations received for the year 2018 include a € 1.1 million preparatory action, which is specifically dedicated to the work of the East StratCom Task Force and will be used to counter disinformation more systematically, effectively and efficiently. The preparatory action will help us to enhance our capabilities in this area by building analytical capacity, better understanding the impact of pro-Kremlin disinformation, sharing best practice and clarifying the division of responsibilities between EU and MS. An additional allocation of € 3 million under budget line 19060100, for press and information outreach, will help us in strengthening the strategic communications work in general.

As this work is currently being planned and programmed, it is too early to judge its impact and to assess the need of additional financial resources.

11. As NATO-partner Turkey has received "Leopard"-tanks from Germany, which it is now using in attacks on Syrian Kurds in violation of international law. In particularly in light of the fact that the Kurds have been partners in successfully fighting ISIS in Syria – what implications does this have for the EU-Turkey relationship?

The EU contributes to the work of the Global Coalition to counter Da'esh by non-military means; the Council has not adopted any decision to engage at the level of the EU in military operations nor has the EU been tasked with coordinating, or acting as a clearing house for information about the supply of military assistance.

We understand Turkey's concerns about the situation at its borders. Yet we are deeply worried about the new front opened in Northern Syria, for its humanitarian and political consequences. All military action should focus on UN-listed terrorist organisations, and it shouldn't make peace even harder to achieve.

The EU firmly believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria; only a credible political solution, as defined in UNSC Resolutions will ensure the stability of Syria and enable a decisive defeat of Da'esh and other UN-designated terrorist groups in Syria.

The EU remains committed to open and direct channels of communication with Turkey. By virtue of its candidate status, Turkey is constantly encouraged to develop its foreign policy in close coordination with the EU, and to progressively align its policies with the EU's political declarations, decisions and agreements.