Career Task Force – perspectives from Heads of Political Sections.

*Summary: We have followed closely the deliberations, reports and documents produced so far in the context of the Career Task Force. We believe these documents duly reflect the major concerns of AD staff in terms of improvement of career perspective of AD staff, though we regret that, the group of Heads of Political Press and Information Sections (HOPPI) has not been associated to the work of the TF. That said, the results of the 2017 HOD/DHOD rotation exercise and the imminent closure of the Task Force exercise represent an occasion to voice once again some critical findings, and to suggest concrete practical solutions, taking into account their possible costs/benefits. We also would like to point out that, although some of the concerns we express are shared by all HOPPI, AD-FPs and AD-TAs alike, it is clear that AD Permanent Officials, who have no alternative career path, face a number of specific problems.*

Detailed proposals:

1. **Lack of fair career prospects for HOPPI**: There is an obvious and growing mismatch between HOD/DHOD posts available and the number of external applicants. The possibility for a HOPPI candidate to reach a management position is woefully low. For the 2017 exercise the figures were: 47 HOD/DHOD posts for 322 candidates (of which 34% from EEAS). At the end, only two AD-FP colleagues currently holding a HOPPI post obtained a management post in a Delegation. This represents less than 2 % of the existing population of approximately 120 HOPPI. In practice, 50 years will elapse before the entire cohort has a chance!
2. **Lack of true diversity**: Matters are compounded by the fact that, so far, the EEAS has not equipped itself with the policies necessary to address all forms of discriminations, including age, disability, sex, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender identity. The specific problems faced by families with kids in schooling age, facing different start dates of the academic years (northern vs southern hemisphere) or the practical impossibility to move to countries where there are no adequate education facilities, are rarely taken into account, as well as there is no account of the specific needs of women, double-career families and same-sex couples.
3. **Concrete actions are needed** as this is a dire perspective for the many experienced HoPPIs. The overwhelming majority of HoD posts still goes to Member States TAs, as well as COM, Council, Parliament, and Cabinets officials, often with no previous Delegation experience. This is hugely different from the career perspectives of national diplomatic services, where (albeit with some differences among MS), a high percentage of A-grade diplomatic staff will reach an Ambassador post or an equivalent management status (i.e. Consul General) during their career. In the interest of enhancing the career prospects for the HOPPIs, we would like suggest the following concrete measures:
   1. Adopt **targeted (minimum) objective** for the promotion of HOPPI staff to HOD position (starting with, say, about 5% of the HOPPI cohort every year).

* Benefits: High motivation, loyalty and performance.
* Cost: Lower cost as in-house staff need less time/money to be operational.
  1. **Reserve HOD posts in small delegations** (which, in most cases, are obvious "first HOD posts") and the bulk of Deputy HOD posts for internal rotation only. This will allow HOPPI to obtain HOD experience, grow professionally and avoid being permanently at disadvantage vis-à-vis MS candidates (who usually apply to HOD posts after having already had Ambassadors' posting experience). Besides, HOPPI experience could provide a strong contribution to the running of the Delegation especially in those cases where the HOD comes from a MS or another EU Institution and lack the relevant administrative knowledge.

Cost:none.

* 1. **Negotiate with COM, EP, Council** that, for every HOD/HQ management post their staff obtain in the EEAS, the respective institution of origin takes back a manager from the EEAS or transfers the relevant budgetary item.

Cost: None

* 1. **Re-equilibrate** **MS presence towards the target** of the Council decision establishing the EEAS across *all* AD grades as well as between HQ and DEL. We regret that the process that was used at the occasion of EU enlargements, where new staff was incorporated across *all* grades and not largely in management positions, was not followed in the case of the EEAS.

Cost: None or, rather, a possibility for savings.

* 1. In most Delegations, the HOPPI acts *de facto* as the DHOD. Hence the **HOPPI should be designated as DCM – Deputy Chief of Mission** in all those Delegations where no formal DHOD exist, with no entitlement, in principle, to additional remuneration. We note that the title "Deputy Head of Division" is not formally a management position entitling to the management allowance, so "Deputy Head of Delegation" or "Deputy Chief of Mission" need not be either. This corresponds to normal practice in Member States, where the person usually acting as Chargé in the absence of the HoD carries the title Deputy, regardless of grade, age, or seniority and could be achieved by a simple internal decision. An alignment on MS best practices, where some recognize a financial allowance for the period spent as Chargé d'affaires a.i." could also be

considered.

* Benefits: As for MS Embassies, the de facto DHOD would gain access and recognition with the host country and peers. It will also recognize the fact that HOPPIs, where there is no formal DHDO, perform management task for at least 30% of the time.
* Cost: No additional cost.

3. The above proposals aim at allowing a fairer distribution of the existing (fixed) number of HOD posts. We note, however, that filling about 46-47% of HOD posts in Delegation with MS Diplomats (according to 2014-2016 statistics) has created an equivalent deficit of management posts in Delegations, which is only partially compensated by the creation of a number of new Deputy HOD posts (about 25 according to our latest count, given that at least six existed before 2011 – the current total being 31).

**4. Fair career perspectives**: This situation is demotivating for the large number of experienced AD officials in HOPPI positions. We would suggest re-establishing fairer career perspectives for AD staff along the following lines:

a. **Career path:** There should be a clear career path for non-management AD staff, with clear indications how to progress to the HoD position or other management posts, with a clear policy of supportive measures, including mentoring, training and career advice, as well as a responsible career development officer within the relevant HR division. There should also be clear perspectives, including possibility for professional development, for those who do not want to progress to management. Access to teaching programmes of MS diplomatic academies should be open to EEAS staff, as should be the access to MS diplomatic services at large, through a revamped and expanded DESP programme. We regret that concrete career initiatives are still focused on HQ-based staff, (c.f. EEAS Management College initiative for Deputy Heads of Division), while we note a continued disregard for non-management staff posted in Delegations.

Cost: none.

b. **Create a number of DHOD/management posts** in Delegation (and HQ) equivalent to the number of management posts occupied by MS TAs after 2011. According to the 2016 HR Report, in Delegations, 64 HOD posts (i.e. 46% of the total 139 HOD posts) are currently occupied by MS-TA and are no longer available to AD-FP staff. Given that about 25 new Deputy HOD posts have already been created between 2011 and 2016, an additional 39 DHOD posts should be created to compensate the loss in terms of career progression for AD-FP staff. We are convinced there are a lot of medium-sized and large Delegations where the creation of management-level Deputy HOD posts would make a lot of sense to reflect the managerial role that is required of the colleagues who routinely assumes the function of "Chargé d'affaires a-.i.", often on an extensive basis in addition to the broad responsibilities already placed on the HOPPI function (DSC, AOSD, running multiple EU coordination groups, representation functions, etc), which come on top of the core task of political reporting. Moreover, this will certainly represent a welcome additional support for HODs (both FP and TAs), given the possibility for them to delegate additional tasks (i.e. management of operational credits).

Cost: Creating DHOD posts would involve the payment of the management allocation (5%) plus the cost of partial reimbursement for water and electricity and, where warranted, a slightly more expensive accommodation than for normal officials. We estimate that, for a total of about 35-39 posts, the direct cost should not exceed around 250,000 EUR/year. This is approximately equivalent to the notional cost of 2 AD FTE in HQ, or about four LAs in a middle-income country. While not a "zero cost" proposal, there is certainly financial room for its implementation within a EUR 500 M budget even in the current budgetary context. Small adjustments to the internal guidelines for accommodation and reimbursement of other costs may allow to further reduce the cost. Finally, the creation of these new DHOD posts could also be staggered over a few years, thus increasing its feasibility.

c. **Create a number of** **senior expert / advisor posts in Delegations**. DG Trade, for example, has already done so to unblock careers of their senior staff. The EEAS, on the contrary, has so far used these posts only for HQ colleagues. In Delegations, these post would not involve the payment of a management allowance (nor of any other perk), though they would allow to open new perspectives in the careers of a number of colleagues.

Cost: This is – at least in the short term - a no cost proposal. Over time there will be some additional cost because, gradually, staff will gain access to promotion to the next grade. The cost of this proposal is difficult to estimate , but – at current promotion rates and salary scales -, we do not think that creation of 10-15 posts could cost more than 30-40% of an AD-FTE in HQ per year, at cruising level (i.e.: after a 7-8 year period). This is indeed a very limited cost for providing a portion of AD-staff (38% of which are blocked in AD12-AD13 grades) with some sort of career incentive in cases where a management career is no longer possible or desirable. As a side "benefit" some colleagues may decide to retire a bit earlier, having achieved the last promotion of their career (and locked-in the relevant financial advantage), which could lead, in turn, to more substantial savings for EEAS.

d. **Eliminate the "61 years age limit"** for EEAS staff wishing to be posted abroad. We have observed that a number of MS allows postings abroad until 70 years of age, while their staff is allowed to take the "EEAS train" for part of their career when they are younger. Thus, these MS colleagues occupy posts and diminish career opportunities for EEAS staff, and then return to their services to continue serving until 70 years of age. We feel that this represents a two-fold discrimination of EEAS permanent staff. The age limit for being posted to a Delegation should be raised according to the new retirement age limit and take into account the likely duration of the posting.

Cost:None.

e. **Compulsory rotation:** When looking at the EEAS organigramme, we note with concern that only a minority of colleagues at management level have actually worked in an EU Delegation. Some have never worked outside Brussels, and candidates with no previous experience abroad continue to be appointed as Heads of Delegation. We feel that the EEASwould greatly benefit from having management staff in HQ with previous Delegation experience, and vice-versa. We consider there should be compulsory rotation for Heads of Division / Deputy Heads of Division, and that having served in a Delegation should be a prerequisite for being eligible for a Head of Delegation/Deputy HOD post. We believe, furthermore, that Delegation experience has to become a compulsory part of the career path for all EEAS staff. Staff and Colleagues in HQ not having an experience in a Delegation and with no interest in doing so could be progressively encouraged to pursue their career in another EU Institution, while management posts in HQ should be, progressively, reserved for staff with Delegation experience.

Cost: None.

Benefits**:** reopening career perspectives, alignment with MS practices and creation of a real "esprit de corps". Elimination/reduction of bottlenecks for returning HODs.

5 We understand that most of the above suggestions underscore the need for positive discrimination policies which may not encounter the universal favour of all stakeholders. At the same time, it should be noted that MS still reserve 100% of their posts for their own nationals. We feel there is a need to acknowledge that the creation of the EEAS and its particular staff composition has meant, in practice, a discrimination for the career perspectives of EEAS institutional staff: no EU institution has ever faced a similar situation.

6. The *de facto* cancellation, in 2011, of 35% of management posts (up to about 50% in Delegations) represented a dramatic change in career perspective for most AD FP staff. This issue has not been addressed for years. Moreover, the 2014 staff regulations reform compounded matters by **halting at AD12** level the careers of AD staff not having a management position exactly in a time period when nearly no management posts became available to talented EEAS AD staff.

7 We consider that exceptional situations require exceptional measures in order to redress these imbalances. Our proposals are meant as a contribution to the deliberations of the Career TF. We reaffirm our view that appointments should be based on qualifications, suitability and merits, as it was highlighted by the existing TF paper on AD careers. At the same time, we consider that the time has come to address the unequal treatment suffered by AD-FP staff and to create a level playing field with MS staff when competing for appointments, something which has been clearly missing over the past 7 years. While EEAS has certainly proved its worth in the framework of EU external action, we are convinced that the creation of a true "esprit de corps" (both between TAs and FPs and HQ and Delegations) and the building of a true common diplomatic culture could not progress if these career issues remain unaddressed and a better alignment with the best practices of MS diplomatic services is not pursued.

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