

Position paper of the EEAS TA liaison group:

Comments on the Career path for EEAS AD staff

The TA's Liaison Group (LG) welcomes the Paper regarding the career path for EEAS AD staff. This is a first and positive step towards defining a comprehensive human resources strategy, in particular identifying the needs and responses of the EEAS in terms of the development of human resources capacities.

At the same time the TA' Liaison Group would like to flag two core issues which should also be addressed in" the Path", as per Council Decision 2010/427:

- The specificity of the EEAS which is mandated to support the High Representative in fulfilling her tasks with respect to CFSP/CSDP, in her capacity as FAC President and in her capacity as Vice President of Commission and coordinator of other aspects of the Union's external action.
- In line with the Council Decision establishing the EEAS, the Service "will comprise officials from the General Secretariat of the Council and from the Commission, as well as personnel coming from the diplomatic services of the Member States". "Officials of the Union and temporary agents coming from the diplomatic services of the Member States shall have the same rights and obligations and be treated equally, in particular as concerns their eligibility to assume all positions under equivalent conditions" That means that the staff coming from national diplomatic services cannot be recruited only to "bring complementary skills" or to "plug any gaps in the EEAS talent pool".

1. EEAS specificity

Building the EEAS as a European "diplomatic service" entails investing in resources that are able to meet some basic skills for a diplomat such as intellectual versatility, adaptability and resilience, negotiating skills, flexibility to travel, acceptance of rotation as a natural part of the career, language skills and aptitude for language learning, tact, diplomacy, organisational skills, etc. Recruiting the best suited people for the EEAS would indeed require extra efforts than the standard EPSO recruitment. EEAS should be able to organise targeted recruitment and to adapt the content of tests to the specific needs of a "diplomatic" career.

From the perspective of a specific EEAS career path, one can hardly see the benefits of the tracks proposed for the second career phase: generalist, management or expert. This proposal seems to serve as a solution to manage the unbalanced number of high AD grades and does not take into account the diplomatic presence (at every grade) from national administration that should be kept at 1/3, possibly also with a balanced distribution in all grades.

This three-track proposal has little justification in terms of encouraging excellence and improving management skills for most staff members. Furthermore, established rules should not overrule the possibility for the brightest staff members to accede to positions with management potential, even before getting to the AD 9 level.

Another aspect related to both career path and diplomatic representation is the possibility of nominating those EEAS staff members rotating to EUDELS, with one or more ranks above their current administrative classification, in order to facilitate dialogue with decision makers in the host country administration. Similar needs might be present for staff working in HQs when sent in missions and mandated to play the role of facilitator/negotiator.

The argument that "EEAS needs a permanent core staff at all levels" is somehow contradicted by the proposals for the "first career phase". It is not very clear how it will be possible to embed an "EEAS culture" amongst freshly recruited staff if, from the outset, the EEAS gives the signal it will assess more favourably those staff members with experience in another institution? Such an approach will encourage increased mobility between EEAS and other institutions, which could be rather damaging for the Service, in particular in its (still) early stage of consolidation. Moreover, it is rather doubtful that high trans-institutional mobility will serve the purpose of a "permanent core staff".

Furthermore, the TA liaison group considers that there should not be distinction between entry level AD grades and those 'in a second phase' in terms of rotation and mobility. With respect to transitional measures for the selection of experts (page 5), we see no justification at this stage to consider 46 posts as equivalent to Head of Unit/Division for promotion purposes, as the Annex III, Art 30.3 SR refers to the 'officials' who may be assigned not posts. Thus, assignment of such persons (not posts) at this stage or in the future should be done, based on objective criteria. Moreover, any decision on "experts" should fully consider EEAS specificity, which, logically, needs more genuine "diplomats" than "experts". Another concern is the already reverted pyramid of grades within the EEAS, a situation which may be aggravated by a significant number of promotions which are equivalent to HoDs's level.

2. Management of TA staff

According to Council Decision 2010/427, temporary agents from national diplomatic services "shall have the same rights and obligations and be treated equally, in particular as concerns their eligibility to assume all positions under equivalent conditions". Consequently, the proposed recruitment of TAs as "gap fillers" goes against the provisions of the said Decision. This provision denies any positive consideration regarding the role of TAs in the EEAS and is contrary to the Council Decision setting the EEAS which makes TAs fully part of the EEAS staff.

Instead, the career paper should include a specific chapter devoted to TA ("concept of TAs careers in EEAS") around the following items:

2.1. Recruitment:

Clarify which positions (level, type of expertise, Delegations/headquarters) should be filled in priority with TAs, according to their expected added value to the EEAS? Which criteria should apply in the selection of TAs (experience, grade in the MS administration, language skills, etc.)?

It could be more clearly underlined that new recruitments are opened for those posts vacant after retirement or departure from the EEAS of AD officials, without misbalancing the 1/3 share of TAs.

Furthermore, the Career Path paper does not address the current situation of a number of entry level of member states diplomats (in particular at EEAS HQs) and which are somehow a counterbalance to the inverted pyramid of high AD grades within the EEAS. The "Path" does not give any possibility of correction for those TA's who were hired at AD5-AD7 levels, despite their 10 years or more of the diplomatic experience. According to the "Path" they would fall under the first category which does not correspond to their qualifications.

2.2. Career:

Could the EEAS reflect upon and propose perspectives that could be offered to TAs making a passage in the EEAS? Which proportion will be considered as generalists/managers/experts? Which proportion will be offered a second posting and, if so, with which possibility of evolution? As perspectives for achieving high grades are mentioned in the career paper (for experts and managers), do they also apply to TAs?

Also, some further reflection is necessary with respect to the possibility of complementing the EEAS permanent pool of talents by organising internal competitions and/or facilitating the continuation of an EEAS career for certain TAs who have served for two consecutive terms. These colleagues have greatly contributed to forging the EEAS in its initial phase and thus represent an invaluable asset for the service.

How will the envisaged career policy (training, assessment, etc.) be applied to TAs during the entry to the EEAS and in case of extension of the contract? How could TAs benefit from other opportunities, such as the EU Fellowships?

2.3. Return to the MS administration:

This part should mention how the EEAS intends to help MS take into account the experience gained in the EEAS, in terms of career.

Briefly, TAs engaging with the EEAS should be considered as having a career distributed between both EEAS and MS administration and should therefore benefit from clear career paths resulting from coordination between these two administrations.