European Commission

Taking Europe to the world

50 years of the European Commission's External Service

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Foreword

Romano Prodi

President of the European Commission

Chris Patten

Member of the European Commission with responsibility for external relations

The need for coherent external representation of the European Communities was born in 1951 with the very first of the founding Treaties, the Treaty of Paris, which established the European Steel and Coal Community. It is therefore not surprising that shortly after that Treaty came into force the first foundation stone of what was to become the External Service of the European Commission was laid. The year was 1954 and the place was Washington DC, for transatlantic relations were a key factor in the making of a united Europe, underpinned as they were by the determined support for integration from the other side of the Atlantic.

Since then, a global network of 130 European Commission delegations has been built up, manned by more than 5 000 staff and encompassing all continents. These diplomatic representations are essential to the promotion of European Union interests and values around the world, and are in the front line in delivering EU external relations policy and

action, from the common foreign and security policy through trade and development cooperation to scientific and technical relations.

And so this year the External Service of the Commission is celebrating its 50th anniversary, at a time when European integration is entering one of its most challenging but also most promising periods. As always, at a time of change, it is particularly useful to look back to our common past and experience; for to know where we are going, it is important that we remember where we have come from.

It is therefore our pleasure to introduce this publication, which tells the story of the development of this service over the years and provides glimpses of the experience of some of the people who have served it so well. Many of them have frequently put the interest of the Service before their own personal comfort and safety, sometimes in very challenging situations. It is to them in particular that this work is dedicated.

As the process of European integration continues, with a Union of 25 Member States and a new European Constitution in sight, the EU's role in international affairs will be even more important in the years to come. The External Service, with its special experience and global reach will provide a platform for Europe to play that role on the ground, to the benefit of the EU and its citizens at home, and in the cause of development, peace and stability everywhere.

Introduction

The role of the delegations has changed constantly … they now carry out tasks relating to almost all the areas where the European Union has a part to play. This reflects the Union's growing importance as a world global player.
President Prodi, September 2003

The European Union in the world

The European Union is a unique experience of peaceful integration and cooperation between former rivals and competitors. Its process of unity was central to the economic and political history of Europe in the second half of the last century. Its achievements today are impressive, and impossible to imagine only a few years ago: peace and stability have been consolidated; growth has been fostered; the well-being of EU citizens has substantially increased. The single currency is a historic success, and Community policies guarantee the safeguard of European principles and interests. The EU is today, even before completion of the enlargement process, the world's largest economic and trading partner, the largest donor of development assistance and the largest provider of humanitarian aid. It is also playing a crucial part in projecting stability around its periphery, notably through the process of further enlargement with central European and Mediterranean countries.

In the external relations area, the EU is now moving forward to a European foreign policy that is properly linked to the EU institutions which manage the instruments needed for its accomplishment.

The European Commission plays a key role in the implementation of the EU's foreign and other policies and in this it relies heavily

on its 130 delegations and offices around the world, which act not only as the eyes and ears of the Commission in their host countries but also as its mouthpiece vis-à-vis the authorities and society as a whole.

The role of delegations today

The delegations of the External Service, although hierarchically a part of the Commission structure, in practice serve European Union interests as a whole, in so far as they are concerned with:

- presenting, explaining and implementing EU policy;
- analysing and reporting on the policies and developments of the countries to which they are accredited; and
- conducting negotiations in accordance with a given mandate.

This means that the delegations exercise powers, conferred by the Treaty on the European Community, in third countries and at five centres of international organisations (OECD, OSCE, UN, WTO, FAO), by promoting the Community's interests as embodied in the common policies, notably the common trade policy, but also many others, including the development, agricultural, fisheries, environmental, transport and health and safety policies. It also means involvement in areas such as justice and home affairs, in which the European Community does not have exclusive powers.

Developing the External Service

The External Service is at the crossroads again. The reform process of the Prodi Commission has also left its mark and impact on the Service. The December 2002 decision on the reform of the Service ([1]) is of particular relevance; it has meant that staff in delegations are for the first time ever under a single management structure, the External Service Directorate.

The implications are far-reaching, be it at organisational level or at the level of individual staff members. At organisational level, and through the improved internal coordination at the direction and management bodies (CDSE and CGSE), it has led to a common Commission approach towards the Service. Individually, the decision means that performance assessments for officials are handled for the External Service as a whole, so that they are assessed within the External Service and no longer as part of staff in the different directorates-general at headquarters.

This is certainly a big step towards a truly common External Service. But other challenges remain: staffing is still insufficient and sometimes mismatched to the tasks at hand; the current focus on aid management may obscure other equally important functions of delegations; some policies need to be reviewed. Against that background, a number of proposals for action to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the network are on the table, including: the creation of helpdesks; the increase of IT resources; the reallocation of staff and the increase of floaters and more generally, the reinforcement of delegation's administrative capacity.

([1]) Document C(2002)5370 of 17 December 2002.

The ultimate challenge for the External Service is the creation of a joint European External Action Service, as proposed by the Convention in the draft European Constitution. In preparation for this development, there are several tasks ahead. One of them is to further advance the professionalisation of staff, for which steps have been taken that include the adoption in November 2003 of an ambitious plan for training for delegation staff ([2]), the successful consolidation of the European diplomatic programme and other initiatives towards diplomatic training. Another essential task is to introduce the reform measures in delegations as they are applied in headquarters, among which management plans are paramount.

The delegations are good evidence of the success of a concept intimately linked to the policy of multilateralism and are the focal point for Commission policies in third countries. But to be successful, they need to be part of an efficient, coherent and integrated network. The latest communication on the development of the External Service ([3]) is part of the effort to achieve these objectives.

With all these measures, the External Service is preparing itself for the challenges to come. Action is ongoing. With the new Staff Regulations coming into force on 1 May 2004, the External Service will yet again have to make a special effort for implementing a far-reaching set of changes in the entire network. Overall, the current work as described above is essential to guarantee the best possible functioning of the network, thereby strengthening the capacities of delegations toward accommodating the future tasks of the 'European Union embassies'.

C Falkowski
Director for the External Service
External Relations DG

([2]) Document C(2003)4334 of 18 November 2003.
([3]) Document C(2003)4163 of 14 November 2003.

Delegations are also involved in the conduct of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), providing regular political analysis, conducting evaluations jointly with Member State embassies and contributing to the policy-making process.

Finally, delegations provide support and assistance as necessary to the other institutions and actors of the EU, including:

- the High Representative for CFSP/Secretary-General of the EU Council, who can rely on logistical and other support when on mission and who has access to their reporting;
- the European Parliament, in that delegations help, for example, to arrange programmes for and accompany visiting delegations and committees where necessary; heads of delegation may also, in agreement with Commission headquarters, attend the gatherings of the Foreign Affairs Committee and other committees of the Parliament, in order to report on recent developments in their host countries and the development of EU policy and programmes;
- the EU presidency, with heads of delegation regularly taking part in Troika *démarches,* and assisting the presidency in other ways.

In all these areas, delegations carry out an increasingly important information function as well, providing background and updates on European integration and EU policies to host governments and administrations, media, academia, business circles and civil society. The main partners of delegations in headquarters are the foreign affairs directorates-general, i.e. External Relations, Development, Enlargement, Trade, EuropeAid Co-operation Office, and the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). However, in their service of the Commission, the delegations serve and represent the whole institution.

Taking action in the field

Looking ahead

The 2002–03 Constitutional Convention has proposed the creation of a joint External Service, including European embassies in third countries and to give a mandate to the Commission and to the Council to agree on the concrete modalities of implementation for this proposal.

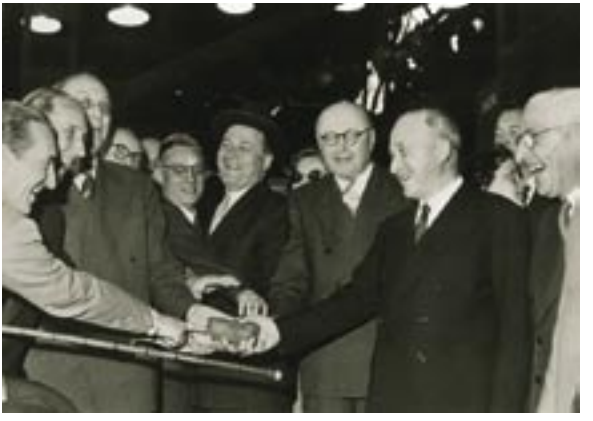
The network of EU delegations of the Commission is ideally placed to ensure the success of this ambitious and far-reaching proposal made by the representatives of Member States, parliaments, the Commission and other Convention members.

These ideas have received widespread support, and it is reasonable to assume that they will remain at the core of the external relation-related part of the final Constitution.

As with other cornerstones of European integration, like trade policy, the single market or the euro, the creation of a joint External Service will not be achieved overnight. However, the foundations for it have been laid. Its realisation will depend on the active participation of all parties concerned, inside and outside the Commission.

The pioneers

Today's European Union owes a huge debt to its founding fathers, and it was one of them, Jean Monnet, who can be credited with the idea that Europe needed to create an identity for itself overseas. In 1954, Monnet, who at that time was serving as the first President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, was concerned that the United States might interpret the demise of proposals for a European Defence Community as a message that efforts at integration were losing steam, and he thus needed to send a positive sign to the contrary.



1953: Jean Monnet presents the first European steel ingot

America had been a staunch supporter of those efforts from the very beginning, and Secretary of State Dean Acheson had on Jean Monnet's first working day in 1952 sent him a dispatch in the name of President Truman confirming full US diplomatic recognition of the ECSC. A US ambassador to the ECSC was accredited soon after, and he headed the second overseas mission to establish diplomatic relations with the Community institutions. The first was in fact with the UK, which was of course not a Member State at that time.

And so it was that Monnet, working with the ECSC's US lawyer, George Ball (later to become a key figure in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations of the 1960s), set up an ECSC information office in Washington, headed by Leonard Tennyson, a former Marshall Plan official. Tennyson, who passed away in 2003, was an American national, but had a passionate commitment to the European cause, and set out on a mission to explain it to the US Government and people. His first ECSC bulletin in October 1954 carried the headline 'Towards a federal government of Europe' and the office soon caught the attention of its audience.

The ECSC opened a liaison office for Latin America, in Santiago de Chile, and its first full diplomatic mission in London in 1956. Two years later, Tennyson was joined in Washington by Curt Heidenreich of Euratom, the first diplomat in the service of the EC institutions to be posted outside Europe. As the 'demand for Europe' accelerated around the world, the European Commission, which had been established the previous year under the 1957 Treaty of Rome as the successor to the ECSC High Authority, had begun to take its first steps to be present in the wider world.

'A letter from America'

After the ECSC mission was set up in 1954, growth was inevitable, and the delegation moved three times before it flew its blue and gold flag outside its current office at 2300 M. Street, NW, in 1995.

What differentiated the Washington delegation from national embassies from the outset was and still is its important number of local staff, including American citizens who work tirelessly for the cause of European and transatlantic unity.

Although differences are sometimes played up in the press and media, the common thread from Jean Monnet and Dean Acheson to Romano Prodi and Colin Powell is how central the transatlantic alliance is to world peace, world trade and world security. Former Congressman Lee Hamilton, now Director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, told the current Commission Head of Delegation, Ambassador Günter Burghardt, that 'Working together, there is nothing that the United States and Europe cannot do, and by working together they can promote world trade and promote peace together globally.'

In 1972, during President Nixon's time, the Commission's delegation in Washington was again the first of the Commission external representations in obtaining full diplomatic status through legislation approved in both chambers of Congress. From Ambassador Mazio, via Jens Otto Krag, Fernand Spaak, Roland de Kergorlay, Roy Denman, Dries van Agt, Hugo Paemen to today's Günter Burghardt and his staff of over 80 political, trade, information, agriculture and science specialists, the EU delegation has become a well-established part of the Washington political and diplomatic community.

And with a new European constitution ahead, together with the May 2004 enlargement of the European Union to include countries from central, eastern and south-eastern Europe, the Washington delegation will continue to grow in importance and increase its diplomatic relevance in the capital of the sole world super power. One can expect Günter Burghardt and his successors to be playing an even more active role in the promotion of transatlantic relations in the District of Columbia and across the 50 states of the United States of America.

As President Kennedy wrote to Jean Monnet in the early 1960s: 'Ever since the war the reconstruction and knitting together of Europe have been objectives of United States policy, for we have recognised with you that in unity lies strength. […] America and Europe, working

in full and effective partnership, can find solutions to those urgent problems that confront all mankind at this crucial time.'

And it was President Kennedy who in his visionary speech at Philadelphia's Hall of Independence, on 4 July 1962, proposed the concept of transatlantic partnership and of a declaration of interdependence between the new world and the new Europe. That concept has lost nothing of its significance today.

Günter Burghardt
Head of Delegation, Washington

The Treaty of Rome included within it measures to associate the then overseas countries and territories of the six founding Member States, and this involved among other things the setting up of a five-year development fund, known by its French acronym FEDOM, endowed with some 580 million European units of account, to be managed by the Commission.

In order to properly administer and account for these funds, which were almost entirely used for capital aid programmes to develop physical infrastructure such as roads, hospitals and schools, the Commission needed people on the spot, and the preferred solution was to contract teams led by a *contrôleur technique* from European engineering consultancy companies to be resident in the beneficiary countries, most of which were in Africa.

Few in 1958 had thought that there would be a need for broader representation of the European institutions in these countries, but as the winds of change blew through the old colonial empires, the Commission's contract teams soon found themselves having to deal with a host of matters that were well outside their terms of

reference. At the same time, newly independent African countries quickly established diplomatic missions in Brussels and, by 1963, 18 such missions had been accredited.

Recognising the growing imbalance in representation on each side, parliamentarians in Europe and Africa had from 1959 been calling for the Commission to designate resident permanent representatives in the associated States, but there was hesitation about this sort of active legation in Brussels, due in part to the failure in 1960 and 1962 of efforts to set up single diplomatic representation covering the ECSC, Euratom and the EEC in Washington, London and Latin America. Back then, it was evidently much too early to agree on a truly European diplomatic service.

But by 1964, the Commission's contract teams in the associated countries were reaching their limits, and action to upgrade presence there was imperative. However, full diplomatic representation was off the agenda for the time being, and the somewhat over-optimistic common wisdom at that time was that development cooperation was anyway a temporary phenomenon that would not require a long-term permanent administrative staff cadre. The solution chosen was thus to create a new semi-autonomous non-profit organisation/agency — the European Agency for Cooperation (EAC) — funded under a Commission grant that would recruit and manage, under renewable contracts, the heads of mission (deemed *contrôleurs délègues*) and their staff to man the Commission offices in the associated countries.

The profiles of these staff were still essentially technical, and they were concerned mainly with development cooperation, but they were able to engage in limited representational activity and had an (albeit limited) mandate from the director-general of the Commission's Development DG (then known as DG VIII). They were engaged as contract staff, and generally did not enjoy diplomatic status.

The EAC itself was under a board comprised of senior Commission officials, and while most off its staff were also contracted, the director was seconded from the Commission. Looking back, the EAC might appear something of a strange hybrid in political and administrative terms, but such were the exigencies of those early days.

1963: signature of the first Yaoundé convention by Walter Hallstein, President of the European Commission

From 1965 onwards, some 21 offices of this type were established in the associated countries in order to implement Community aid granted through the new European Development Fund (FED) under the Yaoundé Conventions (1966–75). The first *contrôleur délègue* appointed was René Calais, who took up his functions in Chad in 1966. At the beginning, staff were in fact former colonial administrators from Member State services or development professionals from the private sector. By 1973, some 320 people were serving in these offices, including 120 Europeans, mainly civil engineers and agronomists, and 200 local staff; the latter mainly in logistical and administrative support roles. Right from the start, local staff have played a critical role in the development of the Service, and their contribution has been fundamental.

Persona non grata?

Mali early 1966 — There was no *contrôleur délégué* du FED yet and the European Development Fund was represented by German consulting engineers and I was their local team leader, with the impressive title of *Chef de Mission du Contrôle Technique du FED.* Although, formally, I only acted on instructions from and reported to my principals in Germany, it was often unavoidable that, for practical local and day-to-day purposes, I had to respond to off-the-cuff questions about the presence and activities of the EDF in Mali.

The political climate in Mali, under the government of President Modibo Keita and his socialist one-party rule, was dominated by a strong tilt towards the then Eastern bloc. Economically the country was in distress, and day-to-day life was marked by harsh shortages of almost all main consumer goods. No wonder that, under those circumstances, the political climate was depressed, and rumours circulated that something had to happen sooner or later.

In March 1966, President Heinrich Lübke of Germany came on an official visit. He was warmly received, not least because of the significant German aid effort in Mali. All Germans and other west Europeans were caught up in the event and invited to official receptions and other parties taking place on such occasions.

As it happened, I was requested to give an interview to a journalist from President Lübke's party. I had no objection, particularly since my principals had instructed me to be friendly with journalists, because positive reflections in the press might create good publicity for our business. A friendly and comprehensive exchange of views about EDF-funded projects in Mali and our role as technical controllers followed.

But I had a surprise a few days later, when I saw the published article, which was a politically critical piece headlined 'Growing signs of unrest in Mali', including a remark that 'despite all declarations of neutrality, the country has moved away from the West and taken a strong turn towards the East. The last important link to the West is the EEC-office, headed by the German Dieter Schmidt' (sic). I thus faced the prospect of hostile reactions from both the Malian Government and from European ambassadors.

While the German ambassador saw no reason to be offended, he advised me to put things to right with the Malians. Luckily this was not too difficult either. The landlord of my residence had just returned from Brussels (where he had been Mali's ambassador to Belgium) and was now working at the Ministry of International Cooperation. He assured me not to worry and thanks not least to his good offices I managed to avoid any political consequences.
Later I became friendly with another Malian official who told me that this action had just come in time because our friends from the Eastern bloc had been actively working at getting me declared *persona non grata*. I had escaped by the skin of my teeth!

Two and a half years later, after growing discontent and unrest, the Keita government was overthrown — the journalists' sombre predictions had come true. And I, at that time a simple *contrôleur technique*, had had my first on-the-job lesson in the trials and tribulations of dealing with the press!

Dieter Schmidt
Former HoD in a number of ACP countries and former Inspector of Delegations

1968: Jean Rey, President of the Commission, inaugurates an EC-funded road in Segou (Mali)

Elsewhere in the world, delegations were opened in Paris (at the OECD) and Geneva, and the Washington office was in 1971 transformed into a delegation headed by Ambassador Aldo Mario Mazio, a career diplomat from the Italian service, and although the title came with the man, rather than the job (credentials were not at that time presented to the President), it was an early sign of things to come.

And so, by the early 1970s the future External Service had been created in embryo. Around 150 European Commission staff carrying out mainly development and information functions were resident in almost 30 missions around the world, and were already playing an essential part in the European Community's external relations policy.

These fledgling missions were for the most part non-diplomatic, with restricted mandates and minimal political profile, and could hardly be compared to the diplomatic services of European Member States, some of which had traditions and experience going back half a millennium. Indeed, the 21 offices in the associated countries could not even lay claim to represent the Commission as a whole, being essentially offshoots of one department, DG VIII. But with the European Community rapidly emerging on to the world stage as a major player in its own right in international affairs, all that was about to change.

Formative years

1980: Dieter Schmidt, HoD, with a group of European ambassadors at an EC-financed bridge at Mpatamanga (Malawi)

The accession of the UK to the then EEC in 1972 and the subsequent signing of the first Lomé Convention between the EEC and 46 founding African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States in February 1975 had enormous consequences for the External Service. Lomé was much more of an international partnership than its predecessor, the Yaounde Convention, which to an extent had continued the now outdated 'association' policy, considered neo-colonial by many ACP States.

The approach under Lomé meant in turn that the role of the Commission's representatives in the ACP had to change, both in style and in substance. While Lomé was still focused on development cooperation, it also covered many other matters such as trade, regional integration and cultural cooperation, and had a higher political profile.

Moreover, the 'Commission delegate', as the head of mission was now to be called, was an essential element in the agreement, and took on a more formal representational role: his functions were set out in the Convention itself, whose text specified that the delegate would represent the Commission in the ACP State

for the purpose of implementing the Convention. The designation of the delegate would also be subject to the agreement of the receiving ACP State, a procedure akin to classic diplomatic practice in the designation of ambassadors.

All this went far beyond the limited mandate of the *contrôleurs délégués* and their technical teams. A number of these staff, who — to some extent by default — had accumulated valuable experience in broader representational skills of the type required by Lomé, were now hired as delegates, but recruitment was expanded to include both Commission officials from Brussels and development specialists from Member State administrations, usually on secondment to the EAC, which remained in charge of delegation administration in the ACP countries

The number of missions in the ACP — now to become full delegations of the Commission — doubled to 41 in the three years between 1975 and 1978, and the total staff complement reached 900, including 250 Europeans.

Guinea Conakry: 'hardship delegation'

Guinea Conakry applied to join the Lomé Convention in 1975. The first administrative act after its accession was to programme Community actions during a mission headed by the British Deputy Director-General, Maurice Foley. The Guineans, strongly influenced by North Korea, were past masters in organising public events and had put on a show for the delegation at the football stadium involving thousands of participants all dressed in white. Maurice Foley was unexpectedly called on to give a speech, and unexpectedly he led me to the microphone and said: 'André, I'm going to speak in English, just to show them that French isn't the only language we speak at the Commission. You interpret.' He was a good speaker and launched into a fine improvisation full of long sentences that lasted a good three minutes each. Not being a native English speaker,

I could understand the beginning but soon got lost and had no choice but to give a parallel speech in French. Luckily nobody noticed the discrepancy: the English speakers thought the English version sounded excellent, and the French speakers thought the same about the French speech. Who knows, maybe Maurice and I were so much products of the same mould that we ended up saying the same thing through some kind of unconscious mimicry!

Paradoxically, the programming turned out to be quite simple, except that we had to include the rehabilitation of a textile factory which we mistrusted on account of the country's Communist management methods, though we did in the end manage to incorporate the idea of 'joint venture'. Generally speaking, provided we stuck to general aims and objectives, discussions with the Guineans were easy-going, and provided, of course, we didn't go too deeply into sectoral policies and implementation — as unfortunately became obvious later on, when the projects faced difficulties. On the whole the atmosphere was good, except that when it came to discussing figures, President Sékou Touré, who was counting on a tidy sum, could not conceal his disappointment. Fortunately, it all ended on an elegant note when the Minister for Economic Planning (sadly hanged a few months later) recalled a Peulh proverb: 'What we give to others means a lot to ourselves but little to the person we give it to.'

Once the easy part, the programming, was completed, harsh reality set in, and we had serious problems setting up the delegation and implementing the programme.

The first major difficulty was finding suitably adaptable candidates who would be willing to move to a country with such a grim reputation. The bosses had left me in charge of recruitment, and I turned to the DG VIII (as it then was) football team, the idea being that watching people play sport might tell me something about their true characters and their ability to cope with difficult and

uncomfortable situations. I then recruited the most promising players for my team in Guinea.

Another difficulty, one unheard of at the time, was the monetary situation. The currency, the Sily, had a black-market exchange rate between 10 and 20 times lower than its official exchange rate. Jokers would make fun of it by saying that it was 'silly to hold Sily'. The few things one could find locally, and especially minor services, cost an exorbitant amount if you changed your money at the official rate. This had led to the appearance of an unofficial bartering system, where the unit of exchange was the can of imported beer. Thus, to telephone abroad, you could find yourself having to wait up to two or three days, unless you were on good terms with the operator. I personally had no problems, but as soon as I finished speaking, Madame Diallo, the operator, would ring me back, saying: 'I'm thirsty, Mr André.' And in order not to lose my privilege, I would send her a few cans of beer.

And so, gradually, the delegation became established and the cooperation work was able to start. But was the work useful and successful in terms of development? Well, I don't think we have any reason to regret working together with Guinea during that Cold War period, even if the situation today is still not what we might have hoped it would be after the fall of the dictatorship. But then, that is another story.

André Vanhaeverbeke
former Head of Delegation in Guinea, Senegal and Ukraine

But expansion was not limited to the ACP. The signing of Community protocols in 1975–77 with eight southern and eastern Mediterranean countries opened the way to cooperation there, and delegations were opened in all of them by the early 1980s. Similarly, a new Asia and Latin America (ALA) EC development budget line was put in place in 1976 and this, combined with the Commission's growing responsibilities in external trade policy, led to an expansion of the network to these areas, the first delegations being opened in Bangkok, Delhi and Caracas. Delegations were also being opened in Japan and at the UN in New York.

These missions, in common with those established in developed countries, were administered by the Commission's External Relations DG (then known as DG I) and, in contrast to the methods used in the ACP countries, it was decided to adopt a more classically diplomatic approach to their establishment. This followed a comprehensive review by the Commission of the rapidly expanding delegation network, which was communicated to the European Council in 1977.

That review defined for the first time the main tasks in their host countries for delegations, the most important of which were seen as:

- to provide advice and support for officials travelling on Community business;
- to act as a contact point for those wishing to communicate with the institutions;
- to provide information on EC aims and objectives;
- to assist in the execution of EC policy and cooperation agreements;
- to cooperate with Member States *in situ* and keep them informed on the implementation of EC policy; and, last but by no means least,
- to encourage cooperation and coordination with and between Member State missions.

The review went on to say that while the emphasis given to each of these tasks would vary, depending on local circumstances,

1968: Michel Gosseti, *contrôleur délégué* in Mali, inspecting water supplies in Tombouctou

every external office must be equipped with the staff and support from HQ to perform the most important tasks of external representation.

To properly carry out these functions, delegations needed the necessary high-level access and diplomatic protection, and the External Relations DG decided that, prior to opening a mission, an *accord du siège* (or establishment agreement) signed with the host country at political level should be put in place. The texts of these agreements were based on the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and they accorded full diplomatic status to the head of mission and his foreign staff.

By 1980, there were 50 delegations around the world, with over 1 000 staff working in them; a global presence roughly equal to that of the Belgian foreign service, which had 150 years of history behind it. And this had been achieved within 20 years.

While their status varied greatly, from the EAC-run ACP missions with their mainly contracted staff and modest political profile, through to the Washington delegation, which by now was virtually a fully accredited diplomatic mission, the nascent External Service was significantly helping the Community to develop the international personality and impact that its global ambitions required.

Early days in the ACP

Some people follow a rather unusual path to the Commission service. As a UK colonial civil servant, I had seven years in Fiji district administration, then, following Fiji's independence, Fiji sent me to Brussels as *chargé d'affaires* a.i. to open its mission to the EC in preparation for negotiations on what became the ACP/EEC Lomé Convention. And in 1976 I was invited to enter the diplomatically ambiguous world of the EAC.

The EAC was the Belgian association (asbl) created in 1964 by DG VIII to manage what might be called its 'Foreign Legion', kept separate from the rest of the Commission's forces, precluded from home service and destined to serve without remission on foreign and predominately ex-colonial soil. That all changed with the reform of 1988 of course.

Although from the start the Lomé Convention had us theoretically representing the whole range of Commission competences, DG VIII enjoined upon us a 'voluntarily non-diplomatic role'. We were expected to be models of discretion and self-effacement particularly vis-à-vis our own Member States' representatives ... In Kinshasa I was either unsuccessful, or possibly too successful in interpreting this role. At the end of my term, the French ambassador most kindly hosted a farewell dinner for me. When I arrived at his home, he took me discretely aside and asked: 'M. McGeever, qu'est-ce que c'est exactement que vous faites?'

Michael McGeever
Served in seven posts as Head of Delegation, retiring from Delhi.

Memories of 'down under'

In 1981, the Commission decided to open a delegation on the fifth continent. There were many good reasons for that, among others the then strong appetite of our nuclear reactors for the necessary raw material, and while it might be difficult to convince the Australians of the wonders of the common agricultural policy, it might at least be possible to smooth Antipodean feathers. These had become quite ruffled over the CAP, which was generally regarded in Australia as protectionist and against their interests.

A director had been duly earmarked to go 'down under' for this worthy task, but was obliged to stay on for almost a year in his job in Brussels. And so, a younger official was convinced to do the pioneer work as *chargé d'affaires.* After a baptism of fire involving a 300 km taxi ride from Sydney to Canberra (caused by a transport strike) he began making his rounds among the Member States' representatives and was graciously received, not least by the very distinguished Sir G. M., the British High Commissioner, residing on a hill in 'Westminster House', his residence. Among the good advice he gave to our *chargé:* 'not to spend more than one week a month in the capital as most of the 200 really influential people did not reside there'.

Our *chargé,* reflecting on this, returned to his office where he received a phone call from the President of the Sheep Council, saying that the British High Commissioner had just told him on the phone that there was now a permanent man from the European Commission, and asking him to be the guest of honour the next Sunday at the annual meeting and to deliver the speech on 'The EC's sheep regime and its crucial importance for the relationship between the old and the fifth continent.'

Nervous, but as a new man in town keenly aware of the importance of visibility, our *chargé* accepted immediately, despite the fact that his knowledge of the said regime was, to put it mildly, somewhat cursory. However, working frantically and exhausting the annual telephone budget in nighttime calls to the experts in Brussels, it slowly dawned on him that in a country of 15 million inhabitants and 160 million sheep, his speech would be indeed of some relevance.

Come Sunday, he was given a red carpet reception in the largest hotel in town by about a hundred people not, as he had half expected, attired in cowboy outfits, but in the finest English cashmere suits. Overcoming his stage fright, our *chargé* told the tale of the plight of poor European sheep farmers in the Alps, the Pyrenees, Wales and Scotland who depended on our support for their survival, and begged his hosts' understanding. When he ended, there was a deafening silence. Then the President of the Sheep Council said: 'Mr Chargé, you just told us that we should go to hell, but you said it in such a way that we are all looking forward to getting there!' and so began a beautiful friendship with the Australian countryside and its people.

Klauspeter Schmallenbach
went on to become HoD in Indonesia and Thailand.

But if it had achieved a certain size, the young service was in many ways still a teenager. Apart from the inevitable growing pains and identity crises, it suffered from a number of internal administrative inconsistencies. The state of affairs was succinctly captured in the Commission's 1982 report to the Council on the external competences of the Community, drawn up by Adrian Fortescue, a former UK career diplomat:

> *The Commission has a nucleus of a foreign service. Its external delegations are doing work directly comparable to Member State embassies. They cover a narrower field but involve the same techniques of negotiation, representation, confidential dealings with governments and international organisations, and political and economic analysis. Like embassies, they need proper back-up from headquarters so that they have the information and instruments to do the job.*

He continued,

> *They also have the same needs as embassies to cope with the specific requirements of a diplomatic life in distant parts. Above all, they need to attract quality personnel who can give their best efforts to the work involved without fear that they are suffering professional or material damage by being absent from HQ. Currently, delegations are on the whole staffed by good and hard working people who are making the most of rather inadequate support machinery. None of them have volunteered for external service because they will benefit materially or in career terms … there is an inherent contradiction in the way in which … outward postings are voluntary but come to a compulsory end without any guarantee of what will follow.*

Fortescue had put his finger on the main constraint to the future development of the system, namely the way in which its key resource, the people staffing it, was managed.
One major reason for the problem was the sheer weight of demand for European representation in the host countries, combined with the institutional youth of the Commission, which was still in the process of constructing a common administrative culture for itself. Such a situation lent itself to the development of administrative fiefs such as DG VIII, DG I and DG X (the latter being responsible for the information offices), who often treated 'their' delegations primarily as an extension of their particular service, rather than as representing the institution as a whole. When this was added to the special situation of ACP delegation staff, who had very few opportunities to serve in HQ, staff mobility, whether between HQ and post or between delegations in different regions, was problematic, as there was no real 'overview' of their career development.

Another was the peculiar historical development of the External Service, and the administrative culture that had resulted from it. The external policies of the European Communities were conceived in Brussels, and it was only later, as the new institutions engaged with third countries, that the need for a foreign presence came to be fully understood. The first generation of Commission officials in the 1960s and 1970s had therefore by and large not been recruited with external service in mind, and so what has often been called a 'foreign legion' approach had been used to staff the delegations. Even in the 'DG I' missions, where Commission officials, rather than contracted staff, made up the foreign staff complement, there was little career perspective involved in an overseas posting, and staff in these postings left Brussels primarily out of a sense of duty or had become frustrated with life in headquarters.

Indeed, a cursory glance at the *organigrammes* of DG VIII and DG I in the mid-1980s shows that fewer than 10 % of middle or senior management had any delegation service behind them.

In contrast, classical European foreign ministries as we know them today did not come into being until the 18th and 19th centuries, when the number and mandate of ambassadors, who had originally been sent directly by, and dealt directly with, their Sovereign, outgrew the capacity of the Head of State to manage them. Ministries were in effect the cart that followed the horse. That tradition survives today, in so far as the 'glittering prizes' in most foreign services often remain the important ambassadorial posts, rather than high-level functions in the ministry at home.

In any event, it was clear by 1982 that among the many reforms that would have to be carried out to ensure quality, the situation of EAC contract staff in ACP delegations, who constituted the overwhelming majority of external service staff at that time (some 75 % of all External Service staff were in these missions), needed urgent attention.

Group of young people in Togo hailing the second Lomé Convention

The situation had become more problematic after 1981, with the birth of European political cooperation, the precursor to today's common foreign and security policy. This meant that the Commission delegate in ACP States would henceforth have to be intimately involved in sensitive and confidential matters with his Member State colleagues on the spot. It was not at all evident that, given their statute, the EAC delegates could enjoy the full confidence among ambassadors that would be needed if the Commission was to play its proper role in this.

An early meeting of heads of delegations in Brussels

Towards maturity

As the 1980s ushered in a new phase of expansion for the service, with the focus on opening missions in the Mediterranean, Asia and Latin America, the Commission set about a comprehensive reform of delegation staff management, with priority given to regularising the situation of ACP delegation personnel. Negotiations within the Commission itself and with staff representatives were joined in 1982. After much deliberation, and with the full support of the European Parliament, which as ever took a close and active interest in the development of the service, it was agreed that the Commission's staff regulations (the 'statute') should be amended to accommodate the special requirements of staff in delegations. The EAC contract staff would become officials of the Commission.

These innovations were also important for the entire service, since the existing official staff rules did not offer the kind of financial or material support for those who took an overseas posting that was normally available to Member State diplomats (or indeed for expatriates in the private sector). This removed one of the constraints on outward mobility, although much still remained to be done if the career development challenges laid down in the Fortescue report were to be fully addressed.

The proposal was submitted to the Commission, then to the Parliament and to the Council in 1986. As a result, the new 'Annex X' to the Staff Regulations (specifying the measures and procedures applicable to officials abroad) was approved in 1987.

These changes were significant, not least because new delegations were opening at an average rate of five every year in the 1980s, and the Commission needed large numbers of quality personnel to man them. The new provisions took effect at the beginning of 1988, and the service would in future be administered under common statutory rules, although it would take more time before a unified management structure could be put in place within the Commission. Thus, in the period 1988–93, the delegations were managed by a specialised directorate within the central administration (DG IX) in close consultation with the

operational services in DG I, DG VIII and DG X. DG IX took over the functions of the EAC, which continued as a smaller service dedicated to recruiting contracted technical specialists for the delegations.

With the 1988 reform, the number of officials serving in delegations rose overnight from 165 to 440. The local staff complement at that time had reached 1 440, and with 89 missions spread across six continents, the External Service had achieved a truly global reach. Indeed, the service had become the sixth largest overseas official presence within the EC.

The earnest of being important

The Prime Minister of Fiji was receiving a senior member of the Commission's Development DG in the mid-1980s in his office in Suva. Naturally, the Head of Delegation was in attendance. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was a large, imposing figure, Oxford educated, with a rowing Blue and a half Blue at tennis, the undisputed architect of the process leading to independence and political icon in the region. Although soft spoken and gentle in manner, Ratu Mara could, when roused, display a streak of violent temper coupled with a deep disdain for outsiders who ignored the protocols of the 'pacific way' (a complex of rules based on respect for traditional hierarchy and chiefliness). He spoke no French. The Brussels visitor's mother tongue was not English. To be honest, his English was less than fluent.

Ratu Mara opened the audience by expressing gratitude for the financial and technical assistance from the EEC, but stressed that trade was even more important and that Fiji could manage

without aid if trading terms were fairer. 'Yes,' replied the man from Brussels, 'Trade with Fiji is not important.' (Meaning, of course, to agree that the volumes were not significant but mistranslating the French word 'important'). The Fijian chief's brow darkened and little white patches appeared on his cheeks, a widely recognised sign of a gathering storm. 'But I have just said that it is important' he hissed. 'Yes, it is not important,' persisted the francophone functionary, blissfully unaware of the turn events were taking.

Sensing disaster, the Head of Delegation broke protocol and, insisting that both eminent parties were correct, gave a short impromptu explanation of the nuances of the word 'important' in the English and French languages respectively. Although neither protagonist appeared to have the slightest idea what the unfortunate HoD was babbling about, the moment passed with the repetition by the Brussels man of the plaintiff phrase 'Yes, it is not important' and a grunt from Ratu Mara.

As the visitors were ushered out, the Premier growled at the HoD, 'I'm not sure I believe you, Michael. You diplomats are such tricky (so-and-sos).'

Could it be that the budding Commission diplomatic service had received an early compliment?

Michael Laidler
HoD Fiji, later Zimbabwe and South Africa

Apart from reforming the statute, the Commission had also taken action to upgrade the diplomatic status of the delegations and, throughout the 1980s, great efforts were made to ensure that all missions, including those in the ACP area, signed an establishment agreement. By the end of the decade, the majority of posts were considered full diplomatic missions by their host countries, and a good many of the heads of delegation (as the former 'delegates' were now referred to) were being accredited at Head of State level, with credentials signed by the President of the Commission, carrying the rank and courtesy title of ambassador.

Most importantly, the delegations were now playing a vital part in delivering Community policies in their host countries, whether it be: in political cooperation, where Member States came to rely on the delegation's unique expertise in EC policy and its institutional memory; in trade relations, where they gave an essential support role to Commission's negotiators and in solving everyday trade disputes; in development cooperation, the conception, implementation and monitoring of which depended critically on delegation staff; in assisting with high-level visits, including those from the parliament; in information, where the 'mission to explain', begun back in Washington in 1954, was needed everywhere as the EC evolved rapidly at home and abroad.

In all, it could be safely said by the end of the decade that the External Service was well and truly on the map. But new and historic challenges were in the making, as communist regimes shook and then fell and the peoples of central and eastern Europe emerged from the shadows to demand their rightful place in the great scheme of continental integration. Moreover, while the Commission had been able to identify the main structural problems with the management of the service, the breathless pace of expansion, unprecedented in any foreign service history, had left little time for them to be fully addressed. All this made for a heavy agenda for the 1990s.

The inspectorate

The concept of diplomatic immunity for the delegations was introduced generally under the first Lomé Convention, when the former *contrôleurs délègues* became delegates of the Commission and were included in the diplomatic lists of the countries concerned. This provoked an immediate reaction from the diplomatic services of the Member States and it soon became evident that some sort of readily acceptable operational framework would need to be introduced if the external offices of the Commission were to be fully accepted as an equal partner by their peers. It was Sir Roy Denman, then Director-General of DG I, who commissioned a study on how the service should operate. The resultant report, by Adrian Fortescue, a career diplomat, later to become a senior Commission official, became the cornerstone on which the service was based and introduced the notion of inspection, which the Commission adopted in its decision of 23 May 1979. In the following three years, DG I, DG VIII and DG X all inspected their own offices according to their own criteria, and in September 1982, in an effort to introduce some measure of standardisation and 'convergence', the Commission decided to introduce a central Inspection Unit, under the direct authority of the President, 'to verify the administrative performance (in all its aspects) and efficiency of the delegations and press and information offices'.

The new unit began its activities in 1983, under the leadership of Hans Beck, then a director in the Secretariat-General, and between 1983 and 1984 inspected six press and information offices and five delegations. When it became apparent, from the lack of follow-up, that these early reports lacked authority, the Commission made a further decision, in February 1987, reinforcing the previous one, underlining the importance of the inspectorate as a management tool and the paramount importance of follow-up.

Since 1987, there are few delegations which have not been inspected and some of the larger ones have been inspected several times. The inspection system has evolved over the years, despite being constrained by the same lack of resources as the rest of the institution. Broadly speaking it is based on 'management by objective' and 'value for money' criteria. The examination of objectives requires the inspection team — of usually two people (an inspector and a deputy) — to conduct a series of interviews in Brussels with all those Commission officials who may require the delegation to act on their behalf, to get a clear picture of the delegation's objectives as seen from Brussels. This preparatory period normally takes three weeks, during which the interviews are all carefully noted. By the end of it the team should have a clear idea of what is expected from the delegation and how its performance is rated. The inspection of the delegation itself is then normally covered in five working days, during which all the members of staff are interviewed individually, to see what they do, and why, and to establish how the delegation sees its own objectives and how they are prioritised in the face of resource constraints. Some of the Member States' embassies are also consulted locally, to see how they rate the delegation's performance. The 'value for money' part of the exercise requires a detailed examination of the delegation's three basic resources — human, physical and financial — and an evaluation of their use. At the end of the week the inspectors give the head of delegation a run-down on their findings, when he has an opportunity to comment on them and draw the attention of the team to any errors or omissions. He then normally gets the draft report, and recommendations, within the following month and his comments on the draft are attached to the final document which goes to the Commission.

Needless to say, this is a time-consuming exercise for all concerned, and regarded by many as a necessary evil at best! The fact remains that all the Member States' diplomatic services have their own inspectorates and they draw considerable comfort from the knowledge

that the Commission's External Service is monitored as closely as their own, in an effort to maintain its levels of professionalism, efficiency and integrity. Inspection reports also bring some measure of reassurance to the increasingly vigilant European Parliament.

In the fullness of time the European Union may arrive at a collective conclusion that it can save money by putting its external representatives under one roof. Logic and 'value for money' both militate in this direction and the ability of the Commission to demonstrate that its own operational parameters differ very little from those of the Member States can only work to its advantage. Certainly the delegations are now fully accepted as being on all fours with the embassies and the inspectorate can legitimately lay claim to some share in this success.

Graham Kelly

former HoD and Head of Inspection Service

A foreign service in the making

The EC responded very quickly to the fall of communist regimes in Europe and the former Soviet Union, establishing two major new programmes to assist the fragile new governments face up to the massive challenge of transition, economic restructuring and political reform. The 'Phare' programme, set up in 1989 focused on east and central Europe, while 'Tacis' began operations in 1991 in Russia and the newly independent States.

The advent of these operations, which would require close supervision and monitoring on the spot, combined with the obvious need for Europe to enhance its political profile in these countries, called for a significant new expansion of the External Service and, in the early 1990s, delegations were opened throughout these regions, from the Czech Republic to Kazakhstan. Given the enormous extent of coverage required, it was not possible to set up full diplomatic missions in all of the countries concerned, and some of these delegations had regional mandates, for example in the Ukraine, which also covered Moldavia and Belarus. New missions were also opened in the Balkans, in the wake of the break up of the former Yugoslavia.

As the decade wore on and the new EU enlargement began to take shape, delegations in the candidate countries took on increasingly important responsibilities and, from 1997, have played a key role in preparing their hosts for what was to come, not only through the administration of the now massive assistance programmes, but also through helping to coordinate the application of the EU *acquis* (the body of European law that all new Member States must integrate into their national systems) and providing information on the Union to all levels of society.

Being involved in Estonia's EU accession process from the delegation in Tallinn was a tremendously challenging yet enriching experience. Let me start with 14 September 2003: the day of the referendum. The splendid weather was a good omen for all of us for whom a successful outcome would mark one of the biggest achievements of our professional lives. Although public opinion polls had begun to show an increase in EU support since early August, it was nevertheless with immense delight that we witnessed the result: two out of three said 'yes' to Estonia joining the EU.

The biggest challenge during the pre-referendum activities was the low level of information on the EU, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas. We therefore developed the Eurobus tour, which brought EU information to remote places. On 1 August, our bus, decorated with the EU colours and symbol, took off from the small island of Hiiumaa. During one month, the bus, carrying information material and equipped with two computers with Internet connection and a film screen, made 84 stops all over Estonia.

In each destination, the bus stopped for 1–4 hours. It was open to visitors. Volunteers distributed information material and had discussions with people. The bus often stopped close to supermarkets to attract more participants. The wide range of activities provided something for everybody: young people could test their EU knowledge through participation in a touch-screen quiz; the elderly would solve crosswords; children could put together a puzzle map of Europe. All together, about 20 000 people participated in our events.

The project was funded through the delegation's information programme and carried out by its EU Information Centre. The latter recruited and trained over 30 volunteers — mainly students — to support the successful outcome. The tour was conducted in cooperation with the Member States' embassies. They shared their experience and also organised a cultural programme during the stops.

During the whole month, both the 'yes' and 'no' camps followed the bus, distributing material and entering into discussion with people. In some places MPs from the ruling coalition and the opposition were present to answer questions. More often, members of youth factions of political parties followed the bus and distributed their EU campaign material. The project had strong support from the Estonian Government. The Prime Minister was present during four of the stops and later expressed his gratitude to the delegation for organising the tour.

The project attracted wide and positive media coverage. Our aim was to increase awareness about the upcoming referendum, to generate more interest in the EU and to provide information about the Union as well as about the implications of Estonia's EU accession. The bus tour was the biggest information initiative of the delegation. It contributed towards stimulating the debate over pros and cons of EU accession. It also had high visibility among the pre-referendum public awareness activities in Estonia. As such, it clearly contributed to the positive outcome and made the 'yes' celebration on 14 September an event to remember.

John Kjaer
Head of the EC delegation in Estonia

1976: early HoD regional meeting in Africa

The signing of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union in 1993, and especially the European common foreign and security policy (CFSP) that was instituted by it, brought major changes to the conduct of EU external relations. Among others, the role of the External Service was for the first time specifically noted in the text of the Treaties. Article 20 stated:

> *The diplomatic and consular missions of the Member States and the Commission Delegations in third countries and international conferences, and their representations to international organisations, shall cooperate to ensure that the common positions and joint actions adopted by the [European] Council are complied with and implemented.*

In so far as they were to be associated with the implementation of the new CFSP, delegations would now take on a more proactive political role. This went much further than the previous European political cooperation arrangements and brought new challenges for staff in the field. CFSP was considerably strengthened later in the 1990s, when the Amsterdam Treaty created the new High Representative, and Javier Solana took up his duties in 1999. Together with the local EU Presidency, delegations have frequently been involved with Mr Solana's numerous missions to foreign policy hotspots around the world and play an important support role for him and the various

EU special envoys that have been appointed by the Council under the CFSP in recent years.

At the time of Maastricht, a deep reflection was under way in Brussels on external relations management and, in 1993, the Delors Commission created a new directorate-general, named 'DG IA' under the leadership of Günther Burghardt (later to become Head of Delegation in Washington), charged with making relations with third countries more effective and coherent. One of its first innovations was to create a directorate responsible for management of the delegations and their staff that would get to grips with the personnel management and training issues, equip the delegations with the necessary human and material resources for their new role under Maastricht and steer further development of what was now termed the 'unified' External Service.

Recognising the contribution that heads of delegations themselves could make to progress, DG IA also engaged in a serious dialogue with the Bureau of Heads of Delegation, a sounding board for the management and future development of the service made up of a group of HoD's elected at their biannual conference.

Tacis fisheries programme in the Caspian region

Security surprises in delegations

Security has become a growing concern for delegations and their staff. The time when offices were using villas impossible to secure (the former delegation office in Mali for example, and others), open to all kind of uninvited visitors, including animals of all kinds and sizes (lizards, snakes, etc.), is over.

While our security installations have been significantly improved in recent years, we often remain under-equipped compared to Member States' embassies, this situation being partly explained by limited budget resources. Indeed, the Commission rents most of its premises that are outside of the Union.

In Ethiopia, for example, the Commission took advantage of the fall of the Berlin wall and of the German unification to rent the former East German Embassy office in Addis.

This rather austere building was full of surprises including a 'safe room' at the ground floor, next to another room where the ambassador was receiving his visitors. In the 'safe room' an embassy employee was recording the conversation held in the other room.

When the security team came from Brussels, they had to demolish a lot of existing installations and to dismantle several of the inside cable installations. Today, only an old-style telephone set is a reminder and witness (hopefully silent) of that period!

Yves Gazzo

And so, the constant 'widening' of delegation coverage was now matched by efforts at 'deepening' the means to carry out their tasks. Steady progress was made on the staff mobility issues identified by the Fortesque report and, in 1996, David Williamson, a former Secretary-General of the Commission, produced a key document on the professionalisation of the service. This report recognised the need for the Commission to develop a homogenous body of people willing to serve overseas as part of a life-long diplomatic career, and its key recommendation — that officials working in the external relations field would in future be obliged to spend a part of their careers in overseas service — was adopted by the Commission later that year.

Local staff underpin the Commission's External Service

The buzz term today in most successful organisations is 'corporate knowledge'. Private firms, public organisations, large or small, recognise the distinct advantage that corporate knowledge can give to an organisation. Best-practice employers all over the world are looking for new incentives to keep their staff from moving on or from early retirement.

It was to the European Commission's credit that it decided years ago to employ local staff at all levels in its delegations. So as to retain the good quality staff it recruited, the Commission sought to ensure that the working conditions it offered were among the best on the market. In most Commission delegations

one can find locally employed staff such as economic advisers, press and information specialists, project managers, researchers, IT experts and top-level support staff. In recent years local staff have played a vital role in ensuring the success of the devolution exercise and in the crucial work of preparing the accession countries for membership.

This means that while officials come and go on their various postings, the Commission can rest easy knowing that the work of the delegations can continue to run smoothly. The administration also knows that when new officials arrive *in situ*, they can rely on the professionalism of the local staff for their corporate memory and local knowledge whether on political or economic matters, project management, key government, business and academic contacts, and the best logistical support. More importantly, local staff help to school officials in the myriad cultural, linguistic and social norms of that particular country or region. It's a win-win situation for the Commission because, apart from these natural advantages, local staff costs are usually far less than those involved with the posting of an official from Brussels.

This is perhaps one of the telling differences between the External Service of the European Commission and the foreign ministries of many Member States. It is no accident, therefore, that officials from the various Member State embassies often make a point of calling, early on in their posting, on the Commission delegations to meet their respective counterparts, including, where appropriate, local staff. It is an easy and sure way for them to get input that helps them develop a 'feel' for their new environment.

The Commission is by and large a very good employer. It offers numerous incentives and good working conditions for local staff all round the world. In earlier days, they did not always receive the recognition they deserve. But as the External Service has expanded

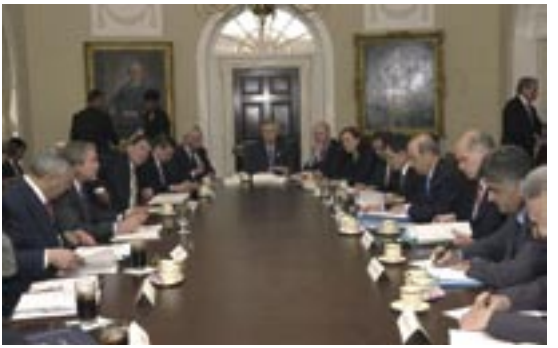
and undergone various reforms, much more attention has been given to their role. And while there are always areas that can be improved, there is today a real dialogue between the Commission and local staff representatives.

In the coming years, the External Service will undergo yet more significant change as the new Constitution takes shape and, as ever, local staff will play a critical part in ensuring that delegations are properly equipped to do the job.

Roger Camilleri
of the Australia delegation is Chairman of the 'Outside the EU' Section of the Staff Committee

The Williamson report provided the foundation for a new administrative culture within the Commission's services. Contrary to what had gone before, staff now saw that their future advancement depended among other things on their willingness to be mobile and, in the years since 1996, there has been a very significant and positive change in the way in which overseas service is regarded. At the same time, opportunities at headquarters for staff with delegation experience rose steadily and, by 2003, a large number of management posts in the External Relations, Development and EuropeAid DGs in Brussels were manned by such personnel.

Reflecting the continuing rapid development of, and new level of interest in, the External Service of the Commission produced new policy documents in the form of communications to the Council and Parliament each year



2003: EU-US summit meeting in Washington

in the period 1996–2003, covering all aspects of its management and development ([4])

These communications were based on a thorough and serious analysis of the management and development of the service, including its role, priorities and resources, and resulted in substantial modifications to the delegation network and its operations.

([4]) The report 'Longer-term requirements of the External Service', also known as the 'Williamson Report', 27 March 1996 (SEC(96)554).
The communication 'Staff reorganisation and rationalisation of the network', 27 March 1996 (SEC(96)554/2).
The communication 'Development of the External Service of the Commission', 8 April 1997 (SEC(97)605).
The communication 'The Commission's External Service', 22 July 1998 (SEC(98)12619).
The communication 'The development of the External Service', covering training, rotation, the functioning of the Joint Relex Service and devolution, adopted on 21 April 1999 (COM(1999) 180).
The communication 'The External Service' (COM(2000) 40).
The communication 'The Development of the External Service' (COM(2001) 381).
The communication on the evolution of the External Service (Doc. C(2003)4163 of 14 November 2003), aiming to consolidate and harmonise the network through new openings, upgrades, changes of names and the necessary redeployments.

As the External Service has evolved, so the experiences of the heads of delegation have varied. This publication attests to that truism, which it is nonetheless particularly useful, essential even, to record as testimony to the ground we have covered.

If I have been asked to contribute, it is no doubt because I can bring the perspective of a woman doing the job in an industrialised, G8 country. This is altogether a rare thing, given that female heads of delegation are few and far between. My first observation on the past, therefore, must also be our first priority for the future: let us not wait for the young female civil servants now entering the delegations to rise to a level at which they can apply for the top job before we take action. We must inform and mobilise the women currently occupying managerial positions. A grown-up External Service needs, amongst other things, more women as heads of delegation. I am not saying this out of some airy-fairy notion of equal opportunities; I speak from my own personal experience in the field. A female ambassador lends Europe a new face in so many situations and brings an extra dimension to a job that has evolved as external policies have diversified.

During my time in Canada I witnessed, amongst other things, the spectacular emergence of the ESDP and the strengthening of the CFSP and saw them combine with commercial and cooperation policies in many areas. My second observation is also the main achievement we must hold on to in the future: the role played by heads of Commission delegations (or Union delegations, as they will become) depends largely on the soundness and effectiveness of their action, which is determined by their knowledge of the external policies, and their know-how as one of the EU's heads of mission.

In this respect, it is worth noting that the move from Commission delegations to Union delegations will simply acknowledge what is already a fact in the host countries.

Danièle Smadja
Head of Delegation in Canada, 1998–2002

As ever, Parliament was also very active, playing an increasingly significant part in monitoring the expansion and professionalisation of the service and passing an important resolution in 2000, proposing the establishment of a common (European) diplomacy which included a call that a new College of European diplomacy be set up to train professionals from the EU institutions and from Member States in Community policies and in diplomatic methods (the 'Galeote' report, named after its rapporteur, MEP Galeote Quecedo). Commissioner Chris Patten, responsible for external relations, welcomed the report in a speech at the European Parliament on 4 September 2000.

Recently, a wide-ranging review of management of the service was carried out as part of the overall reform of the Commission. Neil Kinnock, Vice-President of the Commission responsible for administrative reform, and Chris Patten instructed an inter-services ad hoc group to draw up a project for reforming the Service.

The group coordinated the major internal reflection process that ensued, which culminated in the measures contained in the December 2002 decision on administrative reform ([5]). These consolidate unification of the External Service, clarify the principles of action by delegations, and provide a sound method of career planning in the Service.

The Prodi Commission on taking office in 1999 committed itself to rationalising the central services, so that the new directorates-general — the External Relations DG and the Development DG — could focus on policy and programming in their respective areas. Moreover, a new directorate-general — the EuropeAid Co-operation Office — was set up specifically to administer development cooperation worldwide. The new Commission also began a radical programme aimed at improving the quality and delivery of cooperation programmes.

([5]) Doc. C(2002)5370 of 17 December 2002.

Simply do it

In early 1982 I was asked by my ministry to enter the newly established 'Troika' Secretariat of European Political Cooperation (EPC). Three lower-ranking diplomats, each from a past, present and future presidency, were assigned to work in the capital which assumed the European presidency. This was back in the time when political coordination within the European Community was still fully taken care of by foreign ministries. I subsequently went through three stimulating presidencies — in the Danish, the German and finally in the Greek Foreign Ministry. Integrating diplomats from another country, even when they came from a fellow EC Member State, was at this juncture very innovative and it was not always easy for traditional diplomacy to accept a foreigner in the inner sanctum of the political department.

Despite the interesting time I had, I came up with quite a critical assessment, concluding that EPC organised in this way had no future and that decision-making was too cumbersome and inefficient and arguing that an integrated approach was necessary if the EC really wanted to become a political actor to match its economic clout. I did put forward a couple of concrete suggestions for early improvements, including the need to move the EPC Secretariat to Brussels and to improve selection criteria and working conditions.

The political director in my ministry must have been close to a heart attack when he saw this, and I was told that my views were not shared by my hierarchy. As such, this was not a drama. I was ready to lose the battle as long as I did not lose the war. My report disappeared into a safe, of value only for historians or the shredders. I wrote an article, very academic and with a lot of footnotes which a foreign policy review was eager to publish. Being an outspoken but also a loyal diplomat I asked my ministry for authorisation. The paper came

back stamped 'This is not the view of this house. Publication not appropriate'. Fair enough. These things happen. I thought that the political department was a bit too immobile for my taste and agreed to an offer I received in mid-1984 to move to the Bundestag, as foreign policy advisor.

A couple of weeks later, I received a phone call from a friend in the European Affairs Department. He told me that the minister had asked to prepare the German position in the Dooge Committee (which prepared what was later called the Single Act) and that the political department had not yet made a valid contribution on EPC. Rumours about my report had reached the EC directorate. 'Do you have a copy you can forward to me informally?' my friend asked. Of course I could and was happy to do so.

A couple of weeks later, my friend called me again: 'Your report was well received by the minister. It was exactly what we needed. Your position is now the German position in the Dooge talks.'
'Including this idea of an integrated foreign policy?' I asked.
'As a final goal, yes.'
Amazing how positions can change within a couple of months!
Or was it perhaps that some officials had no clue about what the politicians really wanted?

Looking back from today's perspective, my optimism in the early 1980s was rather naïve. It is true that common foreign and security policy has developed tremendously in terms of procedures and means over the last 20 years and the draft Constitution, if approved, will improve CFSP further. But we are still some way from a truly integrated approach to foreign policy.

European foreign ministers very often speak so convincingly about the need for the European Union to become a powerful actor on the international scene, but we have some way to go before we match the

stage that we have achieved for the euro or the single market. What, after all, makes foreign policy so special that it can only be carried out by a national State or through intergovernmental cooperation, which invariably bends and snaps under stress whenever more specific national interests emerge?

The euro clearly demonstrates the link between integrated economic action on the one hand and effective policy guidance on the other. Besides, globalisation dictates that concrete integrated action on specific policies is, in substance, at least as relevant as foreign policy coordination itself. European policy has become domestic policy and in a global village, action between neighbours seeks its own specific solutions: trade, economic cooperation, reconstruction, development aid or assistance, migration, transport, research and energy, the fight against international crime or terrorism, even defence – all these areas directly concern our citizens. Let us address them one by one.

Bernhard Zepter
Head of Delegation in Tokyo

Known as 'deconcentration', this involves the full devolution of responsibility for implementation of assistance programmes to the field. Deconcentration to the delegations working in developing and transition countries has implied a major redeployment of staff from headquarters, and the reinforcement by other staff. In addition, greater use is being made of contracted specialists placed in delegation offices. It must be remembered that the EU is by far the largest provider of official development assistance in the world, accounting for around half of the world's total. More than EUR 35 billion were committed in 2002, of which the largest single contribution was more than

EUR 6.5 billion from the EU budget, administered by the European Commission.

Apart from cooperation personnel, the Trade DG has in recent years deployed more officials to delegations, as more countries expand their trade with Europe and join the WTO, and a number of DG's with important third-country agreements or programmes to implement, such as justice and home affairs and research and technology, are placing staff overseas. At the same time, there is a small but growing number of officials detached from Member States' services being placed in delegations.

9/11 at the delegation in New York

It is undoubtedly true that 9/11 took everyone by surprise. The European Commission delegation in New York was preparing itself for the normal hectic start of the 56th session of the UN General Assembly and the anticipated arrivals of Commissioners Chris Patten and Gunter Verheugen to take part in EU-15 as well as EC bilateral meetings with the foreign ministers of the world. The first of the two planes struck the twin towers at 08.46 on that bright autumnal day in 2001. There was no evacuation of the UN building and many diplomats did not know for more than an hour that anything had taken place. Ambassador John B. Richardson brought immediate calm to the situation when the EC delegation eventually gathered at its premises, despite the chaos that reigned outside.

Hundreds of Europeans died together with the US and other citizens at the twin towers. I was asked to coordinate assistance coming from the EU to New York. Around 1 000 trained personnel, made up primarily of search and rescue, forensic, medical and psychological assistance teams from all 15 Member States, were

mobilised through the Community mechanism for coordination of intervention in the case of emergencies, ready to move within hours to New York. Ambassador John B. Richardson and the Belgian presidency quickly submitted this offer in a letter to New York Mayor Rudolf Giuliani, declaring that 'Europe stands united with the people of New York'. The offer was not taken up at the time, though European solidarity was demonstrated in a thousand other ways, and continues to date.

George Cunningham
Head of Press and Public Affairs, New York, 2000–03

The average size of many delegations has therefore increased very substantially in the past few years, and what were once relatively small 'family' missions are now large operations, often housed in more than one building, with 50–100 staff working within them.

By the end of 2003, the delegation network, now accredited to more than 150 countries, was manned by more than 5 000 staff, making it one of the largest European diplomatic services.

The External Service had come a very long way indeed from the early days of Monnet's ECSC and the avant-garde sent out to Africa in the early 1960s. Looking back, it could hardly have been otherwise, for while the story of its development is somewhat unique, the spectacular growth in the Service at the end of the day reflects the emergence of the European Union as a fundamental part in the life of Europeans at home, and the concomitant need to ensure that the collective aspirations, policies and values of what will, after this year's EU enlargement, be 450 million people, are asserted in the wider world.

Looking forward

By mid-2004, the EU will encompass 25 Member States, and further enlargements are on the horizon. The EU has for some time been the largest market, trader and aid donor in the world, and in recent years has become an important international player in many other areas, such as migration. The trappings of international presence are thus in place. The need and wish for Europe to be such an actor dates from Monnet's time, although governments have not always found it easy to create a satisfactory institutional response.

But once EU countries had single trade and agricultural policies, once they neared completion of a single market and created a single currency, in short, pooled sovereignty in a whole range of crucial areas, the argument for a truly European diplomacy to match all this became, for many, the inevitable next step. This need has been reinforced by the drive towards globalisation and the new security concerns, which call for a fully coordinated and comprehensive response across the board, whether it be in security cooperation, law enforcement or trade and development policy. And so there is now a new attempt at the European level to provide a united face in direct correlation with the EU's growing impact on international affairs.

Officials and other staff whose contribution makes delegations effective

And EU diplomats, whether they be in foreign ministries and embassies or in Commission headquarters and delegations have over time come to share the reflex of a European response to foreign policy issues and dilemmas, in the realisation that there is a specific European interest into which national policies should be integrated. Hardly a day passes for example when a Commission head of delegation will not have some form of contact or coordination with the Member State ambassador representing the EU presidency. Acting together in this way over the years has produced a modern European diplomatic culture which promises much for the future.

Addressing heads of delegations at their conference in September 2003, Commission President Romano Prodi summed up the role of the delegations today:

> *The Maastricht Treaty entrusts the diplomatic representatives of the Member States and the delegations with the task of representing the EU in non-member countries and international organisations. This has effectively made you — … who put the EU's common foreign and security policy into practise abroad — indispensable instruments in the EU's expanding role on the international stage of our globalised world.*

Mr Prodi was speaking as the European Convention was being discussed by leaders at the Intergovernmental Conference. Those discussions are continuing and it is too early now to predict the outcome.

However, clear recommendations aimed at radical improvements in the efficiency and consistency of external action for the newly enlarged EU of 25 are introduced in the draft Constitution put forward by the Convention, centring on the creation of an EU minister for foreign affairs. According to the draft Constitution, the new EU foreign minister would be one of the vice-presidents of the Commission, conducting the Union's CFSP and all other aspects of external action, such as trade, development, migration, etc.

Backing him/her up would be a joint service, the 'European External Action Service', which according to the Convention proposal would have a leading role in implementing policy and would be made up of staff currently working in the Commission, the European Council Secretariat and national diplomatic services in the Member States.

The Union delegations would also replace the rotating EU presidency in the host country and as such be responsible for coordination with Member State embassies.

If the Convention's proposals should be agreed, they would thus involve far-reaching changes in the political role and management of the External Service, and a foreign service of the EU as a whole would come into being.

Whatever the final shape of the Constitution, 50 years on, and a world away from the first tentative steps taken abroad by the founding fathers, the Commission delegations today provide an extensive and well-established human and material foundation upon which to further build Europe's overseas representation in the 21st century. Their achievement, often in the face of considerable adversity, has indeed been to play a central part in taking both the idea and reality of European Union to a world hungry for its presence.

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