



Editorial Comment

The Case for a Diplomatic Academy of the European Union

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I. External Challenges and Training Needs

Whatever views one may have about the ultimate scope of the EU as global actor, there is no doubt that its external responsibilities and activities have been growing fast over the last decade. The complete overhaul of relations with the central and eastern European countries, the establishment of new relations with the successor states of the Soviet Union, the dramatic developments in the Balkans, the Uruguay Round, the Barcelona process and the renegotiation of the Lomé system are only the most important of a huge range of external challenges which has drastically increased pressure on the EU institutions to deliver policy responses and ensure their effective implementation. Recent and future treaty changes are likely to increase this pressure even further. The Treaty of Amsterdam has given the Union new possibilities to take action on international aspects of justice and home affairs and the Treaty of Nice is likely to formally enlarge the scope of EU action in the field security policy along the lines of the Helsinki decisions of December 1999.

The continuing debate about institutional reforms and necessary treaty changes shows that both the EU institutions and the Member States are aware of the need to better equip the Union's foreign affairs system to meet these rapidly increasing challenges. Yet there is one dimension which tends to be largely neglected in the reform debate: The demands which the Union's growing external responsibilities put on the training of EU officials in Brussels and abroad who have to prepare decisions on international issues, negotiate at the international level, monitor international developments and represent together with the Member States' missions – in hundreds of posts abroad – the external image of the EU. Although the Union does not yet in a formal sense have a 'foreign service' it already exists in practice in more than embryonic form,

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scattered over several Commission and Council Directorate-Generals and representations in most countries of the world. And it matters: The EU's external posture and its effectiveness as an international actor depend to a large extent on the professionalism, the knowledge and the skills of the EU officials working in the areas of EU external relations.

During the last decade major efforts have been undertaken by the European Commission to provide better training to those members of staff working in the Directorate-Generals dealing with external activity (external relations (Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)), trade, development and enlargement) and in diplomatic posts abroad. Yet the training provided is still much shorter in length, more fragmentary and far less systematic than the training most national foreign ministries provide for their own staff. In addition, training is still not an essential part of career planning and professional development. It has also not yet become a necessary pre-condition for promotion and senior management tasks in the sphere of external relations. Officials from other Directorate-Generals can still be transferred to important posts in the sphere of external relations without having gone through a specific training in their new area of responsibility. The Commission's spending on external service training is still well below 1 per cent of total salary expenditure which compares unfavourably to the 2.5 per cent to 3.3 per cent which according to statistics national civil services spend on the training of their officials. The training situation for officials of the Secretariat-General of the Council of the EU is no better.

The EU can clearly not afford this situation to last. Only a new and much more comprehensive approach to training of external relations staff will enable the EU institutions to meet growing demands and highest standards of professionalism in representing the interests of more than 370 million EU citizens internationally.

II. The Institutions' Response

There are signs that the Union institutions are now taking this challenge more seriously than in the past. One positive element is the new emphasis which the proposed Kinnock reforms of the European Commission place on training as an integral part of the career structure of Commission officials. The Kinnock package not only provides for a significant increase of funding for training from the year 2001 onwards, but also for the introduction of obligatory elements of training at various stages of the career.¹ Although there are no specific

¹ See COM(2000) 10 final, 'Reform of the Commission', vol. 1, part IV.2, and vol. 2, chapter IV.XIV.

proposals on training in the external relations sphere it is evident that the implementation of the new global approach to training could provide valuable opportunities for the external relations ('RELEX') Directorate-Generals. There can be no doubt that the professionalization of the Commission's external service would be greatly helped if its members would come to regard training as a natural and continuing element of their professional development and know from the outset that not submitting to training requirements will have a negative impact on their promotion prospects.

The European Parliament (EP) has also started to turn its attention to this issue. In its resolution on the CFSP of 5 May 1999 the Parliament suggested in preparation for the gradual build-up of a 'common European diplomacy' for the implementation of the CFSP the establishment of a *College of Diplomacy of the European Union*.² This idea is further developed in the highly interesting report on a 'common European diplomacy' currently prepared by MEP Gerardo Galeote Quecedo for the Committee on External Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy.³ In this document the proposal was made to set up a *College of European Diplomacy* to ensure that EU officials are given not only technical training in Community policies, but also a full-blown diplomatic training. This is described as an essential step for the creation of a genuine European diplomatic corps capable of dealing with the increased challenges.

On the side of the Member States and the Council the training issue has been approached from a different angle. Following an earlier agreement reached in bilateral Franco-German consultations on the need of providing common diplomatic training for junior diplomats, France and Germany tabled in May 1999 at an informal meeting of the Council working group 'Training' a non-paper proposing the creation of a *European Diplomatic Academy*. Since no fixed location was proposed and because some delegations felt the creation of an 'Academy' to be too ambitious and potentially expensive this project was later downgraded to the proposal of a *European Diplomatic Programme* building upon existing resources and training orientations. Unlike the EP's 'College' project the Franco-German proposal is primarily targeted at the training of national junior diplomats, although the courses should also be open to Commission, Council and EP officials. Its aims include the creation of personal networks among junior diplomats which can contribute to the creation of a European identity in foreign policy, the raising of national diplomatic consciousness with regard to the specifically European dimension of diplomatic practice in EU Member States and the raising of the level of preparation for

² OJ C 297 of 1 October 1999, p. 223, paragraph 53.

³ Draft report: European Parliament document no. PE 285.625. The report is to be adopted in September 2000.

European diplomatic tasks by the provision of a European teaching environment outside of the strictly national setting with a high intellectual level of analysis. It is envisaged that participants should be sensitised to national and European interests through practical case studies and to create a sense of common European purpose through training in joint problem-solving.

III. The Steps to be Taken

As a result of different initiatives described above there is now clearly no lack of projects and ideas. The question for the Union institutions must now be how to ensure that the momentum is not lost and in which direction to pursue for the implementation of at least some of the useful and necessary ideas which are on the table.

The first and rather obvious step to take would be to ensure that the whole diplomatic training issue should lead to a single project. There can be no doubt that a common diplomatic training for EU officials and national diplomats would not only make a powerful contribution to the emergence of a common European diplomatic practice and culture but that it would also provide important financial and infrastructural economies of scale. There is little point for each of the three institutions to pursue projects of their own if a single comprehensive project could potentially satisfy the different needs which all three have rightly identified. It would probably be useful for both Council and Commission to fully associate the EP with their planning on the training issue because they are most likely sooner or later to need the Parliament's budgetary approval for the implementation of these plans.

The second and potentially more controversial step should be to go back to the idea, prematurely given up by the Council last year, to establish a *European Diplomatic Academy*.⁴ The *Diplomatic Programme* concept currently under discussion the Council is based on a system of course modules which would be offered by various institutions (EU institutions, national foreign ministries or training centres, academic institutions) in different Member States. This would most likely mean a series of courses scattered over different places and affected by coordination problems and considerable differences in teaching methods and priorities. The participating institutions would also be more likely than not to base the training modules on already existing ones which would limit innovations in methods and content. As a result the training would lack the coherence, quality and spirit of originality which a truly European diplomatic training requires. A purpose established *Academy*, on the contrary, would provide an ideal framework for an innovative, coherent and intense

⁴ Or as MEP Galeote Quecedo calls it – a 'College of European Diplomacy'.

training environment and atmosphere. It should ideally be located away from Brussels and the other capitals so that national and EU officials would not be not distracted by contact with their daily service duties and personal environment. Most major companies also prefer external centres for intense special training for senior management precisely for this reason. The effectiveness of specialized training can be considerably improved by a secluded environment which gives maximum effect to the dynamics of a training situation and group.

The most important objection which can be raised against the establishment of an *Academy* instead of a mere *Programme* is that of the resources needed to establish such a new institution. Yet this objection would lose much of its weight if – and this should be the third step – the purpose of its establishment would be broadened. It should in fact not be regarded as a training centre for EU officials or national diplomats but for all of them together. This on its own would potentially mean hundreds of course participants per year. In addition, the *Academy* could be used for the training of diplomats from applicant countries on issues of EU external relations as a preparation for accession. It would certainly be in the EU's interest to introduce external service staff from applicant countries as early as possible into the major EU external policies (economic and political) and the mechanics of decision-making of the EU in these areas. The Tampere European Council of October 1999 decided to set up a 'European Police Academy' providing not only advanced training to police officers from the Member States but also to those of applicant countries. The training needs in the sphere of EU external relations are certainly at least as important as those in the area of policing.

The fourth step should be to base the work of the *Academy* on a permanent evaluation of needs of training needs and the impact of training provided. In order to ensure a maximum of efficiency and in order to justify increased training expenditure a comprehensive system of evaluation of needs is necessary. This should comprise a detailed task analysis for each category of posts, self-evaluation of necessary skills and knowledge by members of staff already in post, a systematic analysis and comparison of the training needs and priorities defined in the EU institutions and the foreign ministries of the Member States and – before sending members of staff to training – an individual 'profile' analysis in order to design an individual training schedule. As regards the impact assessment each training module should comprise a set of clear objectives responding to specific needs. There should be two 'tests' on the impact of each training module: One at the end of the training module and one a few months later after the trainees have been working in their new posts through a questionnaire. The results of these tests should be used to change, reorientate or even replace entire training modules as soon as possible.

The *Diplomatic Academy* would have the unique opportunity to be able to draw on the comprehensive experiences of 15 national foreign services in

training their personnel. It can also draw on the training experiences of a number of non-governmental European training institutions with a proven record of practitioners' training in certain areas, such as the European Institute of Public Administration and the College of Europe. 'Best training practices' should be identified and analyzed on a comparative basis in order to achieve the highest possible standard for the *Academy's* own programme. This would involve, for instance, the use of new models of simulation techniques and making use of the best possible trainers from practice and academia. As a result the *European Diplomatic Academy* could become the centre piece of an emerging common EU 'external service culture'. Through a permanent identification of 'best practices' in training and the use of innovative elements its work could serve as a triggering factor for the development of common external service practices and a 'common culture' for EU and Member State officials in external services. This would facilitate the build-up of common diplomatic representations and add to the coherence of the Union's external representation and image. It would also be a powerful contribution to the strengthening of the EU as an international actor.