

## Chapter 9

# Portugal and the Netherlands: Punching Above Their Weight?

Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira, Alena Vysotskaya G. Vieira  
and Louise van Schaik

### **9.1 Portuguese and Dutch Foreign Policies: General Assumptions and Orientations**

The present chapter shall analyse the evolving participation of both Portugal and the Netherlands in the European External Action Service (EEAS). To this end, it shall examine the common assumptions and dilemmas underlying the foreign policy of the two states that have been conditioning their respective evolving positions vis-à-vis the EEAS in its early years. It then proceeds with teasing out the Portuguese and Dutch preferences, options and attitudes in the EEAS purview. At this point, the chapter explores the issue of leadership of the EU foreign policy as viewed from Lisbon and The Hague before discussing the Dutch concern regarding consular affairs which stands in contrast with the Portuguese perspective on the matter. The final section draws out a number of general points that emerge from the analysis made of the converging and diverging views and positions of these two EU member states towards the developing system of EU diplomacy.

Based on general foreign policy orientation and historical background, one can say that Portugal and the Netherlands share common features, assumptions and dilemmas, against the backdrop of which converging views on different aspects and issues of the EEAS should be understood. Besides sharing ‘smallness’ in size with all that is implied in terms of (limited) resources base and dependence on external actors, the two countries have a colonial past and have been traditionally adopting an eminently Atlanticist foreign policy stance. The need to overcome various weaknesses inherent to their size and their quest for international status tends to foster, among national authorities, a common natural perception of the EEAS as a possible complement to national diplomatic services. This is particularly so because the EU is seen as a power ‘amplifier’ and multiplier and its power of norm diffusion to promote a ‘better world’ is considered an important feature of the EU’s ‘actorness’. The continued commitment exhibited by both Lisbon and The Hague to the Union’s external action and their involvement in the remits of European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) should be understood as attempts by these states to use European integration to leverage a range of interests and preferred options

that would be otherwise inaccessible for countries of their size and might; in other words to ‘punch above their weight’. Since the self-perception of smallness is more pronounced on the Portuguese side compared to the Dutch one, such disposition of punching above the weight gains particular visibility in the Portuguese positioning towards the EEAS.

Although the Netherlands is a founding member of the European Coal and Steel Community, while Portugal only acceded to the then European Community in 1986, it is possible to identify similar experiences regarding the dynamics of ‘Europeanization’ (see the Introduction to this volume for definitions and the conceptual framework adopted in the analysis). Both countries can look back at long-standing trajectories of participation in the European project, which has involved critical periods of holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU in several occasions. In this way, both Lisbon and The Hague have had various opportunities to attempt ‘uploading’ their national priorities and preferences, notably in the realm of CFSP. Furthermore, they have also been largely exposed to both ‘downloading’ and ‘crossloading’ dynamics.

This integration experience creates a somewhat paradoxical position towards the EU. On the one hand, in both countries, there is a considerable overlap between the identification of the ‘national’ and ‘European’ foreign policy issues. On the other hand, Portugal and the Netherlands’ ability to ‘punch above their weight’ has been translating itself into continuous attempts to make their voice heard in the evolution of the European project, in general and in the EC/EU’s foreign policy, in particular. While cultivating the widespread metaphor of ‘bridge-builder’ in the official foreign policy discourse (Ferreira-Pereira, 2007; van Schaik, 2013), the two states have become accustomed to have their niches of expertise and specialized contributions to the CFSP/CSDP recognized in Brussels.

Finally, both Portugal and the Netherlands are founding members of NATO and have a strong Atlanticist leaning as part of their foreign policy tradition, culture and identity. In the case of Portugal, this has had an impact on the country’s involvement in the CFSP dynamics since the early days of its European integration experience (Ferreira-Pereira, 2014). The Atlanticist dimension would lead one to expect to see these countries insisting on specific ‘red lines’ in terms of the identification of the more appropriate jurisdiction of the new diplomatic system of the EU and for the transfer of the tasks from the national to the EEAS level. This assumption is indeed supported by the fact that although the EU foreign policy and the EEAS does not receive much attention in the media of the two countries, some specific topics are followed consistently and critically like relations with the Middle East, in the case of the Netherlands.

Interestingly enough, despite the above-mentioned commonalities, Portugal and the Netherlands have never developed a particular form of partnership, alliance or grouping within the EU. Indeed, one could easily highlight differences between the two states. For instance, the position of Portugal as a Southern member state and a ‘net consumer’ of the Union’s budget contrasts with the position of the Netherlands as North-Western state and a ‘net contributor’. Such differences

drive them towards defending diverse EU foreign policy priorities and ways of functioning of the EEAS, though this does not explain why cooperation between the two states hardly ever takes place.

### *9.1.1 Portugal*

From the beginning of its formal participation in the European integration process, Portuguese authorities have perceived the EU as a platform allowing the country to amplify its voice on the international stage after the loss of its empire. On the other hand, EC membership was expected to enable the country to re-engage with the world community and enhance its international standing as the organization itself expanded its horizons and connections, notably by means of the then European Political Cooperation (EPC) and, later, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Since the inception of CFSP, the Portuguese authorities have become somewhat successful in ‘uploading’ major national foreign policy interests onto the European foreign policy agenda. This became particularly noticeable during Portugal’s tenures as President of the Council of Ministers, in 1992, 2000 and 2007. The organization of both the second EU–Africa Summit and the first EU–Brazil Summit in 2007 constituted clear examples of this. In this way, Portugal made a tangible impact on the institutionalization and reinforcement of the EU’s Strategic Partnerships, while strengthening the country’s imprint on EU international relations. The third presidency was also marked by a strong desire to reaffirm the country’s steady commitment to the Union, as reflected in the successful signing of the Treaty of Lisbon; and the vigorous profile of a ‘global Portugal’ which added a layer to the EU’s endeavours to boost its international influence (Ferreira-Pereira, 2008).

That being said, the authorities in Lisbon have always rejected communitarization in the realm of CFSP. From their point of view, the evolution of the CFSP should be able to accommodate national specificities stemming from the existence of privileged relations with former colonies in the African continent and Latin America which gave Portugal a comparative advantage over other countries. Cultivating its relationship with both Lusophone African countries and Brazil, would allow Portugal to move away from its peripheral condition in continental Europe and assert itself as a bridge between Europe, Africa and Latin America. Another important idiosyncratic element of the Portuguese foreign policy identity is the centrality of the Atlantic Alliance to national defence policy; and the weight ascribed to the maintenance of good relations with the United States. Both aspects account for Portugal’s concern with paying due respect to the prime role of NATO and the United States in European collective defence. Accordingly, the appropriate process by means of which the political integration process, encompassing the establishment of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), should be pursued is one that should be incremental, compatible with a leading role for NATO

in collective defence, and flexible enough not to impinge on the specificities of the member states' foreign, security and defence policies (Ferreira-Pereira, 2007).

Portugal has been contributing to the ESDP/CSDP since its inception and has been prioritizing it in its official foreign policy strategy, thereby conveying the ambition to position itself within the group of the countries taking the lead in the advancement of the European security/defence project (Ferreira-Pereira, 2014). Yet, the evolving ESDP/CSDP has also been appraised politically in light of its impact on the country's sovereignty (Ferreira-Pereira, 2014), which translates into the ability to define and conduct a national foreign and security policy. Hence Portugal has traditionally opposed both the emergence of a supranational EU and the institutionalization of a European decision-making structure based on a *directoire* within which the country would have no space at all. Such rejection would influence considerably the Portuguese posture on the development of the EEAS.

As a result of the general elections that took place in June 2011 against the backdrop of a financial aid programme entailing stringent austerity measures, there was a shift in the government forces. The Social Democrat Pedro Passos Coelho took office as Prime Minister, while the Conservative Paulo Portas became the Minister of State and of Foreign Affairs.<sup>1</sup> While, from its inception, the views within the governmental coalition have not been fully consensual on such critical issues as economic and fiscal policies, the stance regarding the country's European strategy, including participation in the EEAS, did not differ fundamentally. Incidentally, there was no specific reference to the EEAS in the new government's programme. Corroborating the traditional rhetoric of the general approach to the European integration process, it was asserted that it was of crucial importance: 'To secure the participation of Portugal in the frontline of the European construction ... To develop a policy of diplomatic recruitment and active support of applications to international posts that are relevant for the national interest and the prestige of Portugal in the world' (Programme of the XIX Constitutional Government).

### 9.1.2 *The Netherlands*

The Netherlands has a long tradition of linking international diplomatic presence to promoting Dutch products and values. Since the seventeenth century, the notion of the 'merchant and the vicar' characterized the image of Dutch diplomacy. Even though since then the relative size of the Dutch economy has shrunk, the Netherlands still ranks seventeenth in terms of the size of its economy.<sup>2</sup> It is a large investor in third countries and has an open export-dependent economy (Knapen et al., 2010).

---

1 He was substituted by Rui Machete in July 2013.

2 According to the CIA World Factbook of 2011 and comparable lists of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Promoting 'Merchant Holland' has regained importance in the current economic crisis. Nevertheless, the Netherlands is also still keen to continue with a long tradition of promoting values such as human rights and the rule of law. The Hague likes to refer to itself as the legal capital of the world and is the hometown of the Peace Palace, several tribunals, Europol and Eurojust and the International Criminal Court. Another element of the Dutch 'vicar attitude' is the emphasis on the need for EU conditions for enlargement to be 'strict and fair' (Government of the Netherlands, 2011b).

More in general, the Netherlands does not consider itself as a small country and has convictions and positions on a wide range of foreign policy issues. The contribution to development cooperation and international missions as well the ambition level of the armed forces is still relatively high, despite severe budget cuts in recent years. This has not prevented the exclusion of the Netherlands from G20 meetings, and the country having decided recently to share its Executive Board seat in the IMF with Belgium to make room for emerging economies. The government entering office in the autumn of 2012 has restated its support for European cooperation in general, and for a larger degree of EU involvement in foreign policy and defence matters in particular. This can be seen – at least partially – as a compensation for the perceived loss of Dutch international influence. On the European continent, the Netherlands is one of the most pro-transatlantic countries in its orientation.

With regard to the Dutch position on European integration, the 'no vote' on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 can be considered as a turning point. From then onwards, the Dutch government changed its attitude from being a frontrunner in the integration process towards a more critical and reluctant stance. Points of criticism recurring in Dutch public debates on the EU include the Netherlands paying a relatively high share of EU budget compared to what it receives, EU institutions being overly bureaucratic and keen on generating red tape, inefficiency of having the European Parliament travelling to Strasbourg for its plenary sessions, transfers and guarantees for South European member states in the Eurocrisis and transfer of competences on an ever-increasing number of issues to Brussels. Dutch citizens and politicians emphasize, in particular, that healthcare, education and pensions are topics in which Brussels should not intervene (Clingendael, 2012).

During the election campaign in August and September 2012, Europe was a leading topic. Even though the outcome was not outspokenly Eurosceptical the big winners, the Conservative Liberals (VVD) and the Labour Party (PvdA) take a rather low profile on EU matters. Prime Minister Rutte of the largest VVD Party has, for instance, indicated that he is interested in prospective thinking (*vergezichten*) on European integration. The Eurocritical tone is likely to resurface in 2014 in light of the European Parliament elections. Therefore, it can be expected that the position of the Netherlands towards the EEAS is situated in the context of a slightly Eurocritical tone, for example with regard to an expansion of tasks and budget for the service.

## 9.2 The Evolving European Diplomatic Structure Viewed from Lisbon and The Hague

The position of both Portugal and the Netherlands within the developing EEAS evinces a number of commonalities worthy of exploration. First, there is the endeavour towards the restructuring of national diplomatic structures – between 2010 and 2013. However, the establishment of the EU's delegation network was neither considered as justification, nor as a solution to challenges facing national diplomacies in the context of a reduced size of the national diplomatic systems. Secondly, both countries have developed a generally supportive view on the EEAS. However, this general position has been accompanied by the 'fear of a *directoire*' as well as with an ensuing critical stance on the information flow between Brussels and the national capitals.

### 9.2.1 Restructuring National Diplomatic Structures

Since 2011, the two countries have been undertaking restructuring of their national diplomatic services. In Portugal, indicative of this was the merging of several programmes and the reduction of the network of diplomatic representation. For instance, the Portuguese Institute for Development Support (IPAD) was merged with the Camões Institute, leading to the establishment of 'Camões – Institute of Cooperation and Language'. And, since 2011, seven embassies (Malta, Andorra, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bosnia and Kenya) and five vice-consulates have been closed down.<sup>3</sup> Given the identification of the increase in exports as a foreign policy imperative, the Portuguese Investment and Trade Agency (AICEP), has seen its status elevated to a key foreign policy actor, while its own external representation network was merged with the diplomatic network. New embassies were opened in Abu Dhabi, Doha and Singapore, with the aim of promoting the country's economic interests in emerging prosperous regions of the world (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 2012a).

In the Netherlands, in several rounds of cuts that took place in 2012 and 2013, adding up to a 55 million euro reduction of the budget for diplomatic representation, the number of diplomats was brought back from over 3,000 to 2,500 in 2014; further cuts of 40 million euros were foreseen on a total budget of 760 million euros. Several diplomatic missions were closed and new closures were expected. This is commensurate with a considerable reduction of development funding, bringing the Dutch ODA contribution from 0.7 per cent to 0.6 per cent of GDP in the coming years. As a consequence, diplomatic staff in third countries is planned to be reduced from 1,121 in 2012 to 861 in 2015, while the number of *attachés* is to be reduced to 285 in 2015.

---

3 The vice-consulate of Frankfurt was transferred to Stuttgart and that of Osnabrück to Dusseldorf, the vice-consulate of Clairmont-Ferrand was moved to Lyon, and those of Nantes and Lille to Paris.

The harsh financial and economic crisis could have led to the closure of the embassies existing in these countries where there is an EU representation. This possibility is, in principle, identified by the Portuguese authorities and the EEAS was also recognized as allowing for the redirection of human and economic resources from some parts of the world to others according to the country's pressing strategy of promoting its economic interests abroad.

In the Netherlands, initially, the Ministry of Finance indeed saw the establishment of the EEAS as a justification to close embassies and to hand over consular and visa affairs to EU Delegations. This view, however, was only partly shared with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), which favoured the more cautious stance that eventually prevailed. It was realized it is still too early to rely on the EEAS and EU Delegations to take over substantial tasks of national embassies. Furthermore, the Netherlands opposes an expansion of the EEAS budget.

Thus far, the changes introduced at the level of both the diplomatic network and the internal structures were prompted by the impact of the economic and financial crisis, while the EEAS has not played a part in the political calculus by the Dutch or Portuguese authorities for re-engineering the diplomatic infrastructure. The Portuguese case is particularly illustrative of this to the extent that five of the seven embassies that were closed down were based in the EU's member states.<sup>4</sup> In both cases, the rationale of the cuts has been rather the overall reduction of the MFA's budget and the imperative of boosting export growth.

### *9.2.2 A Common Supportive View of the EEAS*

In general, both Portugal and the Netherlands have been consistent in their support of the EEAS. Given their small size, they have been nurturing the hopes of seeing the EEAS developing itself into a respected and credible institution capable of endowing EU foreign policy with further consistency and coherence. This would naturally foster a stronger and more credible EU on the international arena.

According to the official view, Portugal has 'actively participated since the beginning in the creation of the EEAS' (Assembleia da República, 2011, 2012b), while attempting to make an impact on the functioning of the Service both in Brussels and in EU Delegations based in third countries. Despite the 'no-vote' in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, and the support for the (British) position to no longer use the title 'EU Foreign Minister' for the upgraded position of the High Representative, the Netherlands did not oppose the idea of setting up a European diplomatic service and combining foreign policy tasks previously performed by the EU Commissioner for External Relations, the High Representative and EU Presidency. A letter to Parliament in 2010 on the establishment of the EEAS mentions that gains are expected with regard to the quality and coherence of decision-making in the area of EU foreign policy (Government of the Netherlands, 2010). It also refers to the need to speak

---

4 This was the case with Malta, Andorra, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

with one European voice due to the shifting tectonics in world order, and the emerging economies being increasingly assertive to the detriment of the EU's international influence.

Whereas in the past the Dutch have taken a rather different position compared to other EU states concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Minister Timmermans emphasized the need for a common European stance on this issue. In the debate on the budget of the MFA held on in December 2012, Minister Timmermans stressed the need for a united EU position on the Middle East peace process and the EU's role in establishing a better labelling system with regard to products from illegal settlements in Palestinian territories. In his view, the Netherlands will not be able to play an influential role on its own in these matters. In relation to questions of human rights violations, *inter alia* in Tibet, he also referred to EU efforts, given the lack of diplomatic presence of the Netherlands in many parts of the world.

Similarly, in Portugal, the Service has been depicted as a step towards a stronger EU speaking with one voice, which is essential for strengthening the EU's role as a global player (Lourtie, 2010, p. 8). From the Portuguese perspective, the economic and financial crises that have been encroaching on the Union's internal stability and external credibility may well become instrumental to the EEAS's consolidation, since it forces European leaders to better define the organization's priorities and the limits of its external action. Dutch support for the EEAS was also demonstrated by a high-level seminar organized by the Clingendael Institute in October 2010, in close cooperation with the MFA. The event brought together senior policy-makers from over 17 EU member states with academic experts to discuss how the EEAS could be turned into a success. Portugal in its turn invited EEAS Secretary-General Vimont to visit Lisbon in February 2012 on the occasion of a parliamentary hearing on EEAS (Assembleia da República, 2012a).

Regarding the question of EU external representation in multilateral organizations, both countries have advocated that the EU coordination and external representation practices should be brought in line with post-Lisbon Treaty rules. Yet it has been recognized that this can be interpreted in different ways thereby affecting, sometimes, the continual improvement of the EU's international assertion and visibility (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 2011, p. 2). To The Hague, it matters how far interests and preferences of EU member states are apart and if rules and culture of the relevant international organization allow for a unified EU external representation. In practice, this means that the Netherlands does actively contribute to achieving common EU positions on most international issues, but not on those where it has strongly held policy positions and consensus is difficult to achieve. An example is the agenda on sexual and reproductive rights, which has raised concern in a minority of (Catholic) EU member states due to religious-ethical considerations, whereas the Netherlands openly supports a progressive policy.

Together with Belgium and Luxembourg, the Netherlands drafted a non-paper in April 2011 in which it advocated better cooperation in third countries and international organizations; increased information-sharing and joint analyses; consular cooperation; streamlined foreign policy decision-making with a strong role



for the Political and Security Committee; logistical support in times of crisis; joint travel advice and cables; common communication; more coordination between the EU and national development cooperation programming; and common training of EU and national diplomats. The Netherlands has also underlined its long-standing demand for the budget of EU's external action to stay within the limits of the overall budget, which, in light of the economic crisis, should not be increased at this point in time (Government of the Netherlands, 2011a).

On Portugal's side, engagement within the EEAS has been marked by the endorsement of such principles as geographical balance and gender balance, in addition to merit criteria. The geographical balance remains an aspect that Portuguese diplomacy has been highlighting continually for being considered a key supportive element in all endeavours towards sustaining the strength of the EU's global diplomacy. The national authorities commend the Union's efforts to promote gender balance among top officials at the EEAS, especially at the level of EU Delegations. This is viewed as a constructive development to the extent that it helps to set an example to national capitals.

In Portugal, the distribution of positions within the EEAS, especially with respect to national diplomats rather than those working as permanent EU officials, has been the subject of close scrutiny and discussion in connection with the country's ambitions in terms of international visibility. This topic has attracted considerable media coverage.<sup>5</sup> After a significant number of appointments of Heads of Delegation had been publicized, in August and September 2011, the perceived 'loss' of Brazil, Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique as 'natural' posts for Portuguese Heads of Delegation turned into a hot political issue. The Portuguese candidate to the post of Head of Delegation in Brazil, Luísa Bastos de Almeida, received particular attention. The Social Democrat Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the European People's Party Mario David 'vehemently condemned' not only the Portuguese government, but also the High Representative, for announcing publicly that the post of Head of Delegation in Brazil had not been awarded because none of the applicants had possessed the indispensable qualities for the post (David, 2010).

Against this backdrop of general criticism, which became less pronounced after the nomination of Ana Paula Zacarias as Head of the EU Delegation in Brazil, in March 2011, the official point of view on nominations was that they represented an acknowledgement on the part of the EEAS of the Portuguese candidates' merit and of the added value that the country's diplomacy brings to the EU. Ultimately, such nominations represented tangible compensation for the national diplomatic service's reduced visibility in the post-Lisbon Treaty landscape. The supportive

---

5 The appointment of António Cardoso Mota (in 2009), João Vale de Almeida (2010), Ana Paula Zacarias (2011) and João Gomes Cravinho (2011) to the positions of Head of the EU Delegations in Caracas, Washington, Brasília and New Delhi respectively are all cases in point

approach of Passos Coelho's government concerning the EEAS should be understood in the light of such perceptions.

After the first years of functioning in the post-Lisbon landscape, EU Delegations stand out as an especially positive experience in terms of the EEAS's cooperation with both Lisbon and The Hague (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 2012b). The Portuguese authorities consider the support provided by EU Delegations for official visits of member-state Foreign Ministers as an asset. The fact that meetings with the highest authorities of third countries are preceded by a briefing by the Head of Delegation to the Foreign Minister is seen as a particularly welcome expedient. Like other member states, Portugal thus recognizes the benefits that spring from the 'economies of scale' generated by the EEAS. Incidentally, Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Portas experienced some of these benefits in June 2012 when visiting Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. While from the Portuguese national authorities' point of view, EU Delegations should endeavour 'to create synergies between the national diplomatic network and the newly created European one' (Assembleia da República, 2011, p. 5), they accept that for the time being, cooperation is confined to informal contacts, ad-hoc collaboration and support for particular projects.

In December 2011, the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs, together with 11 colleagues from other EU member states, co-signed a three-page letter to Catherine Ashton on the EEAS (Rettman, 2012). Sometimes observers viewed this as a criticism of the Service, even though Ministers emphasized their objective of being constructive and supportive. The letter mentions, amongst other things, that 'the setting up of a secure communications network should be a major priority' and that 'the creation of defence and security *attachés* in EU Delegations ... should be considered'. In reaction, Ashton presented a report in which she pointed at the administrative and budgetary challenges facing the EEAS and highlighted the achievements made thus far (EEAS, 2011).

### *9.2.3 Different Views on the Transfer of Consular and Visa Services*

When it comes to the eventual transfer of diplomatic tasks from national to European level, Portugal and the Netherlands have adopted different positions. While the Netherlands is among the strongest proponents of a role in consular affairs and visa services for EU Delegations,<sup>6</sup> in Portugal, the possibility of such transfer in the domain of consular services has been only identified as a possibility to date. The Dutch government has strongly advocated on this matter, but it also realized that a transfer of this task to EU Delegations is unlikely to happen overnight, given the opposition of the UK, France and Germany. A letter to Parliament mentioned secondment of a Dutch diplomat to the EEAS to work specifically on strengthening possible EEAS contributions in the area of consular

---

<sup>6</sup> The Netherlands also accepts a (leading) role for EU Delegations in coordinating development cooperation.

crisis management and consular protection of EU citizens in third countries (Government of the Netherlands, 2012a). Together with the Benelux partners and the Baltic states an announcement was made in Brussels in December 2012 to underline the common desire for a larger European role in consular affairs (Government of the Netherlands, 2012b; see also chapter 12 on the case of Estonia).

Although not presenting itself as a staunch opponent of the eventual transfer of consular affairs and visa services, Portugal has not been actively encouraging such a development. The country's authorities tend to welcome some cooperation in this sphere, namely in the case of major crises including natural disasters, which may well draw on the experiences of coordination in Tokyo and in the Middle East after the attacks in Libya. In cases when it is crucial to provide travellers with advice on how to secure their safety and eventual rescue, EU Delegations are considered an asset. In fact, coordination between the Union's Delegations and national representations conducive to the eventual transfer of tasks may well start here. However, Portuguese foreign policy-makers have stressed that the deepening of consular cooperation should not lead to the disappearance of member states' consular services. They endorse the maintenance of some freedom of action for national services in addition to increased European consular cooperation.

#### 9.2.4 Portuguese and Dutch Objections to the EEAS

Both the Portuguese and Dutch position have been heavily influenced by fear of the EEAS being converted into a sort of a *directoire* of the big powers. For instance, the Netherlands has emphasized that local EU statements are always to be made by the EU Delegation, preferably by the Head of Mission. Member states, particularly the 'big three', should not all of a sudden step in when offences are grave and they are willing to make a mark. The Portuguese officials stress recurrently the need for the Service to 'guarantee an equal treatment to all member states' (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 2011, p. 2). This is symptomatic of a feeling of mistrust that still prevails towards the EEAS. Indeed, the risk of the EEAS being put at the service of some (of the most powerful and influential) member states to the detriment of others has been widely recognized by Portuguese diplomats.

Furthermore, both Portugal and the Netherlands recognize prevailing difficulties in fostering the 'coordination reflex' as well as existing flaws in the fledgling EEAS. In general, diplomats in the capitals are more often in contact with diplomats from the EEAS and EU Delegations, especially in the case of regional departments and country desk officers. Dutch diplomats, for instance, realize the need to ask whether an EU position on issues exists or should be developed. At the same time, it is clearly discernible that, in order to access information, countries' representatives have to take a proactive stance and establish indispensable contacts and links, since the information flow is not automatic or 'natural'. In this sense, while highlighting the competence and professionalism of EEAS officials, Portuguese diplomats widely note that changes to the level of exchange of information between the MFA and EEAS are required. Information exchange

needs to be strengthened and the information flow from the EEAS to member states needs to take place in a more open and transparent manner. This is also the position of the Dutch diplomacy. In an informal meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs underlined the need for ‘more synergy between the EEAS and Member States’ diplomatic services’ (Agence Europe, 2012).

The problem with the information flow is intimately linked to the well-known existence of asymmetry in terms of leverage between national representations of small and big member states in Brussels, in general, and within the EU institutions (i.e. the European Commission and the European Parliament), in particular. This asymmetry implies that early drafts of documents are firstly, and sometimes exclusively, shared between representatives of larger member states and their colleagues in the EU institutions (long before they are distributed through the formal EEAS channel). As a result, a practice of ‘bypassing’ the EEAS, cultivated by the larger member states, has been established, with tangible negative implications for information flow among member states. Countries with large representation in the Union’s institutions have much earlier access to relevant information, which creates disadvantages for those member states that do not possess a wide network of national officials working in Brussels.

Portuguese officials, for instance, who surely see themselves in the latter group, have been receiving ‘well-done documents, but at the last stage of the process’.<sup>7</sup> Dutch officials have also complained about the preparatory documents for Council meetings arriving from the EEAS being late (van Schaik, 2013, p. 103). Some national officials have expressed concern that the working methods of the Service, such as the delayed distribution of documents, will eventually increase the probability of a member state blocking a proposal which it did not have sufficient time to access. In spite of the prevailing sympathy for the early difficulties of the EEAS, the aforementioned asymmetrical access to information is seen as a serious flaw, especially among the Portuguese diplomats. Many people are convinced that this asymmetry could be overcome if Portuguese nominations were more actively promoted both within the EEAS and the major EU institutions. However, it is broadly acknowledged that not even the most active policy could mitigate a major structural problem facing the EEAS, namely the unbalanced/selective flow of information. For this reason, the legitimacy of the Service remains questionable.

While the fear of dominance by the ‘big three’ is present in the positions of both Portugal and the Netherlands, it seems that the Dutch representatives have adapted themselves to the inevitability of such evolution and identified the possibility of acting as a ‘bridge’ between the UK and Germany. Previous experience in the Dutch ‘bridge-building’ is visible in the case of the Middle East. Whereas the Netherlands voted against Palestinian membership of UNESCO in 2011, it abstained from voting at the UN General Assembly when the same matter arose in November 2012. Minister Timmermans explained on Dutch television

---

7 Interviews with Portuguese diplomats, September 2012.

that, despite having advocated a different, more pro-Palestinian position as MP, he now had to respect the majority wishes of the current Parliament.<sup>8</sup> He also hinted at the Dutch having persuaded the Germans also to abstain this time around. It thus appears that the Dutch position has only become slightly more moderate with regard to questions concerning the Middle East peace process and that Timmermans attaches more importance to the Dutch position being in line with those of other EU member states. In general, he seems keen to underline the need for European consensus.

### *9.2.5 Hopes and Fears Regarding the Leadership of the High Representative*

The Portuguese and Dutch standpoint on the leadership exercised by the High Representative mirrors their general stance regarding both the EEAS and the developing coordination between the national capitals and the EEAS. The positions of national authorities are informed by concerns over the autonomy of the EEAS and its leadership: a stronger High Representative would be welcome and should convey the EU common voice, rather than that of big EU member states. In addition, Portugal and the Netherlands assert that this leadership should not undermine areas of strong national interest.

The general assessment is again positive, especially in the Netherlands. For instance, in October 2011, the Minister of Foreign Affairs assured the Parliament that HR Ashton had made an active and valuable contribution to international policies, including to the Middle East peace process, relationship between Serbia and Kosovo and in the Arab region (Parliament of the Netherlands, 2013).

Both Portugal and the Netherlands would support a more assertive HR, which would promote an effective and coherent EU foreign policy, considered in The Hague an essential addition to Dutch diplomacy (Government of Netherlands, 2011b). The HR could provide a tangible contribution especially when it comes to setting the agenda on EU foreign policy on specific issues, such as the relationship with strategic partners – a point often raised in Lisbon, as well. The HR's role should be more than simply a coordinator of member states' positions. It should take on a true leadership role, although the Portuguese authorities acknowledge the fact that the quality of the High Representative's leading role depends very much on member states' ability to forge consensus while avoiding a veto culture. Incidentally, this was the general position that Portugal endorsed in the Final Report of the 'Future of Europe' group, published on 17 September 2012, which called for a substantial strengthening of the High Representative's role.<sup>9</sup>

---

8 Interview with Minister Timmermans at Pauw & Witteman, a Dutch late night show, 29 November 2012.

9 In particular, it stressed the necessity for the High Representative to be rendered responsible for such key external action areas as the Neighbourhood Policy and Development Cooperation; to assume her full role of coordinator within the Commission; and to assume a leading role in improving the effectiveness of the EU's relations with its strategic partners.

From the Portuguese point of view, there is still some room for improvement of the High Representative's role and profile. Indeed, the latter's difficulties in pushing forward a number of pertinent proposals tabled by some member states during the Council meetings (for instance, on the issue of sanctions) has been referred to as symptomatic of this lack of forceful initiative. Too often, the only outcome of the discussions between member states boils down to the Conclusions of the Council, with no actions taking place to follow up political declarations. Hence, there is an urgent need for the High Representative to take the lead in translating Council Conclusions into real action.

### **9.3 Conclusions**

As this chapter has demonstrated, there are several similarities in Portuguese and Dutch stances regarding the EEAS. First of all, neither country's official position has hitherto been guided by a clear-cut blueprint for how the country should explore the EEAS in order to enhance its standing in the international arena. Furthermore, it is not evident how both intend to contribute so as to enable the EEAS to operate as a vehicle for a more consistent and coherent EU foreign policy strategy. And, what would be the added value of these countries in the process of consolidation of the EEAS and its assertion as the EU's principal diplomatic arm, is a question that also remains unclear. Both in Lisbon and the Hague, the perception of the EEAS as a still fledgling institution has been taken as an excuse to justify the limited amount of national strategic thinking on, for instance, the mid-term review of the EEAS in 2013. A reactive line of thinking on the EEAS has prevented an identification of common interests among states with similar concerns and possible advantages, to pursue them together.

Both Portugal and the Netherlands realize that the EEAS has the potential to become not only a vehicle for promoting major national interests ('uploading'), but will also shape national foreign policy priorities ('downloading'). This position leads them to place an emphasis on the complementarity between the EEAS and national diplomacies. However, such complementarity is interpreted in different ways, as the case with the transfer of the consular tasks demonstrates. While The Hague has always warmly supported this option, Lisbon has been more cautious in advocating it. Lisbon's caution is intimately linked to concerns over the gradual replacement of national diplomacies by a European diplomatic structure as the outcome of an incremental process starting with the short-term transfer of diplomatic tasks (from the national to the European level), which ultimately might bring national independence in terms of foreign policy definition and implementation to an end.

With regard to the EEAS's leadership, paradoxically as it may seem, the Portuguese and the Dutch position favours the emergence of a strong leadership exercised by the High Representative, combined with a continued insistence upon a strict division of labour between national and EU foreign policy linked

to widespread concerns about the loss of national sovereignty. This should be understood in light of the countries' condition as small countries and their fear of a European great power concert which has traditionally moved the Portuguese and the Dutch authorities to espouse a strong European Commission. This fear of a conversion of the EEAS into a *directoire* of powerful states, with all that this implies for small countries' capacity to influence both decision-shaping and decision-making processes, can be discerned in both cases. The prevailing de facto asymmetrical access to information, in addition to the unbalanced attention paid by the High Representative to national diplomacies, only reinforces such fears of transformation of the EEAS into a European great power club, rather than a genuine collective and all-encompassing institution.

Both Portugal and the Netherlands have a long-standing tradition of attempting to punch above their weight in both world and European affairs. Portugal's successful bid for the non-permanent membership in the UNSC in 2011–12 and the Dutch hosting of the Nuclear Security Summit in 2014 are perhaps the most recent examples of this. This particular posture, not alien to these countries' historic background as colonial powers with a global outlook, should be borne in mind to understand the evolving Portuguese and Dutch positions towards the consolidation of EEAS. That said, how these states shall impact in the future the EEAS's profile and how the latter shall affect the style and substance of the Portuguese and Dutch foreign policies remains an open question.