Bureaucratic structure, geographical location and the autonomy of administrative systems

Evidence from the European External Action Service

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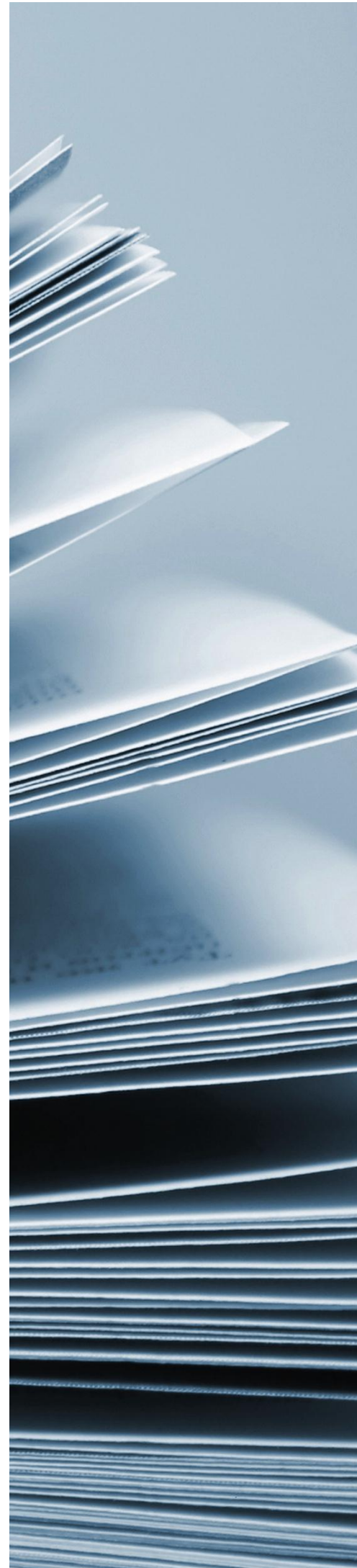## Evidence from the European External Action Service

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Abstract

Formulating and implementing public policy in Europe has historically been a prerogative of national administrations. This paper explores how these prerogatives may have become challenged with the 'autonomization' of the European Union's (EU's) *foreign affairs administration* (The European External Action Service (EEAS)). The ambition of this paper is two-fold: First, to assess how independent EEAS personnel are when making decisions, thus measuring actor-level autonomy. Secondly, to account for actor-level autonomy by applying two key variables in administrative sciences: bureaucratic structure and geographical location of administrative systems. Benefiting from two new data sets, a survey and elite interviews of EEAS officials, two empirical observations are highlighted. First, EEAS officials demonstrate considerable behavioural independence even against attempts from member-state governments to restrain this. Secondly, the behavioural autonomy of EEAS staff is explained primarily with reference to the supply of organizational capacities *inside* the EEAS and less by the geographical location of staff. Thus, the bureaucratic structure of the EEAS serves to safeguard bureaucratic autonomy in EU's new foreign affairs administration. By comparison, the geographical location of EEAS staff is a relatively weak, albeit not absent, signifier of behavioural autonomy.

Introduction[1]

Formulating and implementing public policy in Europe has historically been a

prerogative of national administrations. The capacity of the state has largely been

determined by 'the [administrative] capacity of the state to effectively achieve the

chosen policy outcomes' (Matthews 2012: 281). This paper explores how these

prerogatives may have become challenged with the rise administrative capacities within

the European Union (EU) institutions. One critical test thereof is the rise of

administrative capacities in EU's *foreign affairs administrations*, which historically have been subject to relatively tight state control (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2013). Essential is the extent to which 'European level' administrative capacities in foreign affairs administration build organisational structures that enable office holders to act relatively independently from key components of an inherent Westphalian administrative order (Madison 1788). A European public administration in foreign affairs may serve to create an institutional infrastructure for the joint formulation and execution of a common European foreign policy and strengthen its capability to draw common lessons from experience at a 'European level'. Administrative capacity building in this regard at EU level may also strengthen its capacity to integrate domestic non-majoritarian institutions as part of the centre, thus integrating foreign affairs administrations in Europe across levels of government. One hard test of the establishment of independent administrative capacities in a European context is the European External Action Service (EEAS), where the core-state powers of foreign and defense policies are uploaded to the EU level (Henökl 2014). The ambition of this paper is two-fold:

- The first ambition is to assess how independent EEAS personnel are when making decisions, thus measuring actor-level autonomy within EU's new foreign affairs administration (see below).
- The second ambition is to account for actor-level autonomy by applying two key variables in administrative sciences: bureaucratic structure and geographical location of administrative systems (see below).

The power of international organizations (IOs) is to a large extent *supplied* by the autonomy of its bureaucratic arm, that is, by the ability of international bureaucracies – and their staff – to act relatively independently of mandates and decision premises from member-state

(MS) governments (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2013; Cox and Jacobson 1973; Fukuyama 2013: 11; Reinalda 2013). As an area of research, the extent to which and the conditions under which international bureaucracies may act independently of MS governments has become increasingly vibrant, however, still offering inconclusive findings (e.g. Beyers 2010; Checkel 2007; Moravcsik 1999). This paper contributes to fill this void. This study thus speaks to a wider literature on the autonomy of international bureaucracies (e.g. Ege and Bauer 2013; Trondal 2013). One essential question arises when studying bureaucratic autonomy: 'independent of whom?' (Shapiro 1997: 278). To begin with, it is too simplistic to assume *a priori* from which institutions international bureaucracies such as the EEAS are supposed to be independent (Kelemen 2005: 174). In this study, autonomy concerns the relationship vis-à-vis MS governments. This relationship is essential to study in order to examine transformation of the inherent Westphalian administrative order. The second question is: how can we accurately measure autonomy? The concept of bureaucratic autonomy is not neatly defined in literature (Kelemen 2005: 174; Verschuere 2006). A working definition applied is that 'autonomy is about discretion, or the extent to which [an organization] can decide itself about matters that it considers important' (Verhoest et al. 2010: 18-19). Whereas most literature on the autonomy of international bureaucracies assesses autonomy by considering their *de jure* formal-legal design (e.g. Gilardi 2008; Hammond and Knott; 1996; Huber and Shipan 2002; Maor 2007: 5), far less attention has been devoted to studying the *de facto* real-life autonomy of international bureaucracies. This paper examines the *de facto* 'real-life' autonomy of the EEAS by *assessing actor-level* variables, i.e. the decision-making behaviour, role perceptions and institutional allegiances of the EEAS personnel (Trondal 2010: 147). The autonomy of the EEAS is thus assessed by the behavioural perceptions reported by EEAS officials.

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The EEAS remains under-utilized as an analytical laboratory in EU studies, political science, public administration and organisation studies.[2] First, in the study of public administration it represents a hard test of bureaucratic autonomy since the EEAS has only recently (2010) entered an institutional field coined by intrinsic national stronghold. Secondly, in organizational studies it represents a hard test on the effect of organizational structures on administrative behaviour since EEAS officials have only recently been recruited. It is conceivable that the influence of *previous* organizational affiliations is still present among the staff (see the next section). Thirdly, it is a 'new kid on the block' in political science and EU studies (Blom and Vanhoonacker 2014) and currently subject to scholarly dispute as to the 'nature of the beast' (Bàtora 2013; Blockmans and Hillion 2013: 8; Blom and Vanhoonacker 2014). Fourthly, it is a methodologically rich case since it represents a full-fledged bureaucratic structure available for study. The EEAS is an intriguing case, since it acts as the EU's centralized foreign and security policy apparatus, responsible for designing and implementing the Union's external action, and maintaining diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. It is a fully-fledged bureaucratic hybrid, comprising a wide range of structures from foreign aid and development to international crisis management and defense units, staffed by officials of both national and supra-national organizational provenance. Finally, the EEAS is a useful case to gauge the impact of geographical location of administrative systems since the EEAS features two geographical locations: one head-quarter in Brussels and several delegations scattered around the globe (139 in total (2013)). The EEAS combines personnel originating from two main sources, comprising roughly 60 per cent of its staff from former EU institutions (mainly Commission DG RELEX and the Secretariat General of the Council, SGC) and about one

third of seconded national diplomats (SND) from the MSs' ministries of foreign affairs (MFA). This paper analyses behaviour autonomy of all three categories of EEAS officials.

Profiting from two new data sets, two empirical observations are highlighted. First, EEAS officials demonstrate considerable behavioural independence even against attempts from MS governments to restrain this. EEAS officials are primarily 'inward-looking' abiding formal roles and rules of the EEAS. This observation supports a vast body of literature showing that European Commission (Commission) officials evoke classic (Weberian) civil service ethos such as neutrality and technical expertise on the one hand, and '*communautarian*' ideals of the future of Europeans polity on the other (e.g. Coombes 1970; Michelmann 1978; Page 1997; Ellinas and Suleiman 2012; Kassim et al. 2013). Secondly, the behavioural autonomy of EEAS staff is explained primarily with reference to the supply of organizational capacities *inside* the EEAS and less by the geographical location of staff. The bureaucratic structure of the EEAS serves to safeguard bureaucratic autonomy in EU's new foreign affairs administration. By comparison, the geographical location of EEAS staff is a weaker, albeit not absent, signifier of their behavioural autonomy. There is a tendency that officials located geographically closer to the executive center (Brussels) perceive themselves to be slightly more independent than officials placed at longer distance (at EU delegations around the world).

The paper is presented in the following steps. The next section offers a theoretical departure outlining two sets of independent variables: Organizational affiliation and geographical location. The subsequent two steps present the data and methodology underlying the study as well as the empirical observations. The final step of the study offers a conclusion and a

discussion of what lessons can be drawn in the study of administrative systems and

theoretically on the relative effects of organizational affiliation and geographical location.

A theoretical departure

On organisational affiliation
An organisational approach suggests that the supply of organisational capacities might

have certain implications for how organisations and humans act. This approach assumes

that organizational capacity-building supply government institutions with leverage to

act independently and to integrate external institutions into its orbit (Egeberg 2012;

Olsen 2010; Trondal 2010). This approach departs from the assumption that

organisational structures mobilize biases in public policy because organizational rules

and routines supply cognitive and normative shortcuts and categories that simplify and

guide decision-makers' behaviour (Schattschneider 1975; Simon 1957). Concomitantly,

one initial empirical prediction is that the supply of independent administrative

capacities is necessary for government institutions to act. In effect, the establishment of

independent administrative capacities inside the EEAS is expected to increase the

likelihood that decision-making premises (from vague signals to detailed mandates)

sent from the EEAS organisation will be ascribed importance by EEAS staff. Accordingly,

the decision-making behaviour of 'Eurocrats' in a European administrative system is

likely to reflect their *primary organizational affiliation*s at any time.

Office holders in modern governments tend to occupy multiple organisational

affiliations, some of which are primary and some of which are secondary. However, the

bounded rationality of humans reduces their capacity to attend to more than one

affiliation at a time (Simon 1957). The logic of primacy implies that the *primary*

affiliations of civil servants are expected to bias their behavioural patterns more

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extensively than secondary affiliations (Egeberg 2006). Arguably, primary affiliations create salient behaviour and roles whereas secondary affiliations create less salient repertoires of behaviour for actors (Ashford and Mael 2004: 141). Following from this, the behaviour, role and identity perceptions evoked by EEAS officials are expected to be primarily directed towards those administrative units that are the *primary supplier* of relevant decision premises. Because officials spend most of their time and energy in organizational sub-units of primary organisations (Whyte 1956: 47), they may be expected to chiefly attend to their sub-unit and less towards organizations as wholes (Ashford and Johnson 2001: 36). Subsequently, EEAS personnel are likely to orient their behaviour towards their present EEAS units rather than to the concerns of MS governments – or even the EU system as a whole. They are expected to evoke an 'inward-looking' behavioural pattern geared towards their 'own' sub-units and task environments. We may expect that EEAS officials evoke Weberian virtues of party-political neutrality, attaching identity towards their unit, division and portfolio, and attending chiefly to administrative rules and proper procedures of their primary organisational affiliation (Richards and Smith 2004). The following proposition may thus be derived:

Hypothesis 1: It is expected that EEAS officials' behavioural attention is primarily directed inwards, towards their own institution, unit and division, and only secondarily towards other institutions, such as MS governments. In short, their primary organisational affiliation towards the EEAS is expected to be a primary supplier of relevant decision-making premises. Concomitantly, former organisational affiliations (such as prior careers in MS governments and/or the Council Secretariat) will be of secondary importance in this regard.

On geographical location

Compared to the organisational dimension, the spatial dimension has been largely neglected in studies of public sector organisations. Although an old topic of administrative sciences (e.g. Gulick 1937), in the study of state building, party formation and voting behaviour (Rokkan and Urwin 1982), as well as the symbolic meaning of architecture (Goodsell 1977), the effects of place or site has been largely ignored in public administration scholarship (although see Egeberg and Trondal 2011). This paper contributes to fill this void. The absence of a spatial dimension in the literature on the effects of agencification is puzzling since practitioners sometimes justify often highly contested relocations by arguing that physical distance might serve to underpin the intended autonomy of agencies from political executives. The geographical dispersion of government institutions has indeed been considered an instrument of administrative policy (Egeberg and Trondal 2011). Of importance to this study, the Commission sees geographical dispersion of Community institutions as part of its administrative policy. With particular reference to the geographical localization of EU agencies, the Commission has argued that,

> 'the fact that regulatory agencies are spread around the EU, whilst executive agencies are housed in Brussels or Luxembourg, is just the most obvious symbol of their very different relationship with the Commission' (European Commission 2008: 3). 'The Commission also feels that the agency's [geographical] seat is a constituent element of the basic act and should therefore be included in it' (European Commission 2005: 4; see also Szapiro 2005: 3).

Face-to-face contacts appear in general to be highly appreciated when critical decisions are made in organizations (Jablin 1987: 394). This has particularly been emphasized in international bi- and multilateral diplomacy. The establishment of diplomatic missions in close proximity to other states has been considered instrumental in gaining influence and friendship. Jönsson et al. (2000: 186) argue that processes involving considerable uncertainty, unpredictability and surprise – as often happens in foreign policy-making and diplomacy - require information exchange via face-to-face contacts and group conversation. A previous study among government officials revealed that a majority deem face-to-face contact in formal meetings to be important for carrying out their daily tasks while other face-to-face contacts are emphasized slightly less (Egeberg 1994). Such decision-making through face-to face-interaction presupposes a common site (Therborn 2006). In addition, it can be held that 'place is the forming mould of actors', and has a bearing on bureaucrats socialization (Therborn 2006: 512). Thus, such interaction might be sensitive to the physical arrangement of organizations and to physical distances. The following proposition may thus be derived:

Hypothesis 2: It is expected that EEAS officials who are physically located at the EEAS head-quarter in Brussels direct their behavioural attention foremost towards EU-level institutions in general, and to the EEAS in particular. Thus, headquarter officials at the EEAS are more likely to assume greater behavioural independence from MS governments than EEAS officials located at the delegations far away from Brussels. The latter are expected to direct their behavioural attention comparatively more outwards towards outside institutions – such as MS governments. Concomitantly, geographical proximity to Brussels is conducive to behavioural autonomy among EEAS officials.

Data and method

The empirical observations benefit from two separate data sets, one online survey and one interview study. In 2013 we distributed a link with an invitation to 617 AD level officials of the EEAS to participate in an online survey. After two reminders accompanied by physical distribution of some 70 paper questionnaires to officials in Brussels, the survey harvested a total number of 184 responses, of these were 148 completed questionnaires and 36 partially completed ones.[3] For our sample of 680 eligible respondents the response rate is thus close to 30 per cent. Compared to previous large-scale surveys of the Commission (notably Kassim et al. 2013), this response rate is reasonable. Moreover, the data is satisfactorily representative with respect to officials' previous affiliation, geographical balance (country of origin)[4], place of assignment, educational background, as well as age and gender. 74 of the officials in our survey (41 per cent) were recruited (transferred) from DG RELEX, 19 respondents (11 per cent) from the Council Secretariat General (SGC), and 24 respondents (13 per cent) from MSs' Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA). 22 per cent of the respondents were working for other Commission DGs before 2011.[5]

Not surprisingly the data shows that the EEAS has a highly educated workforce, with the large majority (63 per cent) of the surveyed EEAS officials having at least MA-level university education, and some 17 per cent have obtained a PhD-level degree. Respondents who ticked 'other' in the survey indicated some form of 'post-graduate diploma', 'police-' or 'military academy', 'engineering' and diverse forms of national diplomas. As for gender, the survey shows an unequal distribution between male and female officials (67 vs. 32 per cent of the respondents who chose to disclose this information). However this corresponds to the gender distribution among the general

EEAS population in AD positions with 71 per cent men and 29 per cent women in all AD-level positions[6] and therefore depicts quite accurately the ratio of male and female EEAS officials. The same is true for age. The survey confirms the overall EEAS pattern of a comparatively 'old' or aging EEAS population with more than 40 per cent over the age of 50.

Table 1 Distribution of organisational affiliations among EEAS staff in our survey (per cent)

	Previous affiliation	*Present affiliation*
EEAS	-	75
Council Secretariat General (SGC)	11	-
COM DG RELEX	41	-
COM DEVCO	-	13
COM DG AIDCO	8	-
COM DG ELARG	1	2
COM DG TRADE	1	2
COM DG DEV	12	-
MS MFA	13	2
European Parliament (EP)	1	1
Other	12	5
N	180	184

Regarding institutional provenance, the survey has a bias for former RELEX officials (41 per cent of respondents), which in spite of active recruitment of MS diplomats (Murdoch

et al. 2013) still – three years after its creation - dominates the EEAS population. Next, the survey features an almost equal distribution of staff at the EEAS head-quarter (HQ) in Brussels (52 per cent) and officials posted in delegations (DELs) around the globe (47 per cent). Three respondents did not specify their place of assignment. Within the two populations the distribution is balanced with regard to staff category, level of tasks and gender. It is less balanced for previous affiliation, which has a slight selection bias in favour of previous Commission staff, which however reflects also the overall picture of EEAS staff (approximately 1/3 of staff coming from MSs' Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs)), as well as an overrepresentation of AD officials, which is intended since the survey focusses on EEAS decision-makers (see Appendix 2). With regard to organizational affiliation and place assignment, one reservation needs to be made. Since the questionnaire was distributed to staff in EU delegations, based on the organograms of the EU delegation's websites, the survey also includes a number of 30 officials, working at EU delegations and having EEAS e-mail addresses, but formally depending on their Commission DGs (DEVCO, TRADE, ELARG, Environment).

Table 2 Distribution of officials according to geographical location, by previous affiliation, staff category, task level, and gender

			HQ	DELs	
			Per cent (Frequencies)	*Per cent (Frequencies)*	*N*
Institutional	Provenance	Previously Commission	66 (52)	80 (73)	167
		Previously Council and/or MFA	34 (27)	21 (15)	

Staff category	AD	62 (55)	68 (50)	
	AST	18 (16)	13 (10)	
	SND	10 (9)	15 (11)	164
	SNE	3 (3)	4 (3)	
	AC	7 (6)	1 (1)	
Task level	Political/ diplomatic	56 (50)	56 (44)	
	Administrative/managerial	42 (38)	41 (32)	169
	Operational/ technical	2 (2)	4 (3)	
Gender	Female	31 (25)	32 (20)	143
	Male	68 (56)	67 (42)	
	Mean N	52 (85)	47 (76)	100 (161)

In addition to this survey data, between 2011 and 2013 a total number of 46 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with mainly EEAS and Commission foreign policy-makers, as well as some officials from the Council Secretariat General and MS MFAs. An overview of the distribution with regard to nationality of these interview partners is provided by Appendix 1 - Table A.1 (column 3). These interviews were conducted partly to collect data on the functioning of the EEAS and partly to prepare the ground for the questionnaire conducted thereafter. The interviews were guided by an interview guide and subsequently transcribed.

Results

This section presents the main findings from the survey and interview data as regards some core dimensions of the behavioural autonomy of EEAS officials. Behavioural

dimensions that are assessed include nature and level of tasks, attitudes and role

perceptions, contact patterns, cleavages of conflicts within the organization, and

concerns and signals deemed important when doing their work. On each of these

dimensions, we show how primary organisational affiliation and geographical location

(at the HQ and the DELs, respectively) make a difference in these regards. When

interpreting results, emphasis is primarily attached to consistent patterns *across* tables.

As seen in Table 2 a majority of EEAS officials find themselves involved in diplomatic,

political, managerial and/or administrative tasks. Only a minority report being mainly

occupied with 'operational' and/or 'technical' tasks. The latter category of staff is left out

from the subsequent analysis (see Appendix 2).

One proxy of behavioural autonomy is the loyalty perceptions and 'sense of belonging'

emphasised by office holders. Table 3 (below) measure this by comparing officials'

adherence to 'rules for conflict of interests and loyalties' for those originating from the

Commission ('supranational recruitment') and those originating from the Council

Secretariat General or MSs' MFA ('intergovernmental (IG) recruitment'). Four patterns

are evident: First, EEAS officials evoke a multiple set of identify perceptions. Secondly,

current organisational affiliation is clearly the dominant trigger of officials' sense of

belonging. Different recruitment routs show hardly any effect in this regard. Moreover,

that 'rules and standards for EU agencies' score relatively lower, suggests that the EEAS

is perceived primarily as part of the core-executive of the EU, and not as an EU agency.

Thirdly, previous organisational affiliations (rules of previous institution) are indeed

shown to be important, although far less than current organisational affiliation. Finally,

geographical location of EEAS officials matters somewhat. Staff at the delegations are

relatively more attached to the rules of previous institutional affiliations compared to

officials at the Brussels HQ. By contrast, the hierarchical superior seems to a larger extent to be a first stop on issues of conflicts of interests or loyalty at the Brussels HQ than at DELs. In both cases the 'national coordinator' does not play an important role. In sum, EEAS officials are 'multi-hatted' but their primary affiliation at the EEAS is uppermost among these. Although for former Commission officials the rules of their former organizational affiliation are slightly more important than for MS and SGC recruits, both populations attach most importance to their present affiliation.

Table 3 Per cent officials (very or somewhat) strongly emphasising the following <u>rules for conflict</u> of interest and loyalties, by geographic location and source of recruitment (Mean N=124)

	HEADQUARTER (N=67)		DELEGATIONS (N=57)	
Sources of recruitment:	*IG recruits (N=23)*	*Supranational recruits (N=44)*	*IG recruits (N= 10)*	*Supranational recruits (=47)*
Rules of previous institution	61	65	60	95
Rules of present institution	100	100	100	95
Staff regulations	93	100	80	95
Code of conduct for the civil service	91	95	90	94
Rules of EU agencies	50	44	80	45
Supervisor	95	94	90	89
National coordinator	36	n.a.	30	n.a.

Original code list: 'Very important' (value 1), 'important' (value 2), 'somewhat important' (value 3), 'less important' (value 4), 'not important at all' (value 5), 'can't say' (value 6).

Next, zooming in on officials' contact patterns, two observations become apparent (see Table 4): First, as expected, most respondents indicate that their main contacts are within their primary organisational affiliation at the EEAS - within their division and department (*intra*-organisationally), and secondly towards other administrative units at the EEAS (*inter*-organisationally). This pattern clearly reflects the current organizational affiliation of EEAS officials – both vertically and horizontally within the EEAS apparatus. As expected, frequency of contact decreases proportionally with the level of hierarchy: 80 per cent have '(very) frequent' contacts to their Head of Division, 43 per cent with their Director, and only 11 per cent indicates '(very) frequent' contacts with their Commissioner/political head of their entity. With regards to the latter, the majority of respondents report 'rarely' or 'almost never'.

In spite of the highly formalized character of diplomatic relations, some degree of behavioural spontaneity is a prerequisite for the existence of policy-making discretion. An overwhelming majority reports that e-mail is the most important form of communication, followed by '*in*formal face-to-face meetings', and then, on third place, '*formal* face-to-face meetings'. 'Spontaneous encounters' are considered 'important' or 'very important' to more than one third of officials, suggesting the presence of behavioural discretion among EEAS officials.

Secondly, the geographical location of officials affects their contact behaviour. As predicted, officials at the HQ in Brussels have more *intra*-organisational contacts inside the EEAS whereas officials at the DELs around the world have a more outreach contact pattern – towards MS institutions and third countries' authorities. Moreover, whereas

officials at EU delegations have slightly less contacts within their own organization than their colleagues at HQ, increasingly this is evident when moving up the EEAS hierarchy. This observation confirms our expectations that delegations generally operate somewhat closer to MS governments. However, the fact that they also maintain significantly more contacts with their domestic ministries and agencies of origin, however, does not have to be interpreted as being under the control from their MS. According to interview data (e.g. #24, #31, #38), it also has to do with the role of the new EU delegations organizing, chairing and hosting meetings of the Heads of Missions, Heads of Sections and the other work groups at the lower diplomatic echelons. This also transpires from comparing the figures of frequent contacts with 'own' domestic ministries (41 per cent) and ministries of other EU MS (49 per cent), which may be considered as reasonably balanced. One HoD describes this involvement with the EU-MS as follows:

> "Already now I spend more than 60 per cent of my time with internal coordination [among EU MS]. The EU representation office has an entire floor with meeting rooms and we host about 1000 coordination meetings with the MS at diverse diplomatic and working levels" (Interview #31, authors' translation).

In sum, sharing the Brussels site supports the behavioural autonomy among HQ staff.

Table 4 Per cent officials reporting the following <u>contacts</u> (Total N=157)

	HQ (N= 82)			DELs (N=75)		
	(Very)	*Occasionally*	*Rarely/*	*(Very)*	*Occasionally*	*Rarely/*

	frequently		*almost never*	*frequently*		*almost never*
Contacts within own organization (EEAS)	46	36	18	31	52	18
Colleagues within own unit/division (EEAS)	95	5	0	94	4	1
Head of unit/division (EEAS)	84	13	2	75	15	9
Director (EEAS)	51	32	17	33	26	41
Other departments (EEAS)	67	26	7	58	23	19
Other EU institutions	53	34	13	31	26	33
Commissioner	9	9	83	13	6	81
Ministries/agencies from officials' own country of origin	12	37	51	41	28	21
Ministries/agencies of other EU MS	27	30	43	49	25	26
Ministries/agencies of third countries	21	27	53	67	15	19
	frequently		*almost never*	*frequently*		*almost never*

Next, when asked how important different *considerations and concerns* are in the work of EEAS staff, two patterns are manifesting (Table 5). First, most emphasis is put on the concerns of the primary organisational affiliation of EEAS officials. Equally among HQ and DEL staff, the EEAS is viewed as an intergovernmental 'free-zone' since EEAS officials attach almost no importance to the concerns of their country of origin. Rather, most EEAS officials emphasise the concerns of the EU. Secondly, the geographical location of EEAS staff has no significant effects on their emphasis on various considerations and concerns. The concerns and considerations deemed important as well as the importance given to political signals (see Table 6) seems to be fairly balanced at HQ and at delegations, with some notable exceptions. First, both the Commission and the EP are ranked higher at delegations than at HQ. In contrast, the influence of MSs (in order of their relative weight from 'big' to 'medium-sized' to smaller MSs) is more strongly felt in Brussels than at delegations.

Table 5 Per cent officials emphasising the following <u>considerations and concerns</u> (Total N= 151)

	HQ (N= 78)		DELs (N=73)	
	(Very) important	*Somewhat important*	*(Very) important*	*Somewhat important*
Political concerns	79	9	86	8
Diplomatic concerns	89	10	88	5

Interest of unit/division (EEAS)	81	15	80	15
Interest of DG/service (EEAS)	80	15	81	14
Interest of the EU	91	6	97	2
Interest of own MS	11	6	12	16

Original code list: 'Very important' (value 1), 'important' (value 2), 'somewhat important' (value 3), 'less important' (value 4), 'not important at all' (value 5), 'can's say' (value 6).

Next, EEAS officials were asked to report the relative importance they assign to various political signals. Table 6 shows that they emphasise a multiple set of signals – primarily towards the core institutional triangle of the Commission, the EP and the Council. This suggests that the EEAS is not a service in 'splendid isolation' (Bauer 2009: 469). EEAS officials are indeed politically attentive. Also, the effect of their primary affiliation is highlighted by the impact of the direct hierarchy inside the EEAS. Beyond a clear emphasis put on signals from EU-level institutions, an interesting observation concerns the relative importance that is given to the EP. This is an observation that is also shared by Commission officials reported in a recent study (Ellinas and Suleiman 2012). Furthermore, in spite of the limited direct contacts of the survey respondents with the political level of the EEAS (see Table 4), a fair amount of attention is indeed paid to the signals from the leadership level of the EEAS. This observation supports the assumption that the EEAS – much like the Commission – is an organization driven by an internal 'logic of hierarchy' (Trondal et al. 2010). This assumption is also confirmed by the importance assigned to signals from respondents' 'hierarchical superior or line management'. Taken together, these observations provide evidence of how primary organisational affiliations with the EEAS nurture behavioural autonomy among staff. By contrast, the geographical location of EEAS officials does not have a significant pattern of

effects, other than that (up to 20 per cent) more attention is paid to MS concerns at the HQ, whereas more importance (roughly 15 per cent) is given to central level EU institutions at DELs.

Table 6 Per cent officials emphasising the following <u>political signals</u> (Total N=149)

	HQ (N=77)			DELs (72)		
	(Very) important	*Somewhat important*	*Less/not important*	*(Very) important*	*Somewhat important*	*Less/not important*
European Council	76	22	3	80	11	9
Foreign Affairs Council	82	14	4	74	15	11
European Commission	75	20	5	90	2	9
European Parliament	60	27	12	72	16	12
'Big' MS	65	20	15	48	21	30
'Medium-sized' MS	41	38	21	25	43	32
'Small' MS	30	43	27	18	39	34
Domestic Governments	23	12	65	14	21	64
Political level/ senior						

| management | 92 | 7 | 1 | 91 | 3 | 5 |

Next, patterns of conflict and cooperation are an important proxy of decision-making dynamics within and between government institutions. First, conflicts can be measured on a scale assessing the level of conflict. Of greater importance here is what *patterns* of conflicts are discernible. Essentially, bureaucratic autonomy in the EU's foreign affairs administration would lead us to expect the emergence of conflicts – as perceived by staff – that are either non-territorial and/or multidimensional. By contrast, a one-dimensional cleavage structure that is essentially territorial would reflect an inherent Westphalian conflict structure and a subsequent lack of bureaucratic autonomy at the EU level (Rokkan 1999: 149).

Table 7 shows that the EEAS exhibits both non-territorial and multidimensional conflict patterns among staff. Perceptions of most important conflicts are horizontally patterned within the various EEAS sub-units and vertically across levels of hierarchy inside the EEAS. This multi-dimensional and largely non-territorial conflict structure also involves inter-institutional conflicts between the EEAS and other EU institutions. Moreover, we find little variation between the HQ and DELs in this regard. However, one difference is salient: While hierarchical and sectoral conflicts seem to be slightly higher at HQ, all other types of cleavages are more strongly emphasized by DEL officials. Cleavages between different staff categories at delegations would include conflict between permanent and temporary personnel, and between staff from different former affiliations. Sectoral cleavages comprise conflicts between officials from civil and military units of the EEAS, etc. Moreover, territorial patterns of conflict are hardly

emphasised by EEAS personnel ('conflicts with MS administrations', 'conflicts between "big", "medium-sized" and "small" MSs' or '"old" and "new" EU MSs'). Table 7 thus clearly shows that conflict patterns among EEAS officials are primarily moulded by their current organisational affiliation inside the EEAS.

Table 7 Per cent officials emphasising the following <u>patterns of conflict</u> (Mean N= 149)

	HQ		DELs	
	(Very or somewhat) important	*N (100%)*	*(Very) important*	*N (100%)*
Hierarchical conflicts	81	73	76	67
Sectoral conflicts	88	72	82	58
Conflicts between former Commission staff and former SNDs	61	64	72	60
Conflicts between former Commission staff and former SGC staff	53	63	64	59
Conflicts between big and small MS	32	66	27	61
Conflicts between new and old MS	38	66	1	62
Conflicts between EU institutions	78	71	80	67
Conflicts with MS administrations	51	64	49	60

Original code list: 'Very important' (value 1), 'important' (value 2), 'somewhat important' (value 3), 'less important' (value 4), 'not important at all' (value 5), 'can't say' (value 6).

Finally, officials were asked whether, compared to their experiences before the launch of the EEAS, they had faced profound changes in their work situation. Our data, however not reported in figures, shows that the formation of the EEAS introduced – at least during the early stages of the new organization – an element of opacity for officials regarding their roles and instructions, lines of reporting, and especially as regards organizational goals and strategy. Secondly, perceived changes also involve more 'political exposure' and 'political interferences', but also changes as regards 'clarity of one's own role and function', 'clarity of reporting lines', and 'clarity of organizational goals and strategy'. Officials also report, not surprisingly, increased 'workload' and 'administrative burden'. Especially the latter was reported by nearly two thirds of respondents. On the other hand, contacts have also increased between staff inside as well as outside their own organization (see also Table 4).

Conclusions

Formulating and implementing public policy in Europe has historically been a prerogative of national administrations. This paper has examined how these prerogatives have become challenged with the rise of administrative capacities within the EU's new foreign affairs administration. The ambition of this study has been to empirically assess how independent EEAS personnel are when making decisions and theoretically to explain variation in actor-level autonomy by the bureaucratic structure of the EEAS administration and the geographical location of EEAS staff.

The survey and interview data reported above highlights two important findings. First, EEAS officials demonstrate considerable behavioural independence. EEAS officials are primarily inward-looking officials abiding core roles and rules of the EEAS. This

observation supports a vast body of literature showing that Commission officials evoke classic (Weberian) civil service ethos such as neutrality and technical expertise on the one hand, and communitarian ideals of the future of Europeans polity on the other (Kassim et al. 2013). The EEAS thus operates much like the EU's core-executive institution. Secondly, the behavioural autonomy among EEAS staff is explained primarily with reference to the supply of organizational capacities *inside* the EEAS and only secondarily by the geographical location of staff. In short, the *primary organisational affiliation* of EEAS officials seems to bias their behavioural discretion towards independence vis-à-vis MS governments. This finding also supports previous research (e.g. Egeberg 2012; Egeberg and Trondal 2011; Trondal 2013).

In sum, the bureaucratic structure of the EEAS serves to safeguard bureaucratic autonomy in EU's new foreign affairs administration. The geographical location of EEAS staff is a considerable weaker but nevertheless non-negligible signifier of their behavioural autonomy. This finding complements and nuances previous studies of bureaucratic geography. A large-N elite survey of the Norwegian central administration showed that agency autonomy, agency influence and inter-institutional coordination seemed to be relatively unaffected by the geographical location of agencies (Egeberg and Trondal 2011). Agencification seems in practice fairly often accompanied by geographical relocation away from the national capital or, in the case of the EU, from Brussels to places outside Belgium. This geographical dispersion of institutions, however, leaves few significant effects on the daily work of these institutions. However, with regard to the EEAS, essentially a diplomatic service with its own tradition of disposing a network of representation offices all over the world, the effects of location deserves dedicated attention of future research.

Notes

[2] There is indeed a mounting 'EEAS literature'. However, as with most literature on new institutions, it exhibits certain biases. Much of the nascent EEAS literature exhibits a bias towards assessing how the new 'service' ought to be organized to make the EU a coherent actor on the global stage (e.g. Bátora 2011, 2013; Carta 2011; Furness 2012; Nivet 2011). Some recent studies, however, offer 'positive' analyses of the EEAS, for example by examining its initial formation (Murdoch 2012, Morgenstern 2013), exploring the roles of its officials (Benson-Rea and Shore 2012; Duke et al. 2012; Juncos and Pomorska 2013; Vanhoonacker and Pomorska 2013; Vanhoonacker et al. 2012), and its promise for the coherence, symbol and legitimacy of EU foreign policy (Adler-Nissen 2014; Duke 2012; Raube 2012; Furness 2013; Smith 2013; Wisniewski 2013).

[3] As completed questionnaires were counted responses that answered all content-related questions throughout the survey and at least partially the demographic questions at the end of the survey (MS of origin, education, sex and age). Since, in principle, all content-questions were mandatory to reply to in order to get through and to the end of the survey, missing data in the completed questionnaires is rather limited ('*in principle*' because, in the case of one question the 'mandatory-to-reply' feature was not activated, neither is it applicable to the paper questionnaires that were returned by mail.)

[4] The survey gathered officials from 23 EU MS, with countries most strongly represented being: Germany (22 responses), Belgium (14), Italy (13), France (12), the Netherlands (10) and the UK (9). 17 respondents did not disclose their country of origin. Among the respondents, German nationals are somewhat overrepresented in relation to the total number of German EEAS officials (126 officials: 84 AD and 42 AST), as are the Netherlands (10 respondents compared to 55 Dutch EEAS officials in total, 20 AD and 25 AST). Belgium, although a small MS, is strongly represented in our survey as well as in the EEAS (226 officials: 60 AD and 166 AST), whereas Spain and Poland (5 and 4 respondents, respectively) score somewhat below their weight in terms of organizational population (Spain: 122 EEAS officials, Poland: 61). France, Italy, and the UK are reasonably well represented within the study in relation to their share of the population of the EEAS, and the same is true for a number of medium-sized and smaller MSs (see Appendix 1).

[5] The 21 officials indicating 'other' as their previous affiliation refer either to various Commission DGs, not mentioned in the questionnaire, other national authorities (ministries) or agencies (e.g. police, development agencies), as well as IOs or research institutions as their affiliation of origin. 4 respondents did not disclose their institution of origin.

[6] Source: EEAS, September 2012, see also: European Parliament (2013), 'The Organisation and Functioning of the European External Action Service: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities', Policy Department, EXPO/B/AFET/2012/07; and *idem*: 'Achieving Geographical and Gender Balance in the European External Action Service', see also Duke and Lange 2013; and Formuszewiz and Liszcyk (2013),

[6] All the more, since this assumption is controlled and checked against the 'staff category'-variable, and here the large majority (74 per cent) of the respondents were of the categories AD and SNE/SND. However, some AST officials, e.g. in their function as Heads of

Administration in EU Delegation, and increasingly (since the Kinnock reform) also a number of contractual agents (in function group IV) can be required to assume administrative responsibilities, to design, manage, monitor or evaluate programmes, contracts and projects, to sit on committees and selection or evaluation panels, draft policy documents and reports of diplomatic and political nature, and – if not make – so, at least, to a large extent prepare decisions.

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Appendix 1

**Table A.1 Number of respondents from the survey and interview study, by MS as
compared to EEAS population**

MS	Survey respondents	Interview partners	Total	EEAS population (March 2013)	
(By category)	(All)	(AD and SND)		(AD)	(AST)
BE	14	1	15	60	166
BG	-	-	-	12	4
CZ	3	1	4	23	11
DK	2	-	2	23	16
DE	22	9	31	84	42
EE	1	2	3	12	8
IE	2	-	2	22	14
EL	1	-	1	33	26
ES	5	1	6	81	41
FR	12	5	17	12	56
IT	13	3	16	98	49
CY	-	-	-	4	1

LV	2	-	2	10	3
LT	-	1	1	10	5
LU	-	-	-	3	-
HU	4	2	6	21	10
MT	1	-	1	8	4
NL	10	1	11	30	25
AT	8	8	16	28	11
PL	4	-	4	38	23
PT	1	-	1	27	28
RO	2	1	3	13	16
SI	2	-	2	6	9
SK	1	1	2	8	4
FI	5	1	6	22	18
SE	7	3	10	35	28
UK	9	4	13	68	31
Not specified	17	1 (NO)	18	-	-
TOTAL (N)	148	46	194	899	649

Appendix 2

Level and nature of officials' tasks

Respondents were asked to choose one or more options from a list describing their main tasks:

'political – diplomatic – managerial – administrative – operational – technical'. The

assumption is that officials, perceiving their tasks at least partly within the four first categories

qualify as decision-makers and is thus as part of our analysis, whereas officials perceiving of

their own responsibilities as mainly technical or operational are left out from the analysis. Where more than one option was ticked, the data was aggregated to give priority to the 'higher' level chosen by the respondents to describe their tasks, assuming that if a position, at least partly, includes administrative, managerial or political decision-making routines, it should be included in an analysis of 'decision-making behaviour'.[6] 54 per cent of the surveyed officials find themselves involved in diplomatic and/or political decision-making processes and another 40 per cent working mainly at managerial or administrative levels. Only 6 per cent of the respondents assessed their tasks as either 'technical', 'operational' or 'other'. The distribution of this self-assessment of officials looks as follows:

Table A.2 Level and nature of main tasks (Mean N= 177)

	Frequency	*%*	*Coding*	*Grouped into*	*Aggregated %*
Political	58	33	1	I	54
Diplomatic	37	21	2		
Managerial	34	19	3	II	41
Administrative	38	22	4		
Operational	6	3	5	III	4
Technical	1	1	6		

Key: Based on self-assessment of primary allocation of responsibilities:

I = (1) 'at least partly political', and/or (2) 'at least partly diplomatic'.

II = (3) 'at least partly managerial' and/or (4) 'at least partly administrative'.

III = mainly (5) 'technical' and/or (6) 'operational' (not seen as decision-makers);