

Where are the EU's Women Leaders in Foreign Affairs?

The current round of appointment for the EU's top jobs decided on the EU's leaders for the next five years. Unfortunately, the choice of candidates for senior EU jobs is rarely based exclusively on merit. It is determined by political factors and compromises linked to geographic balance, gender balance and political affiliation. As Member States were putting forward their candidates for the key EU posts, one major issue emerged: the insufficient number of female candidates.

This is not a new problem. In 2011, when the European External Action Service (EEAS) was established, it inherited a predominantly male workforce. The High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (HR/VP) was a woman herself and strongly committed to achieving gender balance across the EEAS. Some steps have been taken but more progress needs to be made. While, for example, the number of women Heads of Delegations in third countries increased from 10 (prior to the creation of the Service) to 24, there is still no female Head of a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission or operation and, currently, no female EU Special Representative (following the non-renewal of the mandate of Rosalind Marsden, EUSR for South Sudan, in 2013 and departure of Patricia Flor, EUSR for Central Asia). As these examples show, the responsibility lies as much – or more – with the EU's Member States as with the HR/VP.

In 2012, EPLO suggested the use of a quota system as a temporary measure to level the playing field for EEAS appointments.¹ The use of quotas was ruled out by the EEAS leadership which argued that quotas are in conflict with merit-based recruitment. In the 2013 EEAS mid-term review, the HR/VP acknowledged that the EEAS was facing challenges in attracting well-qualified female candidates for senior-level positions and recognised that work on improving gender balance and on removing potential barriers to career progression should be intensified.

Given that the EEAS supports women's leadership in peace and security, the participation of women in peace processes as mediators, negotiators and civil society stakeholders, and women as change agents in conflicts, the absence of women from positions such as those of EU Special Representatives or Heads of CSDP missions raises the question of double standards. What legitimacy does the EU have to promote abroad a principle that it cannot apply at home?

Gender equality is of course about far more than numbers, however the absence of women in leadership positions can contribute to perpetuating gender stereotypes and consolidating unequal gender roles. The presence of male-dominated or exclusively male international missions and representatives reinforces patriarchal power structures. This is particularly concerning in fragile countries where gender disparities may be a cause of conflict and violence. The problem is exacerbated by the absence of women from policy debates on security matters in Brussels, which frequently feature all-male panels, including many events organised by and/or funded by the EU.

As leader of a relatively young institution and vice-president of the European Commission, the newly appointed HR/VP has a great opportunity to shake up the current system of appointments to key EEAS positions (as well as to other EU institutions).

Gender balance and merit are not at odds; they can both be achieved with appropriate tools. In order to do so, EPLO would like to urge the HR/VP to develop a strategy (which could include the adoption of quotas as a temporary measure to be revised half-way through her mandate) to address the imbalance in the appointment of men and women to senior-level EEAS positions, including Managing Directors, Directors of Thematic and Geographic divisions, Heads of CSDP missions and operations and EU Special Representatives.

There are examples of good practice and attempts to rectify gender imbalance which should be supported and strengthened including:

- Ensuring that there are women on interview panels for senior-level jobs in the EEAS
- Using the EEAS Women's Network to support women within EU external affairs
- Continuing the practice of the HR/VP meeting women when visiting third countries (often involving meeting civil society where women are un(der-)represented in political institutions) and extending it to EU Special Representatives and Heads of CSDP missions

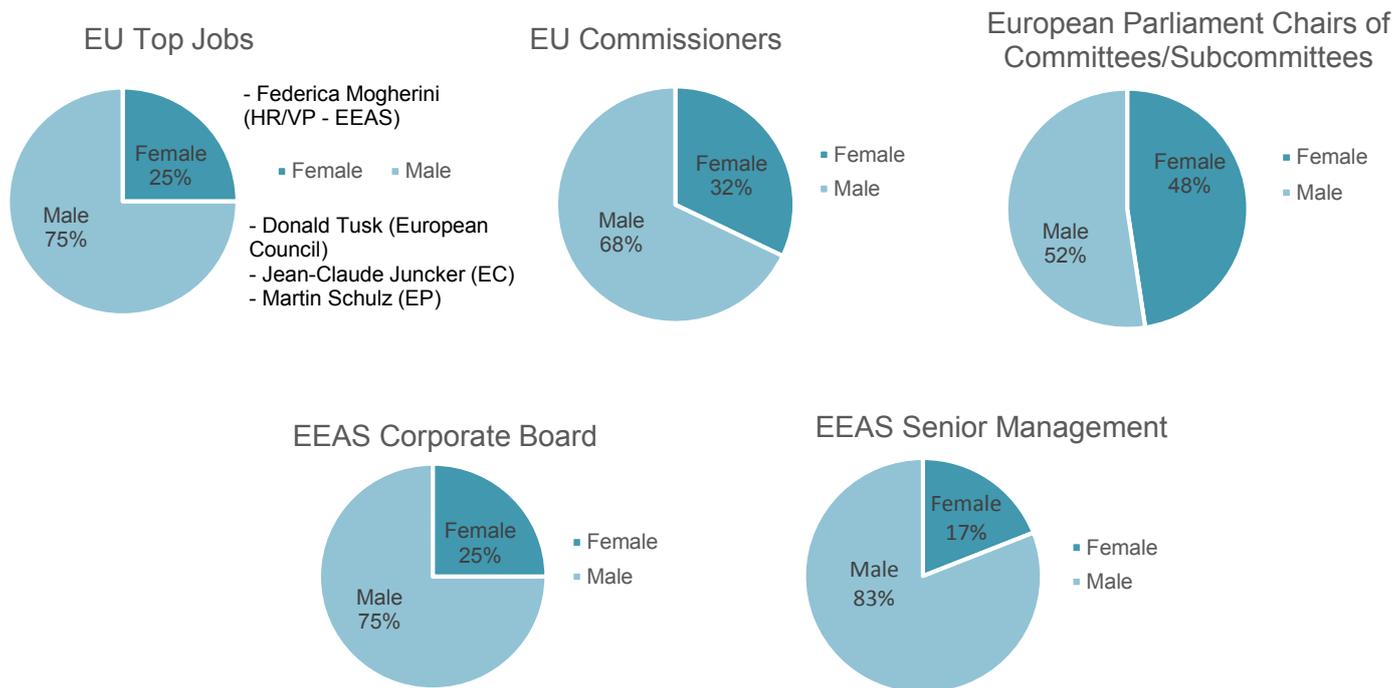
¹ Page 5, [Maximising EU Support to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda](#) (2012)

- Encouraging the European Parliament to continue to monitor and reject imbalances in appointments in other EU institutions
- Urging the Member States to propose female candidates for high-level positions, such as those of European Commissioners, as helpfully requested by Jean-Claude Juncker for this round of appointments to the European Commission.

Objective: 50% target of women in senior-level management positions in the EEAS by 2017.

➤ Short-term indicator of progress: By October 2015, a 33% minimum quota for women in senior-level positions is established as a temporary measure to address the gender gap.

Gender Balance in Top EU Positions²



EEAS Senior Management

Positions	Male	Female	Total
HR/VP	0	1	1
Board of directors	3	1	4
Managing Directors	7	1	8
Directors (regional and thematic)	17	3	20
Head of Crisis Management bodies	3	0	3
Heads of CSDP missions	18	0	18
EU Special Representatives	8	0	8
Heads of EU Delegations	106	32	138
Total	162	38	200
Percentage	81%	19%	100%

² As of September 2014.