Reporting and Representation: 
Intra-EU Diplomacy and Dutch Bilateral Embassies

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Summary
Embassies of the Netherlands within the European Union operate in another political and diplomatic environment than Dutch embassies in other parts of the world. There is a lack of comprehensive studies on the change dynamics of bilateral diplomacy within the EU. This article aims to contribute to the study of intra-EU diplomacy by looking at one of the key tasks of embassies abroad, namely reporting back to the capital. An analysis of the addressees, the type of reporting, and the interlocutors of embassy staff across Europe, reveals characteristics of the work of representations in a ‘post-Westphalian’ order. The results show that the diplomatic environment of Dutch bilateral embassies within the European Union does in several important ways indeed differ from that of Dutch embassies outside the Union.

Keywords
diplomacy, Dutch embassies, European Union (EU), bilateral embassies, representation, ministries of foreign affairs, line ministries

Introduction
Has the process of European integration changed the way in which diplomacy between member states of the European Union (EU) is conducted? Studies that look at the change dynamics of bilateral diplomacy inside the EU are scarce. Although there seems to be some sense of agreement among scholars and practitioners that change does occur, there are few data on how ‘the traditional diplomatic machinery, as represented in the bilateral missions, is adapting to these new demands’.1

The EU, ‘a community of states and peoples regulated and bound by law’, has been described as challenging the basic principles that the traditional Westphalian state order rests upon. Westphalian diplomacy is ‘a system of norms and rules enabling states to survive and interact in an anarchical environment’, whereas

intra-EU diplomacy is ‘an emerging set of norms and rules regulating interaction
of states in a rule-based legal environment’.2 This environment is characterized by
an increased interconnectedness of member states’ administrations and the sector-
al policies that are carried out by them. François Duchêne thus speaks of the
‘domestication’ of relations between member states and John Ruggie describes
the EU as a ‘multiperspectival polity’ in which it is ‘increasingly difficult to visu-
alize the conduct of international politics among community members, and
to considerable measure even domestic politics, as though it took place from
separate, single, fixed, viewpoints’.3 Stephan Keukeleire considers the EU as con-
stituting an emerging diplomatic order in which multilateralism and bilateralism
are intertwined, leading to a mixed ‘bi-multilateral’ set of processes.4 Some
authors, such as Rebecca Adler-Nissen, pay particular attention to socialization
processes among diplomats within the EU, who ‘merge the promotion of national
interests with those of the Union’.5 Others, such as Øivind Bratberg, mention the
impact of ‘Brusselization’ as a dimension of European integration that could
threaten classical bilateral diplomacy in favour of Brussels-based decision-
making.6 Jozef Bátoa and Brian Hocking argue that even within the EU, bilater-
alism remains a key, yet changing, feature of what might be viewed as a
‘post-Westphalian’ (also referred to as ‘post-modern’ or ‘post-sovereign’) foreign
policy environment, focusing on facilitating the sectoral and functional cooperation
between national administrations.7

This article examines whether the work of Dutch bilateral embassies within the
EU differs from that of Dutch bilateral embassies in non-member states, namely
through looking at the diplomatic task of providing information to the capital.
According to various scholars on diplomacy, ‘the most essential function of the
diplomat […] had always been the collecting and sending home of information’8
and that ‘gathering information on political, military and economic development
and reporting it home has long been recognized as one of the most important

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2 Jozef Bátoa, ‘Does the European Union Transform the Institution of Diplomacy?’, Journal of Euro-
pean Public Policy, vol. 12, no. 1, 2005, pp. 53-54.
3 François Duchêne, ‘The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence’, in Max
Kohnstamm and Wolfgang Hager (eds), A Nation Writ Large? Foreign Policy Problems Before the European
Community (London: Macmillan, 1973); and John Ruggie, ‘Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing
4 Stephan Keukeleire, ‘The European Union as a Diplomatic Actor’, DSP Discussion Papers no. 31
(Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 2000), pp. 4-5.
6 Øivind Bratberg, ‘Bilateral Embassies in an Integrated Europe: A Case of Institutional Robustness?’,
7 Jozef Bátoa and Brian Hocking, ‘Bilateral Diplomacy in the European Union: Towards “Post-
Modern” Patterns?’, Discussion Papers in Diplomacy (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International
Relations ‘Clingendael’, April 2008), p. 3.
functions of the resident embassy’. Unmistakably, the revolution in information and communication technology has had an impact on reporting activities. It has led to a speedier exchange of views between ministries of foreign affairs, other ministries and embassies, and therefore to a potentially more interactive and inclusive way of policy-making. At the same time, there is now increased competition from mass media and non-governmental organizations when it concerns reporting on developments abroad. According to several scholars, however, reporting is about much more than collecting and disseminating information. A skilled diplomat will add value by the quality of his or her analysis and the personal dealings with decision-makers. In an attempt to examine specific characteristics of intra-EU diplomacy, it is particularly interesting to study one of the key tasks of representations abroad.

Diplomatic Representation: Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The framework that was developed by Bátor and Hocking — with modes of representation related to a ‘post-Westphalian’ diplomatic environment such as the EU — will be used in this article. Bátor and Hocking argue that changing modalities of diplomatic networks have to be seen in the context of the evaluation of patterns of interaction between national diplomatic systems on the one hand and regional — such as the EU — and global diplomatic networks on the other hand. Structures and processes of diplomatic representation are reflective of changes in each environment. The framework identifies possible characteristics of intra-EU diplomacy along three basic dimensions of diplomatic representation: function, access and presence. Function poses the question ‘what is diplomatic representation for?’ In other words: what purpose does it serve and who are its customers? Access relates to the direction of representation, or ‘which decision-making networks should be targeted?’ Where should diplomats get their information from, and which people and institutions should they try to influence? Presence relates to the modes of representation, or ‘where and in what form should we be represented?’ This basically boils down to the question of whether an embassy or other type of representation should be opened and how it should be staffed.

11) The other functions of diplomacy, apart from gathering and assessing information, are communication between political leaders and other entities in world politics, the negotiation of agreements, minimization of friction in international relations, and symbolizing the existence of the society of states. See Bull, Anarchical Society, pp. 163-166.
As this article is concerned with an analysis of reporting by embassies, which is essentially about transmitting information, the focus will be on function (for whom?) and access (from whom?), with less about changes in modes of representation (where?). A ‘post-Westphalian’ diplomatic environment, such as the EU, is characterized by Bátnora and Hocking along these two dimensions of the framework — function and access — as follows: a) multiple ‘customer base’ with governments, civil society, business and the public (instead of government dominance); b) governance focus and knowledge brokerage (less stress on foreign policy); c) decreasing ability to work according to specific ‘national’ timetables; d) information analysis (instead of information gathering); e) an inter-state union with less stress on formal representation; f) and the need to access complex nodes and networks determined by multiple agendas and composed of state and non-state actors (instead of a limited focus and scope, and targeting more simply structured networks and nodes of influence).

Based on these characteristics, this article makes the following assumptions about reporting by Dutch bilateral embassies within the EU: a) the reports’ ‘addressees’ involve a wider audience than the ministry of foreign affairs; b) reporting contains less stress on topics of ‘high politics’ (as understood in the traditional sense of what foreign policy is about); c) reporting follows the topics and timing of the EU agenda; d) reporting is more concerned with analysis than with information gathering; e) talks with government representatives take place at a lower and more ‘technical’ hierarchical level; and f) the ‘interlocutors’ mentioned in the reports represent a wider network of non-central government and non-state actors. The article does not argue that these characteristics are exclusive to embassies within the EU, but that they — as a manifestation of post-Westphalian diplomacy — are most likely to be encountered in an intra-EU diplomatic environment.

**The Addressees of Reports**

*The Dutch Reporting System*

Do Dutch bilateral embassies within the EU actually report to a wider group of ministries than Dutch bilateral embassies in non-member states? In order to

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12. Because the reporting database that is used for the analysis only contains information for central government agencies, multiple ‘customer base’ has been interpreted here as working for multiple ministries.

13. In order to test these assumptions, I have used a quantitative and qualitative analysis based on the reports of bilateral Dutch embassies. These reports are stored in an electronic database that is managed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague. I have also made use of the archives of the Department for Western and Central Europe of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some citations in the paragraph on reporting types are drawn from these archives. Dutch embassy staff were contacted by telephone and email to verify the level of the interlocutors mentioned in the reports. Reference is made to five of those interviews, as well as one interview with a non-Dutch diplomat, when including some qualitative remarks in the paragraph on the level of interlocutors.
answer this question, the reports of 25 embassies have been analysed: ten within the EU (intra-EU); and fifteen outside the EU (extra-EU). EU member states have been selected on the basis of size, accession date, and whether they adopted the euro or not. The non-EU countries have been selected on size (G20 membership), geographical location and whether they receive development assistance from the Netherlands or not. The selection in Table 1 reflects the diversity of countries and regions in which the Netherlands is represented.

Table 1. Characteristics of 25 Dutch Embassies Used for Analysis of Addressees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU Country</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valletta</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>no</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-EU G20 Location Dev. partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogotá</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dar es Salaam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rabat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sana’a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Santiago</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

14 The Netherlands had, when the selection was made, 113 bilateral embassies, 19 representations to international organizations and 24 consulates-general, with 26 of the bilateral embassies located within the EU.
The Dutch representations worldwide send their official reports to an electronic database, which is managed by the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in The Hague and can only be accessed by central government agencies. According to a recent evaluation of this database system, it has a ‘formal character’, is ‘widely accessible’ and a ‘highly appreciated instrument for analysis, interpretation, instruction and reporting’. Formal communication of these types between embassies and the capital is supposed to follow these channels.

Every report contains the electronic address of the ministry, department and/or person to whom the report is addressed. Reports classified as ‘confidential’ — which equals ‘Restreint EU’ — can be sent to the personal inboxes of MFA personnel or the inbox of their directorate, and the general inbox of other ministries. Because of technical and security reasons, line ministry officials can only receive reports with the lower classification ‘internal’ — which equals ‘Limité EU’ — into their personal inbox. All other reports will have to be sent to the ministry’s inbox, for further internal distribution.

Although the reporting done through the database gives an authoritative picture of the reporting by bilateral embassies, a few comments need to be made. The database does not include material classified as ‘(top) secret’, which constitutes a very minor percentage of information sent by bilateral embassies. The data selection also excludes email messages, which are widely used to convey information but are very hard to quantify because they are not centrally stored and are often deleted. Yet even without email messages, the selection provides a representative picture of the topics with which respective embassies deal and the ministries with which they interact. The content of email messages largely corresponds to the issues that are addressed in the official reporting. Email messages do, however, more often address administrative issues (personnel, budgets and visitors’ programmes), as well as the handling of information requests by individual companies. Finally, some attachés, particularly those of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, use the official reporting system less frequently, but since this is the case for intra-EU and extra-EU embassies, a comparison between both can very well be made.

The Inter-Ministerial Customer Base

Table 2 shows the percentage of reports that have been sent to ministries other than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (on the y-axis) during the selected reporting period, and the percentage of reports that were addressed personally to specific officials of the line ministries (on the x-axis).

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16) As of October 2010, this ministry became part of the Ministry of Economic Affairs.
17) The selected period from which reports were taken runs from 1 September 2009 to 30 March 2010,
During the selected period, almost all intra-EU embassies sent 50 per cent or more of their reports to line ministries, a figure that is considerably higher than the majority of extra-EU embassies. This points towards a multiple inter-ministerial customer base. Embassies in G20 member countries and in European countries that are not EU members (such as Norway and Switzerland) also score above 50 per cent. This is mainly because of the large number of economic, financial and environmental issues, respectively, that are discussed at G20 meetings and with two-monthly intervals (September 2009, November 2009, January 2010 and March 2010). This resulted in a total of 1,132 reports analysed.

Table 2. Embassy Reports to Line Ministries and Personal Addressees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>intra-EU</th>
<th>extra-EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Accra, 2 Bangkok, 3 Berlin, 4 Bern, 5 Budapest, 6 Bogotá, 7 Cairo, 8 Copenhagen, 9 Dar es Salaam, 10 Dublin, 11 Lisbon, 12 Moscow, 13 Delhi, 14 Oslo, 15 Ottawa, 16 Paris, 17 Rabat, 18 Rome, 19 Sana’a, 20 Santiago, 21 Sofia, 22 Tokyo, 23 Valletta, 24 Warsaw, 25 Washington.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the large body of EU law that Oslo and Bern have adopted through bilateral agreements. The embassies that sent a minor part of their reports to line ministries are mainly located in developing countries and non-G20 members. The low percentage of domestic ministries suggests that those representations are mainly preoccupied with ‘Westphalian’ forms of diplomacy, such as MFA-oriented foreign policy and development cooperation. A closer look will be taken later on, when distinguishing between sectoral and non-sectoral reporting.

Another observation is that the majority of intra-EU embassies sent one-third or more of their reports to the personal inboxes of line ministry officials, whereas this figure is below 10 per cent for the majority of extra-EU embassies. This underlines that the administrative interconnectedness, the intensity of personal contacts and the speed with which issues need to be followed up are higher. Embassies within the EU, whenever the content allows, classify their reports in the database as ‘internal’ in order to be able to address it directly to their contacts in other ministries. Most embassies in non-EU countries do not do this — even if the content of a report would permit it — which means that it could take several days or longer to reach the correct person. As a Dutch diplomat in Paris points out, in order to address people at line ministries individually, you need to know the contact person for that specific file, otherwise it would be very time consuming.18

Table 3 shows the number of line ministries to which an embassy sent reports during the selected time period. The intra-EU embassies, except Dublin, count between nine and thirteen line ministries among their customer base. For extra-EU embassies this is two to eight, except for Moscow and Washington with a higher number, with Washington holding a record of fourteen line ministries. This reflects, of course, the importance of both Russia and the United States in world politics and their influence on numerous policies.

Breakdown to Specific Line Ministries

Which specific line ministries, including the Agency for Trade Promotion,19 can be counted among the regular customer base? The most frequent recipient of reports for both intra-EU and extra-EU embassies — as shown in Table 4 — were the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, followed by the Prime Minister’s Office. For the embassies outside the EU, the Ministry of Defence should also be included, as this was the second largest recipient of reports from these types of embassies. To this ministry, which is associated with ‘Westphalian’ characteristics of diplomacy, more reports were sent by extra-EU embas-

18) ‘Rapportage berichtenverkeer’, DWM 431/10/19480.
19) In Dutch ‘Agentschap NL’ and previously ‘Economische Voorlichtingdienst’.
sies than by their intra-EU counterparts. To other departments, two or three times as many reports were transmitted by embassies within the EU compared to those outside the Union.

The close cooperation that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, specifically with its Directorate-General for Foreign Economic Affairs, is expressed through the agreement that was signed in 1955 with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which includes regular staff exchanges.20 The promotion of Dutch economic interests is indeed one of the main tasks of Dutch diplomatic representations abroad. The fact that the percentage of reports sent by intra-EU embassies to the Ministry of Economic Affairs doubles that of their extra-EU counterparts is because of their additional reporting on economic topics that are related to the EU agenda, such as the internal market. This will be discussed in more detail later in the article.

The international tasks of the Ministry of Finance are considerable too, especially in the wake of the worldwide financial crisis and the problems in the eurozone. The fact that intra-EU embassies’ reporting to colleagues at the Ministry of Finance is three times higher than outside the EU has to do with the close

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20) ‘Concordaat EZ–BZ’, Staatscourant, 2002, no. 225, 21 November 2002. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, which has no separate foreign service, has the right to instruct embassy staff with regard to economic issues. Additionally, personnel of the Ministry of Economic Affairs can be posted to embassies and this ministry has a say in the selection and training of MFA personnel.
coordination of financial issues that is a result of the common currency shared by seventeen member states, as well as EU budget discussions. The Prime Minister’s Office is involved with high-profile foreign policy issues and important matters related to the participation of the prime minister in the European Council. Because of this process of Europeanization, the traditional role of the Dutch Prime Minister as a *primus inter pares* has evolved into one of a true government leader. The considerable percentage of reports transmitted by intra-EU embassies to the Prime Minister’s Office, which is twice as high as for extra-EU embassies, alludes to the importance of the head of government in European affairs, something that might increase further with the institutionalization of the European Council following the Lisbon Treaty.

The considerable share of reports that were sent to the Ministry of Environment and Public Planning\(^{21}\) is mainly because of negotiations in the run-up to the Copenhagen Climate Conference and the large body of European legislation with regard to environmental issues. The low percentage of reports sent to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, especially within the EU, could be explained

\(^{21}\) As of October 2010, part of the Dutch Ministry for Infrastructure and Environment.
partly by the fact that this is an exclusive EU competence, highly centralized in Brussels, and partly by the own reporting system of this particular ministry.

The Type of Reporting

After having considered the customer base of Dutch representations, let us now take a closer look at the type of reporting undertaken. To what extent do embassies report on sectoral policies? What percentage of reports refers to the EU? How many reports of intra-EU embassies are intended as input for Council meetings? For this purpose, the reporting content of 10 of the 25 representations, reflecting the different types of countries in which the Netherlands has an embassy, has been examined in greater detail (See Table 5). The selection of intra-EU embassies includes two large and two small member states, two older and two newer member states, three euro countries and one non-euro country. The selection of embassies outside the EU includes two G20 members and four smaller countries, five different regions, and two development partners and three non-development partners.

Table 5. Characteristics of Ten Dutch Embassies Used for Analysis Type of Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td></td>
<td>small</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td>large</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valletta</td>
<td></td>
<td>small</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td></td>
<td>large</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-EU</th>
<th>G20</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dev. partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accra</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>N. America</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana’a</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>S. America</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22) In order to enable a meaningful subdivision in specific council formations, this analysis is based on the reporting during a full twelve-month period (1 July 2009-30 June 2010). This resulted in 1,031 reports analysed. The Dutch embassy in Warsaw also reports on Belarus, which is not an EU member. The Dutch embassy in Oslo also reports on Iceland, which is involved in EU accession negotiations. In order to maintain a clear distinction between EU and non-EU reporting, for Warsaw only the reports on Poland have been counted (88 per cent of its reporting) and for Oslo only the reports on Norway (83 per cent of its reporting).
Sectoral Policies

Dutch embassies provide information on a wide array of topics. All embassies report on domestic politics, such as elections and other important political developments. They deal with foreign affairs, including human rights and defence. They closely follow economic developments, such as the adoption of national budgets, and handle trade issues. Development cooperation is an important topic for embassies located in those countries with which the Netherlands has entered into a partnership relationship. International cultural policy and public diplomacy, as well as consular affairs, are other areas upon which bilateral missions report. Embassies within the EU also cover EU institutional developments, such as those related to treaty change, nomination of a new European Commission, or relations with the European Parliament.

Embassies also report upon sectoral policies, which fall outside the more traditional field of diplomatic activity, such as environmental issues, judiciary and police cooperation, financial issues, social affairs, transport, or health care. For example, during the selected reporting period, embassies wrote about climate financing as part of the Copenhagen Climate Conference, G20 discussions on regulating the financial sector, educational reform and research and development (R&D) as part of the ‘Europe 2020’ negotiations, the inclusion of a return and readmission clause in a bilateral treaty, a European Commission proposal on fuel-efficient cars, national policy on natural gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG), and measures to contain the influenza–H1N1 pandemic.

In order to assess the share of reports dealing with sectoral policies — that is, to judge whether embassies within the EU do indeed operate to a larger extent outside the traditional realm of diplomacy — the contents of the reports have been analysed.23 The analysis shows that the Dutch representation in Valletta spent 49 per cent of its reporting on sectoral policies, Dublin 37 per cent, Paris 34 per cent, Warsaw 31 per cent, Oslo 21 per cent, Ottawa 15 per cent, New Delhi 11 per cent, Sana’a and Accra 7 per cent, and Santiago 6 per cent. In sum, the intra-EU embassies dedicated one-third or more of their reporting to sectoral policies, while all the others spent substantially less, with Oslo in an intermediate position (see Table 6).

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23) In a few cases the choice was not clear-cut. If a report dealt with the promotion of Dutch companies that are active in a specific sector (such as the water sector), and not solely with the specific policy as such, it was counted as belonging to trade promotion. If a report on the G20 dealt with the institutional set-up (who gets a seat?), it was counted as non-sectoral reporting, but if it dealt with the G20 proposals on the regulation of the banking sector, it was counted as sectoral.
EU-related Content

Which part of the reporting is related to the EU arena? To what extent is the work of diplomats within the European Union influenced by the political structure in which they operate? In order to address these questions, all reports with a reference to the EU — as an actor or to a specific policy — have been counted.\(^\text{24}\) For non-EU embassies, reports based on an EU meeting (for example, EU Heads of Mission) were also included, even if the issues discussed did not contain an explicit EU reference.

From Valetta, 66 per cent of the reports were related to EU discussions,\(^\text{25}\) 56 per cent of the reports from Paris, 55 per cent from Warsaw, 53 per cent from Dublin, 24 per cent from Oslo, 22 per cent from Ottawa and Sana’a, 13 per cent from Santiago, 7 per cent from New Delhi, and 6 per cent from Accra. This outcome shows that more than half of the reporting by Dutch embassies within the European Union is connected to EU discussions, underscoring the point that ‘a focus on the EU agenda is increasingly becoming the mainstay of member state bilateral missions’ work within the EU’.\(^\text{26}\)

\(^{24}\) The reference had to exceed the length of one sentence in order to exclude reports with only one disconnected mention of the EU that was not related to the matters discussed in the report.

\(^{25}\) The explanation for this high percentage is probably that the main reason to open a bilateral embassy in Malta was its EU membership.

For at least a certain part, although considerably lower, the reporting by Dutch embassies outside the EU is also EU-related. As David Spence notes: ‘there is an identifiable increase in operational collaboration on EU matters in bilateral embassies, as evidenced by the weekly meetings of embassy staff, not only in Europe, but also throughout the world’.27 To give some practical examples of this collaboration during the reporting period: in Ottawa various EU briefings took place on an EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, as well as regular meetings of the member states’ trade counsellors; some reports of the Dutch embassy in Sana’a were related to the EU–Yemen political dialogue; in Accra, the Dutch embassy reported on the mid-term review of the European Development Fund; and the Dutch representation in Oslo often referred to close cooperation with the EU in the framework of the European Economic Area.

Input for Council Meetings

As pointed out by others, the effects of the blurring of high politics and domestic political processes are reinforced by the decreasing ability of EU member states’ governments to work according to specific national timetables. According to Magnus Ekengren, national timetables are increasingly being supplanted by a multitude of policy-specific EU-wide timetables and deadlines connecting civil servants throughout the EU in administrative networks that hammer out policies.28 This also holds true when looking at the regular input that is provided for council meetings (ministerial, COREPER and working groups) by the selected intra-EU embassies. Indeed, the timing and content of a substantial part of their EU-related reports are directly dependent on the agenda of Brussels. For Valletta, 55 per cent of the EU-related reports mention a specific council meeting for which input was provided, with 40 per cent for Warsaw, 35 per cent for Paris and 33 per cent for Dublin.

The embassies reported most frequently for the function of the General Affairs and External Relations Council. This might diminish in the future, as more matters related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy will be dealt with by the European External Action Service (EEAS). The other council meetings for which regular input was provided were the Economic and Financial Affairs Council, the Justice and Home Affairs Council, and the European Council. The two Dutch representations in the large member states dispatched reports for a higher number of different councils than the two in the smaller member states: Paris provided


Many reports that mention a specific council meeting were based on regular briefings in the capital. These council briefings are organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a line ministry, in order to provide the representations of the other member states with information on their negotiating position. Another part was based on background talks with government representatives. Indeed, Dutch missions within the EU are requested to report not so much on the official positions that are communicated during regular briefings, but to provide more in-depth information on the interests behind official positions. As a Dutch diplomat puts it, ‘the briefings are often late, salt-less and contain hardly anything new’, or in the words of a former senior staff member at the Dutch Permanent Representation to the EU: ‘I only read reports of the briefings of the six big member states, and even then I hardly read anything I did not already know’. This is in line with the remarks of a permanent representative of another EU member state who points out that he rarely reads reports from his countries’ embassies as these mostly contain information that he already possesses. These remarks accord with Hocking’s observation that ‘rather than gathering and transmitting large quantities of information, which can be found elsewhere, the aim is to provide detailed analysis and interpretation of the position that other governments are adopting on policy issues’. Or, in the words of yet another Dutch diplomat at a bilateral embassy: ‘it makes much more sense to report on the key dossiers, well in advance, in-depth, and making use of our network’.

### The Level of Interlocutors

**Interaction of Diplomats within the EU**

Much of the reporting is based on conversations with government officials of the host country, who provide embassy staff with national positions on specific policy fields. Dutch diplomats in turn provide their counterparts with information on the Dutch government’s point of view. These exchanges of information can take

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29) Apart from the European Council, input was provided for the following council configurations: General and Foreign Affairs; Economic and Financial Affairs; Justice and Home Affairs; Transport, Telecommunication and Energy; Agriculture and Fisheries; Environment; Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs; Competitiveness (internal market, industry, research and space).

30) ‘Rapportage berichtenverkeer’, DWM 431/10/19480.


place in various formats: regular briefings by a specific ministry for the entire corps diplomatique or EU representations specifically; meetings between a politician and the EU Heads of Mission; meetings between a civil servant and a certain group of EU embassies; or an appointment with a government representative by a Dutch diplomat only.

When identifying the right contact, a diplomat will — apart from the fact that the reliability of the source should be assessed — consider authority and knowledge. Authority, which is mainly reflected in the hierarchical position of an official, is important in order to make sure that the source of information holds a sufficient degree of responsibility for the policy issue at stake and is close enough to the decision-making process. For this reason, when it comes to addressing sensitive political issues or conveying a formal message to the host state, a diplomat would generally prefer to talk to someone high up in the hierarchy. When the main purpose is the exchange of more detailed knowledge on specific policy positions, a diplomat might settle for, or even prefer, a contact who is lower down in the hierarchy.

The presumption made here is that, overall, embassies within the EU base their reporting on a lower hierarchical level than other embassies. The arguments for this are threefold. First, as described in the conceptual framework that was introduced at the start of this article, in the ‘Westphalian’ order, diplomacy is more preoccupied with formalities and protocol, or as Øivind Bratberg puts it, reflecting national sovereignty and prestige. The EU, however, should be seen as an inter-state union, less obsessed with matters of formal representation and dealing to a large extent with issues of a more ‘technical’ nature. It can be expected that — when it involves the day-to-day decision-making process that keeps the EU machinery running — diplomats might just as well speak to a head of division or desk officer to discuss specific policies. Most of the instructions sent to the Permanent Representation in Brussels (workings groups and COREPER) do not get close attention from senior civil servants or politicians, unless they involve very sensitive issues.

The second reason to assume that the average hierarchical level of interaction is lower is caused by the higher degree of socialization among diplomats of EU member states — that is, being part of the same ‘club’ results in a higher degree of willingness and need to share knowledge. Rebecca Adler-Nissen mentions that: ‘In the EU, the member states are united, if not by blood and marriage, then by what I call a “late sovereign diplomacy” growing out of day-to-day negotiations in the Council of Ministers and its working groups’. The presumption in this

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article is that the ‘intense socialization among state representatives’ also takes place to some extent between diplomats and officials in EU capitals. In the words of David Spence, when describing Europe’s diplomats: ‘They have more in common with each other than with non-European diplomats, and their relations with each other are less diplomatic in the traditional foreign ministry to foreign ministry sense’.

Third, the more frequent meetings between political leaders — both within the Council and on a bilateral basis — have diminished the necessity for meetings between ambassadors and politicians in the capitals. Jan Melissen notes that the more relaxed post-Cold War climate ‘has led to a dramatic increase in bilateral and multilateral summitry’ in Europe, increased further by the process of European integration. In his often-cited inspection report on German embassies within the EU, German ambassador Karl Paschke points out that this does not mean these high-level meetings make follow-up talks with the host country’s executive superfluous. Only the [...] embassy on the spot can, by virtue of ongoing, meticulous, in-depth analysis, supply our political leaders with reliable information on the political thinking of their EU colleagues.

Indeed, EU ambassadors are able to have personal access to the political level if need be, but the necessity might arise less often.

Comparing Results

In order to test the hypothesis that the average reporting of EU embassies is based on a lower hierarchical level than extra-EU embassies, the position of counterparts on which the reporting was based has been analysed. The levels of interlocutors have been clustered as follows:

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40) For the period from September 2009 until March 2010, with two-monthly intervals. In some cases (Accra, Bogotá, Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Rabat and Sana’a), the intervening months have also been counted in order to reach a minimum of ten reports based on a meeting with an official of the host state. If this did not result in a minimum of ten cases, the embassy was omitted from the list (Bangkok, Bern, New Delhi and Santiago). Only meetings of Dutch embassy staff with government representatives have been counted; not those of incoming missions from the capital. Only talks with government representatives have been counted, not meetings with representatives of international organizations. Of the 1,132 reports, a total of 432 could be used for the analysis.
– **political level**: (prime-)minister and deputy minister (political), state secretary (US);
– **top level**: secretary-general, permanent secretary, state secretary (civil servant), general (four-star), director-general, assistant secretary (US);
– **high level**: deputy director-general, deputy assistant secretary (US), director (Europe), senior director National Security Council (US), ambassador at large, conseiller du cabinet,41 major-general;
– **medium level**: deputy director (Europe), conseiller du cabinet, head of division, director of state (US), colonel;
– **low level**: deputy head of division, (senior) desk officer, major.

Each report that was based on talks with the political level was awarded five points, with four points for top-level officials, three points for high-level, two points for medium-level and one point for a report based on a ‘low-level’ contact.42 The results are presented in Table 7.

The left column of Table 7 shows, for each representation, the average level (mean) of the counterparts on which reporting was based. The Dutch embassies in the ‘old’ EU member states — which acceded to the Union in the twentieth century — have an average of 2 and 2.5, as do the Dutch representations in Washington, Ottawa and Moscow. The Dutch embassies in the EU member states that acceded to the EU in 2004 have an average of 3 or 3.5. All non-EU countries which have an average of 3 or lower are G20 members, except Egypt. The other non-G20 members — that is, those not pertaining to the EU either — score 4 or 4.5. The second column shows the percentage of reporting that is based on ‘low-level’ officials.

The third column of Table 7 shows the power distance index (PDI) within each country, as developed by the sociologist Geert Hofstede. This index measures the distribution of power and wealth between people in a nation, business or culture. The PDI seeks to demonstrate the extent to which subordinates submit to authority. The PDI figure is lower in countries or organizations in which those in authority work closely with those who are not in authority, and is higher in countries or organizations with a more authoritarian hierarchy. For example, according to Hofstede, in countries with a high PDI, those in authority openly demonstrate their position, whereas in countries with a low PDI they do not pull

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41) France and some other countries have a system of ‘political cabinets’, which consist partly of non-career diplomats. It is difficult to apply a specific hierarchy to these positions (often higher than might be expected by the years of working experience, because they are politically close to the minister). The position of these cabinet members has been weighted after consultation with the respective Dutch embassies.

42) If several sources were mentioned, the highest level on which the reporting was based has been counted. If the report did not include the specific position of the interlocutor, this was checked with the author of the report.
Table 7. Average Level of Counterparts and Power Distance Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embassy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Low%</th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>Reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valletta</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accra</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogotá</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sana’a</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dar es</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subordinates in countries with a low PDI are generally given more important assignments, with less guidance from above. It is relevant to see whether this relates to the level of the interlocutors, in the sense that talks in countries with a lower PDI would more often take place with lower-level civil servants.43

The fourth column of Table 7 shows the number of reports on which the analysis is based, namely those referring to conversations with representatives of the host government. The best staffed embassies, mainly in the countries deemed

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to be most important to Dutch foreign policy, sent a higher number of such reports to the Dutch capital.

Whereas the hypothesis applies to the representations in the ‘old’ EU member states, it does not apply for the Union as a whole. A reason for the higher average level of counterparts in the EU member states that acceded in 2004 could be that their government administrations have a more hierarchical culture, stemming from the communist period. A Central European diplomat confirms that within the lower levels of the administration, people do not feel authorized to provide information.44 Dutch embassy staff in Warsaw, Budapest and Sofia do acknowledge this, although — especially within the younger generation — there are people that prove the exception.45 Another reason could be that the socialization process with these member states, and the mutual level of trust, is less advanced. The reason for the high level of the interlocutors in Valletta, when Malta is not a post-communist country, is different. The Dutch ambassador to Malta did most of the reporting himself, as he had only one embassy staff member who was also responsible for administrative affairs. Even if he did want to make an appointment with government officials lower down the hierarchy, being an ambassador, he would eventually be met by someone of superior rank.46

The reason that outside the EU all but one of the non-G20 countries score 4 or 4.5 could be that — as relations with those countries are less intense than those with G20 members (such as Washington, Ottawa and Moscow) — few technical issues are being discussed that require reporting to the Dutch capital. Much information is based on multi-donor meetings with the political or top levels. Another explanation is the relatively high PDI that most of these countries have, making it less worthwhile for a diplomat to talk to someone lower down the hierarchy.

It is quite interesting to look at the percentage of reports that are based on discussions with ‘low-level’ civil servants. These concern mainly desk officers, dealing with the nuts and bolts of diplomacy. Nine out of 21 embassies did not base any of their reporting on talks restricted to this level. It is striking that five of the six embassies that based more than 15 per cent of their reporting on ‘low-level’ interlocutors are located in the EU.47 This is a clear indication that within the European Union, apart from higher-level exchanges, contacts with desk officers play a prominent role in day-to-day diplomacy. It confirms that bilateral

44) Interview on 7 August 2011.
45) Interviews on 28 and 30 March 2011 and 23 June 2011.
46) Interview with a former Dutch ambassador to Malta on 30 March 2011. There only seems to be a relation between embassy size and the level of counterparts on which the reporting is based for a small representation such as Valletta, with only two staff members. Otherwise, such a relation could not be found.
47) The other embassy is Washington DC, where, according to a Dutch diplomat there, it is relatively easy to get valuable information from a US desk officer; interview on 8 April 2011.
diplomacy within the EU is less concerned with formal representation and more with keeping the EU’s machinery running. 

On average, most EU countries have less hierarchical societies than non-EU countries. This makes it difficult to draw hard conclusions on whether the experience of EU membership, as such, defines the average lower level of contacts or whether this is because of their low average PDI. In other words, is this type of cooperation and contacts a result of being a member of the same ‘club’, or does the lower hierarchical culture of most European societies create conditions for bottom–up cooperation? Whichever it may be, these results clearly show that Dutch embassies in the older EU member states operate on average at a lower hierarchical level than representations in most other countries.

Non-governmental Interlocutors

As indicated, the analysis above is based on reports reflecting embassy staff conversations with government officials. This covers almost 90 per cent of all reporting during the selected period, in which reference was made to discussions with an interlocutor.48 The remainder is based on direct contacts with parliamentarians, judges, scholars, think-tankers, businessmen and representatives of NGOs. Going by the modest percentage of reports that mention conversations with non-governmental interlocutors, the assumption at the start of this article that intra-EU diplomacy is characterized by targeting multiple stakeholders does not hold. The actual percentage of reports that are based on non-governmental information is higher, as some — for example those describing general political developments in a country — do not refer to direct talks with specific persons, but might have also made use of background conversations with non-government officials. Additionally, a fair number of reports do indeed reflect opinions of non-government institutions, but are based on public statements or publications. However, there is no evidence resulting from the reporting database that EU embassies use a wider network of non-central government and non-state actors.

The main reason for the relatively low percentage of non-governmental interlocutors is that the reporting database is designed for government agencies and geared towards providing input for governmental policies or negotiating positions. It is likely that if, for example, the role of member states’ national parliaments become more pertinent in the European legislative process — because of provisions in the Lisbon Treaty, for example — reporting based on talks with influential national parliamentarians might increase.49 There is ample indication

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48) An average of 10 per cent for the selected intra-EU embassies and 13 per cent for the selected extra-EU embassies.
49) This would then follow the practice of the Dutch embassy in Washington DC, which reports frequently on meetings with representatives of both the House of Representatives and the US Senate, because of their important influence on US foreign affairs.
that embassies do interact more frequently with non-governmental actors than is reflected in the reporting database, but this is handled by embassies relatively autonomously on the spot or, if information is transmitted, for example with regard to trade requests from companies, this is mainly done through email or letters.

The saliency of non-state actors is acknowledged in a recent government policy document with regard to the diplomatic representation: ‘the Netherlands has to adapt to changes [...]. Diplomacy is also about exerting influence for the benefit of Dutch interests and [...] this happens nowadays through many more different players and networks than only through governments’. In order to give an adequate assessment of the professional contacts that embassy staff have with non-governmental and non-central government actors, their weekly routine would have to be studied more comprehensively (interviews and data on incoming missions, etc.). While the assumption is that the interaction, particularly with non-central government actors, is more intense within the EU — because of the close interwovenness of institutions such as central banks, courts of auditors and judiciaries — it remains to be seen how this impacts on the work of bilateral embassies.

Conclusions

The process of European integration influences the way in which diplomacy between the member states of the EU is conducted. The characteristics of an important part of the work of Dutch bilateral embassies within Europe — namely reporting — does indeed differ remarkably from other Dutch embassies.

Intra-EU embassies address, on average, a far wider range of domestic ministries than embassies outside the EU. They also send a higher percentage of reports to those ministries, whereas Dutch embassies outside the Union focus to a much larger extent on the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There is in general a stronger administrative interconnectedness between the representations within the EU and the various ministries in The Hague, as many of their reports are sent to line ministry officials personally.

Dutch embassies within the EU operate more frequently outside of the traditional realm of diplomacy. A large share of their reports address sectoral policies, varying from environmental issues to health care. This is much lower for Dutch embassies outside the EU.

The decreasing ability to work according to national timetables is demonstrated by the reporting of representations within the European Union, which to a large extent follow the topics on the EU agenda. The majority of their reports are

50) Modernisering Nederlandse Diplomatie, 8 April 2011, kamerstuk 32734, no. 1.
related to EU discussions. Furthermore, the timing of a substantial part of the EU reporting by Dutch embassies within the Union is directly dependent on the agenda of Brussels.

As to the decreased importance of formal representation, talks between Dutch embassy staff and government representatives in the ‘older’ EU member states generally take place at a more technical level than in non-EU countries. Within the Union, contacts with desk officers play a more prominent role. The analysis reveals that bilateral diplomacy within the EU is less concerned with formal representation and more with keeping the machinery running.

In sum, this article’s findings show that the structures and processes of diplomatic representation by the Netherlands within the EU reflect the post-Westphalian environment in which it operates. The empirical evidence found through studying the reporting by bilateral embassies provides a unique insight into the characteristics that are associated with EU member state diplomacy within the Union. More case studies are needed in order to ascertain whether we can speak of a general EU-wide development.

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