

(English version)

Question for written answer E-000211/26
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Martin Sonneborn (NI)
(20 January 2026)

Subject: EEAS plans to downsize EU Delegations and the strategic justifications for these plans

As early as mid-2025, several media outlets reported that the European External Action Service (EEAS) was planning to downsize up to 10 EU delegations in order to save budgetary resources. According to these reports, the measure would pay for itself financially after around three years. At the same time, it was envisaged that there might be a shift in strategic focus of the EEAS towards a more sanctions-oriented foreign policy vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. In this context, it was also reported that the EU Delegation to Belarus was affected by the downsizing plans, although Belarus plays a central role in Russia's foreign and security policy, despite its limited political accessibility and partially erratic behaviour.

These reports are in line with a global trend in which development aid and diplomacy spending is increasingly being reduced in favour of defence spending and military deterrence. Implementation is said to possibly start as early as 2026 and no further information is available on the official pages of the EEAS as yet.

1. Does the EEAS plan to downsize EU delegations and, if so, which delegations specifically are affected?
2. Is the EU Delegation to Belarus affected by these measures and, if so, on what strategic and political basis was this decision taken, in particular in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine?
3. What criteria and considerations were used to select the delegations affected by the downsizing?

Submitted: 20.1.2026

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas on behalf of the European Commission
(26 February 2026)

In the rapidly evolving geopolitical context, the EU needs a modernised and agile network of delegations to deliver on its mission in the world and continue to engage with and support partners with specialised resources.

On 14 May 2025, the Commissioners' Project Group on External Relations agreed on a set of concrete proposals for a modernised network. While maintaining the EU's global outreach, no delegation will close — the future network will allow for stepping up engagement with more agility depending on EU priorities. From September 2026 onwards, the network will operate with three types of delegations:

Reinforced delegations — six delegations hosting additional regional expertise to support neighbouring delegations, in managing Global Gateway, migration, stability, strategic communication to better serve the interests of the EU and of the receiving regions and countries.

Standard delegations — the vast majority of delegations, with capacity for all core functions and access to expertise and support from reinforced delegations or headquarters.

Diplomatic presence delegations — ten delegations with reduced staffing and a mandate focused on core diplomatic functions ⁽¹⁾. This allows the EU to maintain key political and diplomatic engagement with host countries. Other areas of cooperation will continue to be covered, either by a neighbouring delegation or by headquarters.

This followed extensive consultations between the European External Action Service and the Commission to ensure full political and operational alignment. In this context, the EU Delegation in Belarus will maintain a diplomatic and political presence that will allow it to function adequately, also in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

⁽¹⁾ Belarus, Eritrea, Eswatini, Haiti, Kuwait, Lesotho, Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Timor Leste and Trinidad and Tobago.