

2.3 Working Group on “Communication between Associations and Ministries of Foreign Affairs”

Chair: Austria

Working Group members: Cyprus, Germany and Ireland

The aim of the working group was to maximize the efficiency of communication between Associations and MFAs by comparing practices and experiences in EUFASA countries, establishing a “SWOT analysis” and proposing recommendations.

Definition of “Communication“:

Derives from the Latin word „communis“, which means „shared“. “Communication is a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information but also create and share meaning” (Business Dictionary).

Comparison of practices and experiences of EUFASA countries:

A questionnaire of 10 questions was sent to all EUFASA member associations. 20 associations (87%) sent their replies: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Main findings of the questionnaire:

- a) Most of the associations (president/ board) meet the
 - Secretary General of MFA regularly (1x per year)
 - Head of Human Resources at least once per year
 - Head of relevant department upon request
 - Representative of the Unions (Syndicates)
 - Minister (Foreign Secretary) is met rarely (every 4-5 years)

- Czech Republic: President of the association works on contract for MFA (HR department) and communicates regularly with the FO*
- France and Spain: MFA assigns MFA officers as „liaison officers“ between associations and MFA*
- Finland : „Officer of Well Being at the Working Place“*
- France, Italy, Switzerland : Invite Minister/ Head of HR at annual General Assembly*
- Germany: meets with Secretary of State (highest ranking officer)*
- Countries with well-established Family Offices mainly act via FO*

- b) Conferences and Meetings:
 - Most of the associations are invited to attend the annual Ambassadors’ Conference; some of them have the opportunity to present the association on that occasion
 - Associations / members are invited to participate in training courses for MFA employees (such as pre-posting, protocol, coming home; language classes usually upon availability of spaces)
 - 6 associations are NOT invited at ALL to any meeting or conference

- Only the Czech Republic's association's president (being a MFA officer) is invited to attend meetings on internal documents / projects of the MFA*
- Belgium : Attends the „FAMILY DAY“ organized by FO*
- France : Participates in meetings of the decision committee for the allocation of training/ education allowances for spouses; attends “employment fora “ organized by MFA.*

c) Decision-making process of MFA:

The majority of the associations are NOT involved in the decision making process of MFAs

- Czech Republic: invited to comment on various papers/ MFA projects, not only family issues*
- Finland: sometimes invited to give comments*
- Switzerland: might be consulted on specific issues (family issues mainly)*
- United Kingdom: Often gives an input into the discussion leading to the decision; a member of the Board of the Foreign Office is designated to act in association's behalf*

d) Interaction between associations and MFAs takes place in relation to:

- General family issues – see 1) and 2)
- Individual requests – only in difficult situations (divorce, assault of violence) IF requested by the individual member; some (5)assoc. do not approach MFA at all on behalf of individual members MFA Association
- For information
- For help
- From time to time /not on a regular basis

e) Means of Communication between Associations and MFAs:

- E-mail, telephone, fax (used by all associations)
- Association's newsletter (from 1 per month to 3 per year)
- Articles in MFA Newsletter
- Association's website and MFA's intranet (50% of associations have access)
- Personal direct contacts and meetings
- Annual General Assembly
- Events Organized by associations
- Notice boards, flyers

SWOT Analysis on the communication between Associations and MFAs:

STRENGTHS

- Regular meetings with high ranking MFA officers
- Use of modern means of communication, mostly covered by MFA
- Good relationship Association - MFA

WEAKNESSES

- No or little participation of Ass. in decision making
- No regular information from MFA
- Unilateral / one way process
- Dependence of persons

OPPORTUNITIES

- Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding
- Lobbying for regular exchange of information
- Appointment of permanent contact person
- Link Ass. Website + Intranet

THREATS

- Lack of information
- Loss of credibility
- Loss of good will due to change of persons

Recommendations:

In order to improve communication between the Associations and their MFAs, EUFASA recommends:

- MFAs and Associations should consider drafting an Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding to clarify their relationship.
- Associations should request full access to the MFA's intranet
- Meetings between the Association and MFA and representatives should be established at all levels
- Associations should seek to be associated to the MFAs decision-making process regarding family issues