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## Senior Diplomats in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs: When an Entrance Exam Still Determines the Career

Christian Lequesne<sup>a)</sup> and Jean Heilbronn<sup>b), \*</sup>

<sup>a)</sup> *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI), Sciences Po, 56 rue Jacob,  
75006 Paris, France  
christian.lequesne@sciences-po.fr*

<sup>b)</sup> *London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street,  
London WC2A 2AE, United Kingdom  
jeanheilbronn@gmail.com*

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### Summary

This article highlights the specificity of the recruitment of senior diplomats (Advisers) in France since 1970. The idiosyncratic character of the French situation resides in the lack of a single examination. The diversity of ways by which a senior diplomat can enter the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (FMFEA) leads to the coexistence within the ministry of two main groups — the ENA diplomats (that is, from the National School of Administration, the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration*) and the so-called 'Orient' diplomats — each defending specific interests and roles within the French *Quai d'Orsay*. The kind of entrance exam that you take still determines careers in the French MFA. The pillarization of the career has nevertheless decreased since the 1990s, because the necessity to cope with common external challenges (such as budgetary cuts) has reinforced a shared identity among French senior diplomats.

### Keywords

French diplomatic service, recruitment of diplomats, career of diplomats, reforms of diplomatic services

### Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the evolution of diplomatic services has given birth to an important corpus of literature in the domain of social sciences.<sup>1</sup> Many studies focus on the impact of globalization on the different functions that are

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<sup>1)</sup> S. Riordan, 'Reforming Foreign Services for the Twenty-first Century', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2007, pp. 161-173; Daryl Copeland, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: Rethinking International Relations* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009); and Geoffrey Allen Pigman, *Contemporary Diplomacy* (London: Polity, 2010).

accomplished by senior diplomats.<sup>2</sup> A major effect of globalization on national diplomacy has been to make civil society just as important as states' governments in shaping external policies and international relations. In consequence, a rich discussion has arisen on the new forms of public diplomacy as well as on the role of cultural diplomacy on foreign ministries' influence across the world.

In France since the 1980s, there has been only a little scientific work on the evolution of the national diplomatic services. This situation can seem strange if we consider that France has had, since the Middle Ages, a long tradition of analytical writings on diplomacy. In the fifteenth century, Philippe de Commines, a nobleman from Flanders, wrote his memoirs on the missions to Italy that he undertook for successive kings of France.<sup>3</sup> It is also a Frenchman, François de Callières, who at the beginning of the eighteenth century published one of the first treatises on how to negotiate with the sovereigns of Europe.<sup>4</sup> In the twentieth century, there was also a French tradition of writer — diplomats, such as Jules Cambon,<sup>5</sup> who gave relevant views on the art of diplomacy. In the contemporary period, however, the theory of international relations remains weak as an academic discipline and this relative absence is matched to a broader decline of research on foreign policy in political science.<sup>6</sup> It would be false, however, to talk about a complete academic black hole. During the last decade, several works have been written on foreign policy's decision processes as well as on the articulation between national diplomacies and the external action of the European Union,<sup>7</sup> the profession of diplomat,<sup>8</sup> and more generally on the work of diplomats seen through the angle of the sociology of work.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the study published by Loriol and others on labour conditions within the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (FMFEA) is a precious source of analysis. While it is true that the study was ordered by the FMFEA itself to increase knowledge on its own organization and functioning, the team of scholars was able to conduct investigations independently and released an unbiased document.

<sup>2</sup> J.W. Moses and T. Knutsen, 'Inside out: Globalization and the Reorganization of Foreign Affairs Ministries', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2001, pp. 355-380.

<sup>3</sup> Philippes de Commines, *Mémoires*, *Historiens et Chroniqueurs du Moyen Age* (Paris: Gallimard — La Pléiade, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> François de Callières, *The Art of Diplomacy* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Jules Cambon, *Le Diplomate* (Paris: Hachette, 1926).

<sup>6</sup> Matthieu Chillaud, 'International Relations in France: The "Usual Suspects" in a French Scientific Field of Study', *European Political Science*, no. 8, 2009, pp. 239-253.

<sup>7</sup> Frédéric Charillon (ed.), *Politique étrangère: nouveaux regards* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2002); see also the work of the historian Maurice Vaisse, *La puissance ou l'influence? La France dans le monde depuis 1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Meredith Kingston de Leusse, *Diplomatie: Une sociologie des ambassadeurs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997); and Samy Cohen (ed.), *Les diplomates: Négocier dans un monde chaotique* (Paris: Autrement, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> M. Loriol, F. Piotet, V. Porteret and V. Boussard, *Recherche en sociologie du travail sur les métiers diplomatiques: Rapport d'étape* (Paris: Laboratoire George Friedmann CNRS/Paris I, 2007).

Nonetheless, it is above all pamphlets and journalistic investigations, or even comic books on the *Quai d'Orsay*,<sup>10</sup> that have been prolific since the early years of the 2000s.<sup>11</sup> Through these works, it is often a caricatural picture of an arrogant diplomacy that is painted, completely subjected to the French President's orders, and spending more than it can afford while living in a closed-in community. For this reason, a thorough sociological analysis of the *Quai d'Orsay*, of its personnel, of its practices and of its representations in the twenty-first century is still to be written.

This article only deals with one aspect of the sociology of the FMFEA. The study focuses on the careers of senior French diplomats working for the *Quai d'Orsay* during the period 1970-2009. Two groups of diplomats, competing for the top jobs at the highest ranks in the FMFEA, will particularly hold our attention. The first group is made up of senior civil servants coming from the prestigious National School of Administration (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA) in French). People from this group enter the *Quai d'Orsay* after two years of study at the ENA with the rank of Foreign Affairs' General Adviser. In the second group, diplomats have been directly recruited to the FMFEA through a specific and highly competitive examination to become Foreign Affairs Orient's Adviser. The name of Orient's Adviser comes from their complete mastery of at least one specific language (such as Mandarin, Hindi, Arabic, Farsi, but also German or Dutch). This duality inside the FMFEA allows a characteristic to be highlighted that is shared by a larger part of the French public administration — France's bureaucratic corps, as described by several analysts during the 1980s,<sup>12</sup> is a place where the domination of one's status does not guarantee exactly the same career track to people who are supposed to do the same work globally.

The study is based first on data collected in the *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire*, completed with interviews conducted among French diplomats during spring 2011. The *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire* is a document that has no equivalent in any other French ministry. Published every year by the *Quai d'Orsay*, this 2,000-page book includes detailed organizational charts of every department within the FMFEA and of every diplomatic or consular mission abroad. This book also provides a detailed biographic note for every staff member at the FMFEA, ranked in alphabetical order and ranging from staff recruited directly after a high school degree to those who entered the *Quai d'Orsay* after five or more years of higher education. Through the nominal lists of agents by rank, it is possible to follow the evolution of the career of every one of them, and even, by applying a salary scale that is shared by all French administrations, to calculate

<sup>10</sup> The designation of the *Quai d'Orsay* refers to its geographical location in Paris.

<sup>11</sup> Franck Renaud, *Les diplomates: Derrière les façades des ambassades de France* (Paris: Nouveaux Mondes, 2010); Christophe Blain and Abel Lanzac, *Quai d'Orsay: Chroniques Diplomatiques* (Paris: Dargaud, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Marie-Christine Kessler, *Les grands corps de l'Etat* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1986).

their salaries when they are employed at the central administration — which means when they do not get expatriation allowances. The sufficiency and transparency of the *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire* contradicts the culture of secrecy that is usually attributed to the FMFEA. For scholars, it provides a reliable source of information.

The study focuses on the careers of senior French diplomats who were recruited between 1970 and 2004 and who have reached at least the position of Adviser (*Conseiller* in French), and who have been appointed to this rank directly. This choice should not obscure the fact that one-third of foreign affairs' advisers obtained this position through internal promotion, which means that they started their career at a lower level and entered the FMFEA through the Foreign Affairs Secretary examination, for example. However, this article is not to be regarded as a quantitative study developed through an extensive use of statistical methods. Rather, it is a qualitative study, which uses specific examples of several individuals' careers to draw general lessons. The choice to focus on eleven years, spread over a 34-year period, stems from this limited ambition. The choice of the years 1970, 1971, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1999 and 2004 allows us to compile a large sample that is representative of the different age groups working in the *Quai d'Orsay* and of the wide range of hierarchical positions within it. The senior executives recruited in 1970 are, in 2009, often already retired or approaching the end of their careers. On the opposite end of the scale, Advisers recruited in 2004 are still in the first years of their career. Through these eleven years, the study examines the cases of 107 French senior diplomats from the FMFEA, 57 from the ENA and 50 from the Orient's Adviser examination. The article assumes that this study is enough to draw some generalizations on French senior diplomats' careers.

Although the article tries to identify what could be seen as the ideal career path of French senior diplomats, we are conscious that a term such as 'classical career' should be used only with restraint. One career can never be exactly identical to another. Being a senior diplomat involves having a diverse, original and unique livelihood. Individuals create their own careers according to the studies that they have undertaken, the regions that they like, and a multiplicity of other factors, such as reputation, political relations, social network, marital situation and private tastes.

The article starts by assessing the career of senior diplomats who were recruited from the ENA as General Affairs' Advisers. The same exercise is then undertaken for the senior diplomats who were recruited as Orient's Advisers. Third, the article explains the reasons for the decreasing pillarization of roles and attitudes between the ENA and the Orient's Advisers inside the FMFEA. Finally, the article concludes by stressing which research agendas on French diplomacy could be followed.

## Access through the National School of Administration (ENA): Still the Royal Way

Generations of French senior civil servants have been educated at the ENA since its creation in 1945.<sup>13</sup> The fact that many graduates from the ENA joined the ranks of the main French political parties of the Fifth Republic and served further in various governments (both left and right wing) has increased the prestige of the school. It is an original characteristic of the Fifth Republic to have recruited many of its main political leaders among its government officials. This led the political scientist Jean-Louis Quermonne to talk about a 'heavy presence of bureaucrats in the political sphere' (in French, '*une fonctionnarisation de la politique*') since 1958.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, this tendency to recruit politicians among high-ranking civil servants has faded since the 1990s. Coupled with the diminishing influence of the state in a world of fierce capitalism and open markets, this trend was certainly damaging for the ENA's standing. However, being accepted to the ENA remains a very difficult challenge. The school's selectivity is one of the highest in France and the number of posts has been decreasing since the end of the 1990s as a consequence of budgetary restrictions within the public service. In 2010, only 80 people were chosen to follow the two-year programme in Strasbourg, punctuated by regular in-the-field internships.

One can enter the ENA through three different examinations, all similarly selective and competitive. The 'outside' examination, through which 40 people were selected in 2010, is open to university graduates who have undertaken at least three years of study (BA degree). In reality, this group is often constituted of graduates from *Sciences Po* in Paris who have already done at least five years of study, often six and sometimes even more. The 'inside' examination, by which 32 people were accepted in 2010, is designed for civil servants of the state, of territorial authorities, of public establishments, and of international governmental organizations who have had four complete years of service. This is thus an exam that is aimed generally at older candidates who want to secure better promotion in their career. The third and final examination, through which came the last eight selected candidates of 2010, is more original. It is aimed at agents from the private sector, elected officials (municipal advisers or mayors, for example) and leaders of non-governmental bodies (such as unions) who want to reorient their career to work in the public service, after having completed at least eight years in those diverse sectors.

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<sup>13</sup>) Jean-François Kesler, *Le pire des systèmes... à l'exception de tous les autres: de l'énarchie, de la noblesse d'Etat et de la reproduction sociale* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995).

<sup>14</sup>) Jean-Louis Quermonne, *L'appareil administratif de l'Etat* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1991).

The main aspect of the education provided at the ENA is found in its multi-disciplinary nature. The school aims to educate generalists who should have certain mobility in the public service, and not single-subject specialists. In accordance with this logic, the position that the ENA graduates will gain in a French ministry, when they finish their two years of study, depends primarily on their ranking compared to their fellow students. The career choices made by the ENA students are then determined by the marks that they received while in the school (from exams and training). The top graduates on the exit-ranking list will traditionally choose to serve in one of the *Grand corps de l'Etat*, which are also the most interesting, in terms of prestige and salary, such as the State's Council (*Conseil d'Etat*), the Court of Auditors (*Cour des comptes*) or the Treasury's General Inspectorate (*Inspection générale des Finances*). The second-ranking students on the list will usually choose to work in the FMFEA, where they are recruited directly as Foreign Affairs' General Advisers. There is no specific training scheme for the future diplomats inside the ENA. Once recruited by the *Quai d'Orsay*, they will follow an obligatory four months of training, just like all senior staff, at the Diplomatic and Consular Institute of the FMFEA. This is a recent development, as this school was created by, and for, the FMFEA in April 2010. Finally, the remaining graduates from the ENA (that is, a majority of them) will hold positions in different ministries — with a preference for the Ministry of Economics and Finance — or in administrative tribunals.

In 2010, three ENA graduates joined the FMFEA as Foreign Affairs' General Advisers. There were four to do so in 2009, as well as four in 2008, and seven in 2007 and 2006. The choice of the FMFEA within the ENA depends, of course, on the interest that the graduating students show in an international career, but also, as observed above, on their placement in the ultimate ranking. In consequence, some of the ENA graduates choose to follow a career in the *Quai d'Orsay* simply because their personal ranking did not grant them access to the *Grands corps de l'Etat*, which are highly selective in terms of the positions available. In 2010, only four positions were offered at the State's Council, four others at the Court of Auditors, and four as well at the Treasury's General Inspectorate. Nevertheless, over-generalization should be avoided. It also happens that some of the ENA students choose the *Quai d'Orsay* rather than a *Grand corps* simply because they want to work in the field of international relations.

It has already been noted that a vast majority of the FMFEA's diplomats graduating from the ENA studied previously at *Sciences Po* in Paris, another prestigious school of social sciences, which was created in 1873 outside of the French university system and recruits its students through selective exams. Other ENA diplomats generally have a bachelor's or a master's degree in law and a more diverse career in the French administration if they entered the ENA through the 'inside' examination. They can also have done the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS), another *grande école*, which normally prepares students for the career of high

school teacher and then university lecturer. If ENS candidates are studying at the ENA, it is to escape the job of teacher, because the salary and social prestige of such jobs have diminished greatly within French society.

The article's sample allows five trends about the career of the ENA graduates inside the *Quai d'Orsay* to be stressed. First, the ENA graduates are more inclined to follow a multilateral path than the Orient's Advisers, with multilateral here meaning a diplomatic career that is mostly devoted to intergovernmental organizations (IOs). In the study's sample, 79 per cent of the diplomats graduating from the ENA held a position at the French Permanent Representation to the United Nations (in New York or in Geneva), or at the French Permanent Representations to the European Union (EU), to the North Atlantic Council, to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). They often obtain such positions relatively early in their career, after six years as Secretaries and after ten years as Advisers. Eventually, after twenty years of service, they frequently become appointed as Ambassadors in these posts. For example, all of the successive French Ambassadors to the Permanent Representation to the European Union since 1977 graduated from the ENA. This trend can also be observed in the appointments at the central administration, where the ENA graduates are more often placed in multilateral departments than in geographical ones. For instance, the Director for European Cooperation was appointed in 1997, twenty years after graduating from the ENA; he was in 2011 the Secretary-General of the FMFEA. The Director for Scientific and Technical Cooperation was appointed in 1993, sixteen years after leaving the ENA; in 2011 he was one of the Diplomatic Advisers of the French government. The Assistant Director for Disarmament was appointed in 2006, ten years after graduating from the ENA; in 2011 he was heading the French Permanent Representation to NATO. Inside the multilateral path, diplomats from the ENA develop their career around a specific expertise. EU affairs and disarmament/security affairs constitute two areas of specialization in which people could make their whole career.

The ENA graduates, when they occupy and effectively trust bilateral positions, are posted to 'big' developed countries (such as the United States, EU capitals, Russia, Canada, Australia and Japan), or in the major emerging countries (such as Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa or Egypt). 58 per cent have occupied a post at the French Embassy in London or in Washington at least once during their first fifteen years of service. Consequently, they often become Ambassador in the aforementioned countries after 20 to 30 years of career. For instance, the French Ambassador to Canada in 2004 got his position 34 years after graduating from the ENA. In 2008, the French Ambassador to Tokyo got his job 32 years after graduating from the ENA. The French Ambassador to Beijing in 1996, preceded by Moscow in 1992, got his positions 25 and 21 years, respectively, after graduating from the ENA.



The ENA graduates are more inclined to take on jobs as political advisers compared to other diplomats, not only at the service of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs or European Affairs, but also as Adviser to the President of the Republic or to the Prime Minister. According to Marc Lorient's sociological study of the FMFEA, diplomats who graduated from both the ENA and *Sciences Po* occupied on average 1.5 positions in a political function, whereas this number was only 1.1 on average for those who only did the ENA, and 0.7 for the Orient's Advisers.<sup>15</sup> After having held positions in a 'cabinet' (which means a minister's private office in France), they continue their diplomatic career, which is accelerated by this spell, thanks to the new contacts that they have established within the political sphere. As an example, diplomats who graduated from the ENA in 1992 constitute an enlightening case of the advantage of making a detour towards a political function. Among the six, three have attained the highest position, called 'Out of Rank Adviser' (*Conseiller des affaires étrangères hors classe*). The interesting point is that these three people have all held political functions inside and outside the FMFEA: one was Diplomatic Adviser to the French Prime Minister from 1997 to 2002; the second was Adviser to the Deputy Minister on European Affairs in the late 1990s; and the third was Adviser to the French Foreign Minister in 2007. Since 2009, they have been appointed, respectively, as French Ambassador to the UN and to the IOs in Vienna, Head of the service in charge of the EU Common and Foreign Security Policy, and French Ambassador in Tel Aviv. Quite significantly, their three colleagues who simply followed the regular diplomatic career are 'only' Second Adviser in New Delhi, Second Adviser to the UN, and Deputy Director for Scientific and Academic Cooperation. It is among the group of ENA graduates that we also find diplomats who have moved to a political career as members of the government or members of the French Parliament. In this sample, two have become members of the French National Assembly or of the European Parliament: Dominique Souchet (ENA, 1972); and Sylvie Goulard (ENA, 1989).

Fourth, the ENA graduates despise consular activities. Having studied politics and public affairs, they are more interested in political chancellery and consider the work of consular agents to be less rewarding. When they do take a consular post, it is to access immediately the rank of General Consul in a prestigious city such as Quebec, Sao Paulo, New York, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong or Miami. This consular experience occurs relatively early in their career, after twelve years of service, and extremely rarely after more than twenty years spent in the FMFEA.

Finally, the ENA graduates are quicker to reach the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary, which is the most important step in terms of salary, but also to get a

<sup>15</sup> Marc Lorient, '*La carrière des diplomates français: entre parcours individuel et structuration collective*', *Sociologies*, 2009, available online at <http://sociologies.revues.org/index2936.html>.

position as Ambassador, even if it is not a compulsory prerequisite. According to our sample, the ENA graduates reached this rank after an average of 19.5 years of career (with a minimum of 17 years and a maximum of 22 years), while Orient's Advisers needed an average of 22.5 years (with a minimum of 18 years and a maximum of 29 years).<sup>16</sup>

There is no doubt that 'Enarques' (as ENA graduates are known) tended in the period 1970-2009 to access higher positions in more prestigious embassies and that they did so quicker and more easily than others. For the last 40 years, the ENA has been the royal way to have a successful career as a diplomat in France.

### **The Orient's Advisers: First Row, Second Rate**

The mere name of the 'Orient entrance examination' is a legacy of France's colonial experience, a period when national diplomacy recruited senior executives to serve in non-Western countries that were often considered as part of a far and mysterious East. The term 'Orient' was used in a similar way in the research field of oriental civilization. To talk about 'orientalism' was not then such a polemic subject as it is today. The National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (*Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales*, INALCO) is a reminder of this French orientalism, just as the famous London-based School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) reminds us of the United Kingdom's colonial past.<sup>17</sup> The name 'Orient examination' was thus retained at the FMFEA; it allows for the direct recruitment of a small number of executives who study in depth, and effectively master, at least one oriental language. In 2011 there were three distinct groups of languages that are recognized at the entrance examination. The first group is dedicated to Central and Eastern Europe. Oddly, German and Dutch were recognized at the end of the 1990s as oriental languages, thus putting the adjective into perspective, although in March 2011 there were discussions inside the FMFEA — under pressure from non-Europeanists inside the Orient's corps — to delete this policy and to give more credit to rare languages such as Hindi, Chinese or Swahili.<sup>18</sup> The second group includes Southern Asia and the Far East; and the third group focuses on Eastern Mediterranean languages, the Maghreb and Africa.

Until 1999, the recruitment of the Orient's senior staff was carried out through a 'Foreign Affairs' Orient Secretary Examination'. The situation changed in 1999 when a 'Foreign Affairs' Orient Adviser Examination' was created as a direct rival

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<sup>16</sup> In the particular status of the agents of the FMFEA, nomination to the grade of 2nd-rank Plenipotentiary Minister requires at least sixteen years of service in the 'Out of Rank' Advisers' grade.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Labrousse, *Deux siècles d'histoire de l'École des langues orientales, 1795-1995* (Paris: Hervas, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Interview at the FMFEA, 16 March 2011.

to the post-ENA recruitment method. This very selective examination — only six to eight people are accepted out of hundreds every year — is also divided, as is the ENA's exam, between an external examination that is reserved for young university graduates, and an internal examination through which current employees of any French administration (in practice, the FMFEA) can apply. In addition to perfect mastery of English and of an oriental language, the test includes a general knowledge examination, a law or economics assessment, and questions on international and European issues. In this way, it is not so different from other examinations that allow university graduates access to the French public sector. Yet what can be observed from the careers of diplomats who acceded to the *Quai d'Orsay* through the Orient's Adviser examination (or Orient's Secretary before 1999)?

The Orient's Advisers have a bachelor's or a master's degree in law, history or a diploma from *Sciences Po*. In our sample, a majority of the agents (29 out of 50) came from *Sciences Po*. Half of them (24 out of 50) also graduated in parallel from INALCO. It is interesting to stress that study at INALCO was more the case for the older generations — those who studied during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s — than for the newer generation who could have studied languages in other universities. Orient's Advisers can thus be considered as the most vocational diplomats. For several years they studied a specific language and culture, they often lived in foreign countries, and joined the ministry to go and work in countries that they like. With regard to the social background of French diplomats, it is not at all proven that ENA graduates have higher social origins than Orient's Advisers — contrary to what is argued in the *Quai d'Orsay's* Department of Human Resources.<sup>19</sup> For example, 12 per cent of former ENA students possess a name belonging to the French aristocracy, but 10 per cent of Orient's Advisers in our sample do too. The difference is thus small. The careers of the Orient's Advisers still start, however, at a slightly inferior rank compared to their ENA colleagues. They are first appointed abroad as a Third or Second Secretary, contrary to the '*Enarques*' who usually become directly First Secretaries, because the two years spent at the ENA count for seniority. Moreover, their escalation up the diplomatic ladder is somehow less rapid. On average, they become Assistant Secretary (*Sous Directeur*) after fifteen years in the ministry, Deputy Director after twenty years, and eventually Director when they are about to celebrate their thirtieth year of diplomatic service. For example, one Orient's Adviser was appointed as Assistant Director to the Staff Department fourteen years after his entrance in the FMFEA, and Director for Asia and Oceania in 2000, 30 years after having passed the examination. In 2009, the Director for Development Aid previously held the post of Assistant Director to the Middle East and Deputy Director for North Africa and the Middle East in Paris, respectively fourteen and 23 years

<sup>19</sup> Interview at the FMFEA, 23 March 2011.

after having been recruited. The position of Ambassador is rarely obtained before having spent twenty years working for the FMFEA.

Senior Orient's Advisers are appointed more to small and middle-sized countries and then gain more responsibilities as their careers are about to end. There are some exceptions to this general trend. Jean-David Levitte, for instance, was recruited through the Orient examination and not the ENA. He was appointed Director for Asia and Oceania after twenty years, and then Ambassador to the UN Security Council, to the United States, before joining the Presidency of the Republic as Diplomatic Adviser to the President. Maurice Gourdauld-Montagne is another exception of an Orient Adviser who had a fast-track career inside the ministry. Recruited through the Orient examination in 1978, he became French Ambassador to Tokyo in 1998, then to London in 2002, and finally to Berlin in 2011.

Another general trend is that only 20 per cent of Orient's Advisers follow a multilateral path inside the FMFEA and work in the French permanent representations to the major international organizations. Again, a limited number of exceptions exist. Ambassador Jean-David Levitte spent a long part of his career appointed to the French representations to the UN, both in New York and Geneva.

Orient's Advisers are usually mobile diplomats. They spend more years posted to foreign embassies and consulates than their colleagues graduating from the ENA. Their mobility can be explained by the fact that serving abroad is a vocation for the Orient's Advisers. When they are at the central administration, Orient's Advisers tend to take jobs in the geographical directorates of the ministry. Nonetheless, the FMFEA is a small department compared to other French ministries and it is not always easy to find a job in connection with the region of specialization. For example, a specialist of Eastern European languages who entered the *Quai d'Orsay* in 1972 through the Orient's Adviser examination was then appointed to such diverse capitals as Stockholm, Ankara, Islamabad, Helsinki, Tokyo, Athens, Skopje, Tirana, Valetta and Ulan Bator. Another Orient's Adviser who was recruited in 1972, and who mastered Japanese and Korean, held positions in Tokyo, Manila, Hanoi, Bombay, Phnom Penh, Kinshasa, Abidjan and Antananarivo. The human resources' department of the FMFEA has recently adopted a proactive policy of only appointing Orient's Advisers to the region(s) where they are specialists. Yet experience has shown, especially in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, that remaining in the same region throughout the entirety of a career could be damaging for the renewal of French foreign policy. Many diplomats, in developing close and friendly relations with the leaders in power (which were rarely democratic), often became obstacles to any push for change or to any call for better governance and greater protection of human rights in the region.

Orient's Advisers are less prone (and eager) to obtain political appointments in ministerial 'cabinets' in Paris. Indeed, they enter the *Quai d'Orsay* to engage in

diplomacy and usually do not have the same broad political ambition that the ENA graduates possess. Interestingly, however, Orient's Advisers who get a political position as Diplomatic Adviser to the President of the Republic or to the Prime Minister experience a favourable push in their career. Just to take again the examples of Jean-Daniel Levitte and Maurice Gourdault-Montagne: the first was Diplomatic Adviser to the Presidency of the Republic from 1993-1995 and then again since 2007; the second was Director of the Prime Minister's private office from 1995-1997 and then had six years as President Chirac's Diplomatic Adviser (from 1997-1998 and from 2002-2007). Getting a position on the border of politics and administration remains a strong personal advantage for the few Orient's Advisers who gain access to such posts.

Finally, a post of Consul-General is not such an uncommon phenomenon for an Orient's Adviser as for an ENA graduate. Out of the 21 diplomats in our sample who entered the FMFEA during the years 1970, 1971, 1972, 1977, 1978 and 1979, eight had held such a post by 2009. They sometimes take a post of Assistant Consul-General or Deputy Consul-General relatively early in their career. A post of Consul-General can then be obtained at diverse moment of their careers; the appointment depends more on the importance of the city than on the rank of the diplomat. In consequence, if an Orient's Adviser was able to be nominated as the Consul-General in Cracow after only ten years in the FMFEA, another one had to wait eighteen years to hold a similar position in Johannesburg, and a last one 28 years to become the French Consul-General in Washington (one of the most attractive consular posts). At the end, consular activities are no more popular for the Orient's Advisers than for the ENA graduates. Chancery work still remains their priority.

To sum up, Orient's Advisers' careers contrasted with the careers of their colleagues from the ENA in the period 1970-2009. Diplomats by vocation, they tended to hold more posts outside the central administration in Paris, they favoured bilateral relations and worked in geographical departments. Moreover, they seemed somehow to be slower to climb the diplomatic career ladder. If Orient's Advisers are at the first row of French diplomacy, they still may be regarded as second-rate diplomats when compared to the '*Enarques*'.

### **Towards a Decreasing Pillarization**

Even though political scientists have focused more on France's public policies rather than on its high public service since the 1990s, the French administration generally remains described as structured around different and relatively compartmentalized corps.<sup>20</sup> This 'pillarization', to use a term derived from the study

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<sup>20</sup> Jean-Patrice Lacam, *La France: une république de mandarins? Les hauts fonctionnaires et la politique* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 2000).

of pluralistic political systems,<sup>21</sup> leads to permanent negotiations among the corps in order to secure control of the high-ranking positions within the state's bureaucracy. This phenomenon also explains the atomization of the public policy-making processes, as policy networks are frequently built between specific bureaucratic corps and specific private interests. Finally, pillarization has sometimes been destabilized, or on the contrary strengthened, by the new transnational networks of actors that can emerge from EU negotiations.

This study shows that access to the position of Foreign Affairs Adviser at the FMFEA through several different examinations and not through a unique examination — as is the case in Germany, the United Kingdom or Italy — led between 1970 and 2009 to a certain differentiated defence of interests by diplomats depending on their affiliation with a certain corps, which was regarded as a pillar. Pillarization has an institutional translation in union representation. At the FMFEA there is both a Union of the Diplomatic and Consular Agents coming from the ENA (in French, *Association syndicale des agents diplomatiques et consulaires issus de l'ENA* — ADIENA) and a Union of the Diplomatic and Consular Orient Agents (in French, *Association syndicale des agents diplomatiques et consulaires d'Orient* — ASAO). To these two organizations, several others can be added that defend particular administrative statuses within the FMFEA and also the representation of the main French national unions, such as the *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT). In consequence, each association makes sure that the interests of its corps are respected within the FMFEA during the meetings of the so-called Joint Administrative Commissions. Such Commissions are composed of an equal number of representatives from the administration and from the unions. The representatives will ultimately be those who propose the promotion list to the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs. Promotion to the rank of 'Out of Class Adviser' is a sensitive issue, as it is not automatically given to any senior diplomat and remains a strong sign of professional success. Representatives from ADIENA and from ASAO will ensure that certain quotas of 'their' people are present in such lists. Through this mechanism, they also prove to be faithful to a classic characteristic of pillarization — namely, a balancing act between groups.

The idea of an ENA pillar, which is always and systematically opposed to an Orient pillar, must however be put into perspective. Among the personnel of the *Quai d'Orsay*, a strong sense of identity exists that goes along with a clear rejection of everything that could be interpreted as an external intrusion in its internal affairs. As a result, both corps find themselves united against the procedure permitted by the personnel's status that allows senior public servants from other ministries to be nominated as Plenipotentiary Ministers. Similarly, diplomats

<sup>21</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Democracies in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

from the ENA or from the group of Orient's Advisers strongly dislike nominations of non-government officials to the rank of Plenipotentiary Minister, as a reward for serving the Ministry in a specific way. One recent similar nomination occurred in December 2008, when the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, promoted his special adviser and spokesman to such a grade. A medical doctor who was previously engaged in humanitarian action thus became the Plenipotentiary Minister; he was appointed Ambassador to Syria in September 2009 and is now able to pursue a career in the diplomatic service until he retires.

As we have seen above, the two ways of recruiting high-ranking diplomats (the ENA and Orient) between 1970 and 2009 served to occupy functions that were not exactly similar within the FMFEA. However, such differences became more and more blurred, mostly because of a series of new constraints. The first of these new constraints was the general diminution of FMFEA's budgetary resources since 2004. The ministry has indeed been strongly affected by the regulations imposed by the Ministry of Budget to every public administration since that date. Still, the *Quai d'Orsay* had already started to reduce its expenditures before 2004 and, in consequence, has seen its resources diminish 25 per cent in the last twenty years.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the FMFEA's budget that is devoted to cultural cooperation is being taken away (by way of experiment for the moment) by an external operator, the French Institute (in French, *Institut Français*). This operator's mandate is to bring all of the French Institutes and French Alliances (*Alliances Françaises*) in foreign countries together, along the lines of the *British Council* or *Goethe Institut* models. Still, France retains the most important diplomatic network in the world, with 162 diplomatic posts and 235 consular posts in 2010. Nevertheless, more and more embassies located in small countries are composed merely of an Ambassador and an Adviser. This diminution of resources also translated into a reduction in expatriation allowances for the staff, which represent in France the main component of the salary of a diplomat who is appointed to a foreign country. Agents of the FMFEA, who insist that their administration only represents 1.2 or 1.3 per cent of the French state's yearly expenditures, experience this reduction as a drop in status. Incidentally, the decrease in expatriation allowances gave way in December 2003 to one of the first strikes of French diplomatic agents in embassies and consulates abroad.

Another source of rapprochement between diplomats from the ENA and from the group of Orient's Advisers lies in the common feeling of a gap between the administration of the *Quai d'Orsay* and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs who followed one another between 2002 and 2011. Since Hubert Védrine left the position in 2002, his successors have had difficulties in being well accepted by their own administration. Even though he had a successful career as a diplomat behind

<sup>22</sup> Alain Juppé and Hubert Védrine, 'Cessez d'affaiblir le *Quai d'Orsay*', *Le Monde*, 6 July 2010.

him, Dominique de Villepin, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2002 to 2004, experienced such difficulties, certainly because of a series of unpopular reforms (such as the decrease of expatriation allowances) that he passed. Another explanation resides in the limited political weight of de Villepin's followers with the Presidency of the Republic and its diplomatic advisers. In the French Fifth Republic system, the President of the Republic is the ultimate authority to decide foreign and defence policies, and the political weight of the Foreign Minister is important in order to secure some autonomy for the diplomatic administration, which is out of the *Elysée's* reach.<sup>23</sup> Yet for six years, none of the French Ministers of Foreign Affairs succeeded in distancing themselves from the President and acquiring real independence: Michel Barnier between 2004 and 2005, Philippe Douste-Blazy between 2005 and 2007, Bernard Kouchner from 2007 to 2010, and Michèle Alliot-Marie, who was briefly nominated to this post between 2010 and 2011, were all eclipsed by the strength of the Presidential function.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the return to the *Quai d'Orsay* of Alain Juppé since February 2011 has been seen as a relief by most diplomats, as Alain Juppé had successfully gained the trust of the diplomatic administration during his first mandate as Minister of Foreign Affairs (between 1993 and 1995) thanks to a skilfully executed reform of the service. Moreover, his nomination as number two in the government of French Prime Minister François Fillon has been perceived as a protection from the too-systematic intervention of the French Presidency in diplomatic affairs.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, rather than opposing each other, several general features of the careers within the FMFEA move the two pillars closer to one another. Among them should be noted the increasing difficulty for a generation of senior executives from the baby boom generation to obtain a position as Ambassador or Director at the central administration for lack of vacant positions. In 2011, there were about 35 executives in the FMFEA who did not perform badly throughout their career but still cannot get hold of the position as Ambassador to which they are legitimately entitled.<sup>26</sup> In the *Quai d'Orsay's* language, they are designated as 'agents on shelves'.

A policy for managing human resources, which was intended to individualize the agents' careers, was only introduced in the FMFEA towards the end of the 1990s. Before this reform, the FMFEA restricted itself to mere bureaucratic management of careers. The main rationale behind this phenomenon was that serious work on human resources was relegated to the benefit of the 'noble' task of

<sup>23</sup> Samy Cohen, *La monarchie nucléaire: les coulisses de la politique étrangère de la Vème République* (Paris: Hachette, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> The resignation of Michèle Alliot-Marie in February 2011 led to the unprecedented publication by various groups of anonymous diplomats of opinion pieces in the press criticizing the weakness of French ministers of foreign affairs.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Lequesne, 'Nicolas Sarkozy et la diplomatie française', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, October-November, 2011, pp. 85-94.

<sup>26</sup> Interview at the FMFEA, 23 March 2011.



making foreign policy. The late discovery of managerial functions was also essential for budgetary matters, under pressure from the General Revision of Public Policies (in French, *RGPP*), which was initiated by François Fillon's conservative government in 2008 with the goal of reducing the general deficit of the public budget. Indeed, this deficit still represented 149 billion euros in 2009, the equivalent of 8.2 per cent of France's gross domestic product (GDP).

Even though the Foreign Affairs Advisers coming from the ENA still have, in 2011, a certain advantage in terms of career compared to the Orient's Advisers, they are the ones who feel the more threatened by the evolution within the FMFEA. As a result, they are also the ones who express the strongest corporatist claims inside the FMFEA.

A certain feeling of threat among the ENA diplomats is not only the result of the reduced number of positions made available at the *Quai d'Orsay* to the ENA since 2008 and thus of their total share among the Foreign Affairs Advisers (only 20 per cent in 2011). It also comes from the fact that the elitism of the ENA socializes young civil servants to certain 'normal' forms of competition in order to secure the 'best' positions. In this regard, the novelty of nominating diplomats from the group of Orient's Advisers to the French Embassy in London, Berlin, Beijing or Moscow is perceived as an emblematic loss of power. Diplomats from the ENA have found it difficult accepting this change, as the embassy — like the prefecture at the national level — still represents public service authority, where the senior civil servant can enjoy power as the personalized embodiment of the French state.

If pillarization continues to differentiate at the *Quai d'Orsay* between the careers of diplomats who graduated from the ENA and diplomats who took the Orient examination, this pillarization, in the most recent period, far from increasing, has tended to reduce itself. Yet the fact that ENA graduates' careers resemble more and more those of their colleagues from the group of Orient's Advisers is certainly perceived by former students of the ENA as a loss of privilege and status.

## Conclusion

This article highlights the specificity of the recruitment of senior diplomats in France since 1970. The idiosyncratic character of the French situation resides in the lack of a single examination. The diversity of ways through which one can enter the FMFEA leads to the coexistence within the ministry of several pillars, each linked to specific procedures of recruitment.

Another characteristic in the careers of French diplomats, which is shared this time with France's working environment in general, is the importance of one's conditions of access in the future development of one's career. The way that you enter an institution and the schools that you graduated from are still decisive in

France in the constitution of your professional career. In the case of the FMFEA, this remark needs to be put into perspective by the fact that the internal promotion of agents from lower to higher grades is more frequent than the average of other French ministries. As a matter of fact, if this study focuses on the means of direct recruitment of senior staff through the most selective examinations (what is called 'entrance through the main gate', or '*entrée par la grande porte*' in French), one-third of Foreign Affairs Advisers were actually nominated to this grade after having entered the FMFEA through a lower-rank examination.

This study also underlines how much the interaction between the administration and politics, notably through the *cabinets ministériels*, has an influence on the career of particular individuals in the French diplomatic system.

Finally, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the recruitment of diplomats or senior diplomats has occurred in a context that is marked not only by a serious reduction in the budgetary resources of the FMFEA, but also by a profound reconsideration of its professional practices. This article has only sketched this last dimension, which will absolutely have to be examined further in a systematic sociology of French diplomats' professional practices.

In France, as in most countries, the job of Ambassador continues to take on a symbolic dimension of authority, through the classical representative mission of Westphalian-style diplomacy. However, Ambassadors in the twenty-first century should be more concerned about public diplomacy. Public diplomacy requires taking into account new practices, such as the capacity to host meetings and exchanges in an informal setting, the competence to use new information technologies (such as social networks and blogs, etc.),<sup>27</sup> or the ability to speak at academic conferences and symposiums. Today, public diplomacy is still a field of research that, in the case of France, deserves to be investigated further. Indeed, such research would be instrumental in producing a larger sociology on what it means to be a diplomat today at the *Quai d'Orsay*.<sup>28</sup>

**Christian Lequesne** is a Professor of European Studies at Sciences Po in Paris since 1988, and is the Director of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI). He is a former LSE — Sciences Po Alliance Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

**Jean Heilbronn** is a double Master's student in International Relations at Sciences Po in Paris, and at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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<sup>27</sup> See the conference titled 'Internet: Towards an International Cyberpolitics', organized by CERI and the Department for Prospectives of the FMFEA on 21 January 2011.

<sup>28</sup> This is research that Christian Lequesne wishes to keep investigating at CERI — Sciences Po.