

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

More generally, where Canada has 160 missions around the world, Germany has 230, Italy 256, the United States 289, France 290, Britain 342, and Japan 395. Austria, Switzerland, Spain and Turkey all have more offices abroad than Canada.

The "thinning out" of the department affected all employee groups: trade ⁽¹⁵⁾, consular ⁽¹⁶⁾, administration, support, and locally-engaged staff. But the cumulative impact appears to have been greatest on political officers:

- As the department's political agenda expanded and increased in complexity, it had to be managed by a smaller number of political officers.
- As other departmental programs required attention but had fewer resources to deal with them, increased responsibilities devolved on political officers to take up the slack (the traditional "default" source of personnel resources).
- As other government departments needed more assistance abroad, political officers accumulated additional tasks.
- And as support resources were withdrawn, political officers were required to perform an increasing number of administrative tasks. Twenty years ago, the mission in Moscow, a classic "political" post, had seven secretaries; today, with a larger officer complement, it has one.

In the meantime, the department is short about 140 FSs (political/economic and trade), away on extended leave, secondments, interchanges etc. Government staffing rules allow these positions to be filled temporarily by contract employees, and managers have been diligent in trying to do so. But the results have been mixed. While many good people have been hired and have performed admirably, managers at the workshops agreed they were not a substitute for FS officers. As a rule, they had fewer of the procedural and communications skills of FS officers, little knowledge of the department and its processes, and no experience of the work of missions.

¹⁵ *During the 1990s, the trade commissioner complement was reduced by 20%. As a result, the average number of trade commissioners per trade office declined from 2.2 to 1.5.*

¹⁶ *In FY 2000/01, Canada had only seven (7) full-time Canada-based consular officers abroad and only 56 Canada-based FTEs in total (almost all of it part-time work spread among more than 150 individuals) to perform consular work at 137 missions. Between 1994 and 1998, the number of consular cases increased by 50% (to 114,000). In 1998, Canadians made 4.2 million trips to countries other than the United States.*