

# France Modernizes its Diplomacy

By **Éric Chevallier**

**D**iplomacy is not immune to the general trend toward government modernization that most OECD countries—and many others—have been experiencing over the past 10 to 20 years. The special mandate of diplomats does not exempt them from the need for transparency to both the public and parliament.

Bernard Kouchner, France's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, believes that his ministry—and, more generally, the entire governmental apparatus involved in France's international activities—must undergo extensive reorganization to face the significant and rapid transformations that are taking place throughout the world: new issues and challenges for our diplomatic corps, new players and new missions.

The foreign affairs ministries of our key partners are facing the same challenges we are, including deep budget cuts, the need for downsizing workforces,

the redrawing of the diplomatic and consular map to include emerging areas, and the need to strengthen inter-ministerial coordination of activities abroad. We are closely watching the way in which most of our partners are transforming their administrations and their diplomatic networks, and we regularly share information.

Our goal is to give our ministry the responsibility for setting France's agenda for action beyond our borders. We continue to streamline the government's international network. The ministry is implementing a policy of ongoing adaptation, and now hopes to boost reform efforts by following two principles: reaffirming our network's universality, which is a major asset for France in a context of increasing global competitiveness; and adapting our presence to the scope of issues and our interests.

To involve officers in discussions leading to the preparation of the white paper on France's foreign and European policy, the ministry implemented a white-paper information site on its intranet in October 2007. The site has received more than 18,500 visits and 600 contributions.

There have been numerous proposals on ways to improve the various mechanisms in place: being as open as possible to outside expertise, which should form the very basis of the future globalization, development and partnership branch; strengthening the policy of diplomat mobility abroad (creating a dedicated group); reforming pay systems at Headquarters and abroad to give greater consideration to merit, functions performed and living conditions; making it possible—through statutory reform—to appoint young officers as ambassadors on diplomatic postings; taking concrete steps to improve working conditions at Headquarters (for example, making laptop computers the rule rather than the exception); streamlining work methods and achieving a better work-life balance (real status of spouses, etc.)

Most of these proposals were taken up by the white paper commission, and the Minister committed to ensuring that ministry employees see real progress made.

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Éric Chevallier: "We continue to streamline the government's international network."