

RELEASE
IN FULL

From: Slaughter, Anne-Marie <SlaughterA@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2010 10:13 AM
To: H
Cc: Mills, Cheryl D; Abedin, Huma; Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: Plane reading: old boys network v Ashton

Below is from the Economist blogger re efforts w/l EU to discredit Ashton, particularly from the French. Wouldn't hurt to mention her positively with French interlocutors. See particularly this line: "There is, frankly, a whiff of old boy's network against Lady Ashton: she is not a lifetime member of the honourable guild of former foreign ministers, and she is surrounded by men in suits who think they know a lot more about foreign policy than she does. There is not much sympathy for her complicated family life, involving young children, and much commuting between Brussels and Britain."



A blog by the author of our column on the European Union

Charlemagne's notebook

• **Why did Lady Ashton take the EU's foreign policy job?**

• Jan 26th 2010, 22:04

NOT yet February, and the briefing against Catherine Ashton, the newly appointed EU foreign policy chief, is getting nasty. Jean Quatremer, the Brussels blogger and well-connected EU correspondent of *Libération*, dropped another depth charge against the baroness tonight. His list of complaints against her is long, and I have a feeling some of them are a smidgeon exaggerated. I find it hard to believe it is literally impossible to reach Lady Ashton after eight o'clock in the evening as Mr Quatremer charges, because she allegedly has her mobile telephones diverted to the EU situation centre (a small intelligence analysis cell staffed by officers from national services) after that hour. I also have some doubts about the stress laid on the fact that she has not yet got round to having top secret security clearance yet, so cannot see any confidential papers. As a former British cabinet minister, and serving UK commissioner, something tells me the British at least may share just the odd secret with her.

A senior official I saw today also made the point that any holder of Lady Ashton's post would currently be struggling with teething problems and squabbling as the new foreign policy apparatus created by the Lisbon Treaty takes shape. There is, frankly, a whiff of old boy's network against Lady Ashton: she is not a lifetime member of the honourable guild of former foreign ministers, and she is surrounded by men in suits who think they know a lot more about foreign policy than she does. There is not much sympathy for her complicated family life, involving young children, and much commuting between Brussels and Britain.

Finally, at the risk of sounding too loyal to the British, I think Mr Quatremer is being unfair when he says that it suits the Foreign Office in London to have Lady Ashton "sabotage" the post. My impression is that the British government feels Lady Ashton needs a lot of support right now and worries she is not getting

enough support, but at the same time worries that if she receives too much help in the way of briefings and advice from British officials, she will be seen as a British stooge. That may be a self-serving sort of fear (because it allows the British to offer Lady Ashton lots of help) but it is real enough.

Other charges probably have something to them. They certainly chime with things I have been told by other people.

But most damaging, to my mind, is the intimate nature of some of the briefing: this stuff is coming from officials close to Lady Ashton, or who are senior enough to have significant contact with her. And I can confirm from my own conversations that people across the whole EU foreign policy machine are asking the same question: why did she take this huge job, when her instinct seems to be to make it as low key as possible? That is a dangerous question mark to have hanging over you.