

## Stronger CFSP: the big un-kept promise of the European integration process?

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Decisiveness and an ambitious vision for uniting the EU's Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was clearly presented by the HR/VP Federica Mogherini during her hearing before the European Parliament, but the question is to what extent this persuasiveness reflects the balance between the potential of the EU's institutional infrastructure and the aim of acting as a global player. Mogherini's hubris somehow seems incompatible with the inherited cacophony of the decision making process shared amongst the EU institutions, the fragility of institutional coordination, and ultimately, with the leading and decisive role of the 28 Member States - in both the Council and the European Council, when it comes to the EU's foreign policy.

It is evident that the institutional changes after the Lisbon Treaty, with the formation of the European External Action Service and having the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy being at the same time Vice President of the EU Commission, has served as a binding glue between institutions. Additionally accompanied by the unprecedented institutional experiment of Juncker's new Commission, has brought some new energy in terms of institutional cooperation. However, finding the lowest common denominator among Member States will not be enough, considering that the EU still suffers from rampant identity issues, weak institutional coordination, a largely absent external shepherd, and three uncommitted (Britain, France and Germany) internal leaders. The shortsightedness of the EU is easily visible when it comes to strategic political thinking,

political ownership of CFSP and a lack of a common purpose. The EU's foreign policy has been to a certain extent conceptualized by the US for a long time. The US being a trooper of the EU CFSP, proving so in the Balkans, Afghanistan and now in fighting the Islamic State. In addition, the fragile EEAS authority, on one side perceived as an appendix of the Commission, and on the other side as nothing more than an extended hand of the Member States delegations, serves as a trojan horse in the vision of making the CFSP more cohesive and stronger.<sup>1</sup>

It is very questionable as to how effectively the CFSP can contribute towards making the EU a credible international player in conflict prevention and management, while lacking substantial military strength to make a difference. With the constant hijacking of efforts for defense and military integration by the trio of Great Britain, France and Germany, the silent non interested actors such as the Scandinavians and the self proclaiming non-aligner-countries who preserve their reservations either because of historical uncertainties, pride based sovereignty matters or budget dilemmas, the muscling of the CFSP does not look very promising.<sup>2</sup> A strategic approach, entailing instruments for anticipating and preventing crisis, needs to come out of a successful coordination between the European Defense Agency, the Member States and the EEAS.

One of EU's essential objectives is to enhance the existing and develop stronger partnerships and prod them to confront global challenges and

develop sustainable rule of law - based regimes.<sup>3</sup> The objective is well grounded, however the materialization is jeopardized by removing the carrot in the story of enlargement for the Western Balkan countries for example. The paradox of long-term vision of building partnerships and the de-motivational perspective of no enlargement in the next 5 years, might open Pandora's box for Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo, and on top of that gives the ace back to Russia, helping to increase its leverage in the perpetually shaky Balkans.

One of the most reiterated policy objectives in Mogherini's hearing was recalibrating relations with partners from the enlarged neighborhood in Africa and the Middle East by changing the paradigm in the EU's role - from an effective payer to becoming an effective player, in terms of development.<sup>4</sup> Creating a Commissioner's Group on External Action comprised of the Commissioners for Trade, European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and International Cooperation and Development, being at the same time chaired by the HR/VP Mogherini, is an important step forward, however, several cleavages within different policies need to be bridged. There is an inherent conflict of competences between the Council and the Commission in terms of harmonizing the development and security policy objectives in many Arab countries, the Southern and Eastern Neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> Development policies need to be administered in a less rigid fashion, in order to secure faster mobilization of resources and assist the transition process in post-conflict countries.<sup>6</sup> The EU also needs to ensure ex-ante effective oversight of the distribution of the humanitarian aid, since the European Court of Auditors recently found that 2.6 percent of EU's budget for "external relations, aid and enlargement" was used erroneously. If that percentage is applied to

the €450m pledged to Gaza that means €11.7m could end up in Hamas' hands.<sup>7</sup>

What can be conferred is that having Europe's security environment on thin ice with burning conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Libya, the Sahel and Ukraine, accompanied by certain internal institutional cleavages, could also be converted into a game changer. It is up to HR/VP Mogherini, as the face of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy and the respective EU institutions, to find the credo, bridge gaps, fill the CFSP with life and purpose, and succeed in fulfilling the promise of having a stronger and more cohesive European Foreign and Security Policy.

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