

EU Foreign Policy: Mogherini Takes Over

The EU's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini has been in office for 100 days since taking over from Catherine Ashton. In the context of Russia's aggressive policy and instability on the EU's southern borders, Mogherini has an opportunity to make greater use of the authority that her position entails. Nevertheless, structurally, EU foreign policy remains a prerogative of the nation-states.

By Christian Nünlist

The year 2014 was a difficult one for EU foreign policy. On the one hand, Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the civil war in Ukraine have placed a question mark against the rules of international politics as established in Europe since 1975. On the other hand, European jihadists returning from Syria have kept the Western European intelligence agencies busy and raised the threat of terrorist attacks motivated by radical Islam within the EU. Power politics and spheres of influence have returned as practical political concepts, and the EU must come up with a coherent strategic response to Russian revisionism and to the challenge of the so-called "Islamic State" (IS), after many years in which attention had primarily been devoted to economic risks.

The handover from Catherine Ashton to Federica Mogherini as the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in November 2014 was an opportunity to enhance a dimension that hitherto has been the stepchild of European integration. The challenges in Europe's neighborhood are a chance to start over.

In 2010, Ashton spent much time and energy on building up the new European External Action Service (EEAS). Moreover, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the need for a common EU foreign policy was regarded as a negligible issue. In 2015, the



On 30 August 2014, Catherine Ashton (on the right) and her freshly selected successor Federica Mogherini arrive for a news conference at the end of a meeting of EU Ministers in Milan. *Reuters*

EEAS is operating smoothly and has become a fixture – while the office of the High Representative itself has also gained authority due to diplomatic success on the Balkans and in the Iranian nuclear dispute. Today's EU foreign policy is qualitatively different from that of 2009: the institutional innovations of the Lisbon Treaty have added continuity, coherence, and professionalism. Also, the notion of a common foreign policy enjoys widespread popularity: According to a recent survey, 75 per

cent of Europeans favor a strong global role for the EU.

However, there are structural reasons for doubting that a truly decisive reevaluation of the EU's institutional foreign policy can be achieved under Mogherini. For one thing that has become clear in the various crises over Libya, Syria, or Ukraine is that Berlin, Paris, and London continue to call the shots and that divergent national points of view frequently result in an uncoordinated

cacophony instead of a common EU position. During times of crisis, in particular, foreign policy remains the domain of the individual member states.

The change from Ashton to Mogherini has tangible consequences for Switzerland. The EEAS is responsible for negotiations with Switzerland over reforming Berne's relations with the EU. For Swiss foreign policy, the new situation is an opportunity to consider whether Switzerland's activities in Europe's increasingly unstable neighborhood should be undertaken unilaterally or in cooperation with the EU (cf. box on p.3).

Javier Solana: "Mr. Europe"

Following the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954, Jean Monnet's vision of a common foreign policy remained a taboo for decades. The principle of regular consultations did not become an institution until the advent of European Political Cooperation (EPC) in the 1970s. Even after the establishment of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) following the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, foreign policy remained a prerogative of the nation-states.

The position of the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy was finally established by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997). For the first time in its history, EU foreign policy had a face. As

During times of crisis, foreign policy remains the domain of the individual member states.

Europe entered the debacle of the Kosovo War, then-NATO secretary general Javier Solana became the first "Mr. Europe". The proverbial telephone number that former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger is said to have requested "if I want to call Europe" was finally connected in October 1999.

During the "Solana Decade" (1999–2009), the EU became a more important actor on the global stage, not least thanks to numerous civilian and military overseas missions. Thanks to Solana, the EU spoke with one voice in the Middle East peace process and in the conflict over Iran's nuclear programs, and acted as a stabilizing factor on the Balkans. In 2003, Solana also drafted the first common European Security Strategy (ESS). However, he was not an "EU foreign minister", as his mandate only provided for services to the European Council

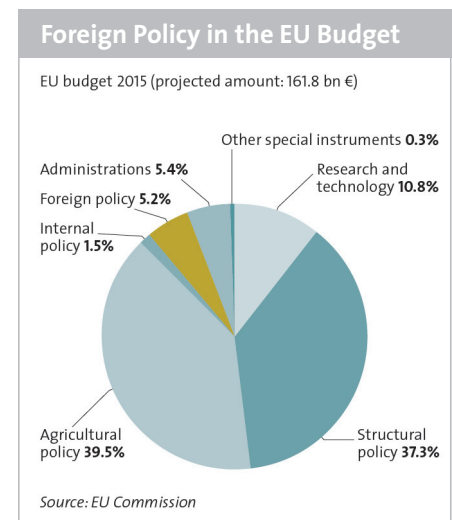
(the chairmanship of which changed hands every six months) and the Commission. The EU's Commissioner for External Relations at the time, Chris Patten, had 6,400 public servants and a far larger budget at his disposal than Solana. The Commissioner represented the EU Commission in the world since 1958 and he was also responsible for the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) from 2004 to 2009.

As the EU reformed itself under the Lisbon Treaty (2009), the positions of the High Representative and the External Relations Commissioner were merged into a new office labeled the "High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy" and not, as planned, "EU Foreign Minister". With the new position covering both functions, redundant structures were eliminated. Ashton also chaired the meetings of foreign and defense ministers, while using her "two hats" to bring foreign-policy coherence to the Commission, of which she was the vice-president. Moreover, she spoke for the EU at international organizations and conferences.

In this way, the authority of the office was visibly strengthened. This may have contributed to the EU member states' choices of Ashton (2009) and Mogherini (2014), who each had a lower public profile than Solana. Candidates such as Joschka Fischer, Radosław Sikorski, or Carl Bildt were passed over. However, a sober analysis of Ashton's incumbency reveals not only achievements, but also the structural problems of her office. Today, a truly communitized foreign policy remains a distant prospect for the EU, and deliberately so.

Ashton's Achievements, 2009–2014

Catherine Ashton was regarded as largely invisible, risk-averse and weak while in the office of the High Representative. Her first year in office was marked by efforts to build up the EEAS and jurisdictional disputes with the EU Commission under José Manuel Barroso. At least there was no major international crisis in 2010 to distract Ashton's attention. The EU's main problem was the debt crisis, which came under the authority of European Council President Herman van Rompuy and was largely tackled by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy. During the Eurozone crisis, a common EU foreign policy was simply not a priority. The economic situation required the full attention not only of the national govern-



ments, but also of Council President van Rompuy and Commission President Barroso. Thus, Ashton did not succeed in mobilizing the full potential of what is in truth a highly powerful office.

In the 2011 crisis over Libya, Ashton and her newly established EEAS did initially play a useful role. Ashton prepared the EU sanctions that were enacted two days after UN Security Council Resolution 1970 and subsequently further tightened in several steps. The EU adapted its Neighborhood Policy to the revolutionary events in North Africa in 2011 with a new strategy, and also delivered substantial humanitarian aid rapidly. However, in matters concerning a Western military intervention, extending recognition to the Libyan opposition, and dealing with the increase of migrants, there was disagreement among the EU member states. Paris and Rome in particular forged ahead without coordination with the EU, leaving Ashton unable to speak for the entire EU in this matter. The coherence of the EU's foreign policy was further eroded by Berlin's abstention at the UN Security Council vote on a military intervention in Libya on 18 March 2011. The external shock of the Arab revolts did not deliver an impulse for stronger integration in the area of common foreign policy, as had been the case with the Kosovo and Iraq wars.

Generally speaking, Ashton played the role of an administrator and coordinator rather than that of a strategic thinker. Her main successes came late in her five-year term in office with the diplomatic rapprochement between Kosovo and Serbia in April 2013 and the Geneva interim agreement on the

Iranian nuclear program in November 2013. Ashton and the EEAS also played an important role in preparing EU sanctions against Russia in 2014. However, when unexpected international crises arose (Libya, Syria, Ukraine), it repeatedly became clear that the member states regard foreign policy as their own prerogative and primarily pursue their own interests and priorities. The EU's High Representative can only become involved in areas on which there is a consensus between the national governments. After the economic crisis had been designated a top executive priority, the governments in their national capitals wished to retain control in the geostrategic struggle with Moscow, as well. In the international management of the Ukraine crisis, it was Angela Merkel in Berlin who pulled the strings, not Ashton in Brussels.

Ashton herself has appraised the evolution of her office and of the newly established EEAS. Her report summarized the strengths and weaknesses of the EEAS and recommended improvements, especially concerning relations with the Commission. However, the national governments showed little interest in Ashton's criticism; three years after the EEAS had been created, there was no intention to revisit the debates of 2010. Ashton's suggestions for short-term change, including a strengthening of strategic planning capabilities, were adopted by the Council of the European Union in late 2013. However, her proposals for medium-term reforms were postponed; they had included leaner management structures and suggestions for resolving the difficult question of who should stand in for the High Representative, who cannot attend Commission meetings in Brussels while simultaneously participating in conferences abroad. Ashton's successor is scheduled to present a new report on the EEAS in 2015.

Internal Coherence

The appointment of Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in August 2014 was reminiscent of Ashton's election five years earlier. Again, proportional representation was a factor; a Social Democrat, the Italian politician was chosen to give balance to the threefold EU leadership that also includes Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and the European Council's President Donald Tusk. Critics yearning for a "Solana 2.0" complained about Mogherini's alleged lack of experience. In

Switzerland and EU Foreign Policy

For Switzerland, too, the handover at the top echelon of EU diplomacy is of significance. Rebalancing the bilateral relations with the EU has become more difficult after the adoption of the initiative "Against Mass Immigration" on 9 February 2014. This challenge to the free movement of persons, issued by the sovereign voters, has further complicated the starting position for Berne. A recent routine EU report on the state of relations with Switzerland made clear that for Brussels, free movement of persons is not only directly linked to the Bilateral I treaties, but also affects participation in the Schengen Agreement and Dublin Regulation as well as parts of the Bilateral II treaties (research, Erasmus, media). Since 1 November 2014, responsibility for negotiations has rested with Mogherini's head diplomat **Maciej Popowski** and with the Swiss Desk of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs under **Gianluca Grippa**. As the negotiations are essentially over interests, it should not matter that the Italian EU High Representative Mogherini is a "neighbor" and that Commission President Juncker is considered to be "Switzerland-friendly".

For Swiss foreign policy, relations with the EU are a priority – they are defined as one of four core areas in the country's current foreign policy strategy for 2012–2015. In certain regions, including the **Western Balkans, the Southern Caucasus, and North Africa**, Switzerland's peace policy is particularly active while also overlapping with the EU's Neighbourhood Policy. However, Switzerland pursues an autonomous foreign policy. In some of its aspects, it complements the EU's policies, but it also competes with them in certain regards. In the Ukraine crisis, Switzerland as the OSCE chair was able to contribute useful mediation services and, as a neutral country, to assist constructively in promoting de-escalation. At the same time, with its independent stance regarding economic sanctions against Russia, Switzerland distanced itself from the EU position. For Swiss foreign policy, the geostrategic conflict between the EU and Russia is a dilemma. On the one hand, Switzerland is unambiguously committed to the **Western values** that have guaranteed peace and stability in Europe since the Helsinki OSCE Conference of 1975; as a small neutral state that cannot engage in power politics, it relies on the rule of law and respect for international principles and norms. On the other hand, as a non-member of both the EU and NATO, it has maintained a **strategic partnership** with Russia since 2005, even though certain parts of that partnership were temporarily suspended after the annexation of Crimea.

The aggravation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in early 2015 thus also brings further strain to Switzerland's difficult bilateral relations with the EU. While Switzerland will continue to attempt mediation between the West and Russia, both within the framework of the OSCE and with its **traditional good offices**, the EU will increasingly demand Switzerland's solidarity when it comes to **European values** and the foundations of European security since 1975, which are no longer respected by Russia. For Switzerland's foreign policy, the increasing unrest on Europe's periphery offers an opportunity to engage actively, and in close attunement with the EU, on behalf of peace and stability in the buffer zone to the east and south of the EU.

principle, however, there is no reason to believe that the foreign minister of a G7 state is not competent and experienced enough for this EU job.

In autumn of 2014, Mogherini presented her vision and agenda for the next five years to the EU Parliament. She made very clear that – like Ashton – she would not pursue a "29th foreign policy", but coordinate and bring to bear the full impact of the 28 foreign policies for added value. Mogherini called for a long-term vision, a new "grand strategy", that could be enacted in concrete terms should a conflict break out. On 1

the Commission is located, rather than to work from the EEAS headquarters. This symbolic move on Mogherini's part signaled her determination to give much more prominence to the function of her office as vice president of the Commission, which had been neglected by Ashton. For instance, right from the start, she involved the Commission more closely in the preparation of ministerial meetings. In the run-up to the December summit of EU foreign ministers, a topical dossier on relations between the EU and Russia was prepared. Mogherini also instituted comprehensive foreign policy post-action reviews with her fellow commissioners.

The new Commission President Juncker has noted in his political guidelines that he intends to give the High Representative more leeway than his predecessors did. Mogherini heads the newly created "Commissioners' Group on External Action", which regularly brings together the commissioners for the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotia-

Kissinger's proverbial telephone number was finally connected in October 1999.

November 2014, in order to improve communication between the EEAS, the Commission, and the Council, she moved her cabinet to the Berlaymont building where

tions, Trade, International Cooperation and Development, and Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management. As the reforms instigated by the Juncker Commission show, Brussels has recognized that the challenges in Europe’s neighborhood require better foreign-policy coordination. However, the final decisions are still made in the Council of the European Union, where a unanimous consensus of member states is required on foreign-policy questions.

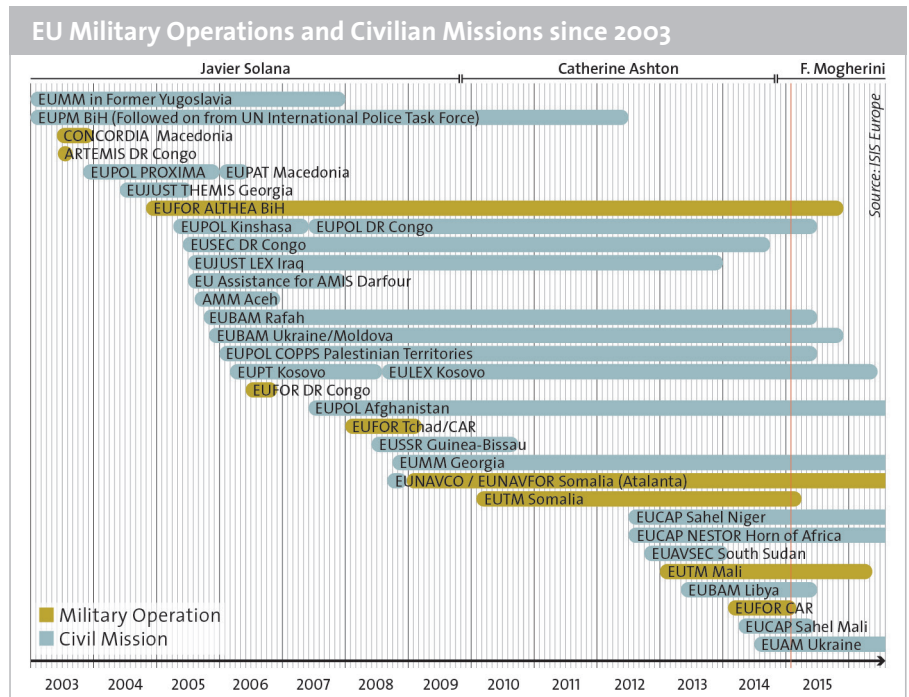
Europe and its Neighbors

While Ashton first had to establish the EEAS, as noted above, Mogherini has been able to focus from day one not only on internal coordination in Brussels, but also on external representation of the EU, including crisis management. In 2015, the EU must confront two crucial foreign-policy challenges: First of all, the Ukrainian crisis and Russia’s aggressive foreign policy require a common political approach. Secondly, the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy towards the countries on its southern periphery also needs revision. Mogherini was criticized during the appointment hearings for being too compliant towards Moscow. The Italian politician made clear that she no longer regarded Russia as a partner. Nevertheless, as early as December 2014, in an internal strategy paper on Russia that was leaked to the media, she was already proposing concrete suggestions for re-establishing constructive relations between the EU and Russia in the longer term. Due to the renewed escalation of the civil war in eastern Ukraine, however, her ideas were rejected at the EU Foreign Affairs Council in January 2015.

With regard to the instability in North Africa, Mogherini and the new Commissioner for the European Neighbourhood Policy

Mogherini made clear that she no longer regarded Russia as a partner.

and Enlargement Johannes Hahn have been tasked with presenting a new neighborhood policy in 2015. Due to its passivity in the Gaza conflict and its response to



the challenge of the “Islamic State”, the EU has continued to lose credibility in 2014. Mogherini called for a fresh look at the Israeli–Palestinian peace talks and suggested to enlarge the Middle East Quartet (US, Russia, UN, EU) by also including Arab countries.

Mogherini also has a mandate, formulated in late 2013 by the member states, to realign the strategic interests and priorities of EU foreign policy and adapt them to the current challenges. She may revise the European Security Strategy of 2003 or even draft the EU’s first foreign policy strategy document. It will probably not be easy, though, to establish a consensus on a common “grand strategy”. The prospect of a UK exit from the EU will be a Sword of Damocles hanging over London for years to come, preventing the British government from engaging in supranational foreign policy until 2017. Moreover, the EU countries disagree as to whether the threat emanating from Vladimir Putin’s Russia or the in-

stability in North Africa and the Middle East should be engaged as priorities.

Overall, in her first 100 days in office, Federica Mogherini has presented herself as a can-do pragmatist. She has exhibited convincing self-assurance as well as factual expertise and solid preparation. It is true that she will only be able to create true added value where the 28 member states are in agreement. However, in 2015, she has the opportunity to enhance the coherence of the EU’s foreign policy thanks to improved coordination with the Commission. Mogherini could demonstrate that the old saying by Jean Monnet about crises being opportunities still holds true. Paradoxically, in that case, Putin would not only have revitalized NATO and the OSCE, but also given a new stimulus to a common EU external policy.

Dr. Christian Nünlist directs the team “Swiss and Euro-Atlantic Security” at the Center for Security Studies (CSS). He is co-editor of *Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis* (2014).