

The Networking of European Foreign Policy: From Cacophony to Choir?

Annegret Bendiek

The European Commission has created a new foreign affairs project team led by Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This institutional reform represents yet another attempt to overcome the incoherence between the CFSP and the European Union's external relations. The expectations of a more networked foreign policy will only be fulfillable if the EEAS takes over inter-departmental strategic planning and Germany plays a leading role in flexibilising the CFSP/CSDP.

In early July 2014 the European Parliament chose Martin Schulz as its President, and a fortnight later confirmed Jean-Claude Juncker as President of the European Commission on the basis of his "Political Guidelines" by the large majority of 422 votes. Soon thereafter former Polish prime minister Donald Tusk was appointed President of the European Council for December 2014 to May 2017. Finally, in late October, Parliament and Council gave their approval to the new Commission, which began work on 1 November 2014. This changing of the guard at the European Union will set the course for its future foreign policy. Schulz, Juncker, Tusk and the new High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, must now turn to the task getting the European Union to speak with "one voice" in its external representation.

The Goal: Coherence

That job will be anything but easy. Academics and politicians have been pointing out for years that European external policy suffers from incoherence of substance and lack of internal coordination. The member-states often pursue diverging strategic interests and find themselves at odds over fundamental questions, such as the importance of the transatlantic partnership, the proper line on Russia or policy towards China. There are several reasons for this lack of congruity in foreign policy. Strategic dissonance between the member-states is one, largely stemming from their different foreign policy interests and traditions. Another is the institutional division of foreign policy between different Directorates-General and their inadequate coordination. Trade communicates poorly with neighbourhood affairs; migration policy is devel-

oped without reference to development; and security is disconnected from the European Union's digital agenda. The Treaty of Lisbon was supposed to equip the Union with its own legal personality in external affairs, but in fact the old distinction between the Community policies of EU external action and the inter-governmental CFSP/CSDP persists. So although the Commission has assumed responsibility for external representation, where it is to promote the "general interests of the European Union", this encompasses only areas outside of the CFSP and CSDP. The Commission has powers relating to trade policy, cooperation with and restrictive measures against third countries, humanitarian aid, international agreements and external relations – but not for external security or fundamental strategic questions. So it will not be easy for the new team to constructively tackle within the EU apparatus. Instead it must be feared that the High Representative and the President of the European Council will continue to jostle over external representation. Moreover, the Treaty of Lisbon requires international treaties to be ratified by a European Parliament that has become an increasingly assertive foreign policy player. Stormy debates over the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada (CETA) reflect this new politicisation, alongside relevant differences of substance.

Political Programme

In view of these difficulties, the political programme Juncker outlined in mid-July for the next five years would appear richly conflict-laden. He names three priorities from the Political Guidelines: "a new boost for jobs, growth and investment", "a connected digital single market" and "a resilient energy union with a forward-looking climate change policy". None of these goals will be achievable without consideration of international circumstances and a coordi-

nated policy towards third countries. A "resilient energy union" and a "forward-looking climate change policy" are just as obvious core foreign policy issues as "a reasonable and balanced free trade agreement with the U.S." In her address to the European Parliament in early October, the High Representative also presented an ambitious foreign policy agenda affecting various departments. She intends to reform the European Security Strategy, expand cooperation on security and defence, promote stability in the wider neighbourhood, deepen transatlantic cooperation, and advance strategic regionalism above all with South America, but also with Asia. Further, she intends in particular to expand human rights cooperation with multilateral organisations (United Nations, NATO, Council of Europe, OSCE, but also Arab League, Union for the Mediterranean and African Union). Finally, she points to the UN's post-2015 development process, where the European Union is expected to decisively influence the agenda. Sparring over powers between the High Representative and the individual Commissioners and member-states is inevitable. A close working relationship between the vice-presidents will be crucial for Mogherini's authority.

A Foreign Affairs Project Team

It will only be possible to realise the ambitious programme laid out by Juncker and Mogherini if the structural deficits of European foreign policy can be overcome. The new Commission took account of this by creating a new structure with seven vice-presidents including the High Representative. The prominent position of the vice-presidents is reflected in the provision that no legislative proposal may be introduced to the College of Commissioners without their approval. Concretely, this means that the "normal" Commissioners are each attached to a vice-president. In the case of the High Representative this creates a foreign affairs project team whose remit comprises European neighbourhood policy and

accession talks, international cooperation and development issues, humanitarian aid and crisis management, as well as the sphere of international trade. The High Representative's team also includes the Directorates-General for migration/home affairs, climate action/energy, and mobility and transport. Within the group of Commissioners she will possess powers extending beyond the CFSP. Juncker has entrusted Mogherini with leading and coordinating a team entitled "Europe in the World", to report on geopolitical developments and ensure that the foreign policy aspects of the Commission's work are tied more closely together. The intention to link the High Representative more firmly with the other Directorates-General is reflected in her moving into the Commission's Berlaymont building and scheduling regular meetings with colleagues assigned to her.

The idea of much stronger networking of internal and external policy agendas and departments also affects migration policy and energy and climate policy. Juncker has created a new Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs to both take action against unregulated immigration and make Europe more attractive for highly qualified skilled workers. Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos shares responsibility for this portfolio with First Vice-President Frans Timmermans. Both will also coordinate regularly with the High Representative in order to implement the proposed close interconnection of internal and external policy. Combining energy policy and climate protection under a single Commissioner, Miguel Arias Cañete, and his coordination with Mogherini also represents progress in Juncker's efforts to promote environmental protection, preserve competitiveness and at the same time reduce Europe's dependency on third countries. Here the High Representative will have the job of lending inter-departmental orientation to the Energy Union project team under Maroš Šefčovič. In order to lessen the burden on Mogherini, the respective Commissioners may fulfil representative duties in her place.

Creating a foreign affairs project team is an important step towards an institutional strengthening of the role and powers of the High Representative. Juncker is seeking to respond to sharpening global competition and put the Union in a position to speak with a single voice, by strengthening horizontal links between different areas and overcoming the outdated separation of internal and external policy. If Mogherini succeeds in putting Juncker's ideas into practice, there is yet hope for a European foreign policy capable of transforming the cacophony of different spheres into a harmonious chorus. That would mean European foreign policy being less modelled on classical diplomacy. Instead the High Representative should in the first place communicate internally, speaking with the relevant EU foreign policy actors (including the national parliaments) in order to develop a joint European approach.

Conditions for Successful Networking

Organisational reforms will not be enough to solve the problems ensuing from disagreements between the member-states over strategic questions. For a coherent, networked EU foreign policy at least three conditions would have to be fulfilled:

Firstly, the High Representative requires an adequate and competently staffed apparatus of her own. To that end the European External Action Service (EEAS) needs to recruit more of its expertise from academia and civil society. In future it must take charge of foreign policy networking and function as the interface between departments of relevance to foreign policy. It should therefore also set the agenda in the sense of preparing comprehensive foreign policy strategies. Only in an outstandingly qualified EEAS with a competent European planning staff will the High Representative be able to operate effectively between European Council and Commission. The EEAS should consistently work to turn itself into a coordinator connecting up the different

departmental policies of the European Union and its member-states. Here, Mogherini should concentrate on enhancing the visibility and initiative of the Service and more effectively coordinating its interaction with non-state foreign policy actors. A crisis response centre should be set up at the EEAS to unite the relevant parts of the Commission and the Service, and to develop rules for CSDP operations. Fundamentally, the EEAS should see itself as the driving force of digital diplomacy in Europe.

Secondly, in areas that demand unanimity it will be important to apply flexible integration processes more frequently, in other words intensified cooperation. However coherent a foreign policy may be at the administrative level, it will run into trouble without unanimity at the strategic. Juncker and Mogherini therefore argue for the possibilities of “permanent structured cooperation” to be applied more broadly, especially in relation to defence procurement. First and foremost this means France and the United Kingdom, but Germany and Poland will also have to be involved, especially where policy towards Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia is concerned. Only if these four states can finally reach a common strategic positioning will Juncker and Mogherini’s plans stand a realistic chance. It should be made easier to turn an initiative started by a group of member-states into a full European initiative with the help of the EAD.

Thirdly, there are particular tasks that German policy towards Europe must address. First of all, Berlin should support the Commission in bundling its powers and help the EEAS grow into a new role as the inter-departmental strategic planning agency for European foreign policy. A very much further-reaching challenge is that Germany will no longer be able to conceal its position as a civil and trade power. Given that European foreign policy relies on France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom all pulling together, Germany will not be able to avoid a share of responsibility for the flexible integration of European

foreign policy and a rapid deployability of CSDP instruments. Finally it must be remembered that only a European foreign policy will be strong enough to assert German interests vis-à-vis third parties. Thus the planned reform of the German Foreign Ministry should strengthen both German European policy coordination and the position of the High Representative and the EEAS.

© Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2014
All rights reserved

These Comments reflect solely the author's views.

SWP
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4
10719 Berlin
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

ISSN 1861-1761

Translation by Meredith Dale

(English version of SWP-Aktuell 68/2014)