

Mogherini's first 100 days: Not the quiet diplomat

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During her hearing at the European Parliament on 6 October 2014, Federica Mogherini – the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission ‘designate’ – mapped out her priorities for EU external action if she were to be confirmed in the position:

- To use the first 100 days to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and decide whether or not to review the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) and, if so, in which form;
- To promote better cooperation on foreign policy, both at EU level (within the European Commission and with other institutions) and between the member states; and
- To focus on neighbourhood issues first, while not losing sight of wider, more global issues.

100 days since the start of her activities as HR/VP, it seems opportune to assess not only what has been achieved but – more importantly – to distil the new approaches and working methods to EU foreign policy-making. We will start with the latter.

Playing VEEP to the full

In his ‘mission letters’ to Mogherini and each of the other Commissioners of 1 November 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker stressed a number of institutional priorities, notably the expectation that she would play her role as VP to the full. Mogherini’s symbolic decision to install her office in the Berlaymont building, the appointment of Stefano Manservigi, an experienced hand at the Commission, as her Chef de Cabinet, and the recruitment of half of her cabinet from Commission staff, have served her well in striving to attain that goal.

Crucially, Mogherini has also reactivated intra-College coordination on matters pertaining to EU external action, a practice that was abandoned by the Barroso II Commission. With a bi-monthly frequency (the mission letters state a minimum of one meeting per month), the HR/VP has presided over the Commissioners’ Group on EU External Action. In the wake of more deaths in the Mediterranean this week, Mogherini even called for an extra-ordinary meeting of the Group with Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos to review policies to

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address the challenges of migration – a topic which, given her background in Italian politics, she cares a great deal about and counts among her priorities.

In other fields too, the new HR/VP has clearly spelled out the links between different strands of EU external action and the “need to work together”, such as between the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and trade (e.g. stressing the geostrategic importance of TTIP negotiations with the US); humanitarian aid (e.g. arguing the need to set up better coordinating devices in order to address major crises like Ebola); and climate change (which “has to be even more part of our foreign policy”). Mogherini is aware of how current challenges require a “far-reaching look at the global landscape”, and has found her fellow Commissioners to be willing to cooperate with her on these issues.

The HR/VP has continued her predecessor’s useful practice of going on joint missions with fellow Commissioners (e.g. with Johannes Hahn and Christos Stylianides to Turkey) and issuing joint statements with them (e.g. with Hahn on the police raids and arrests of media representatives in Turkey). Yet, there is no evidence thus far to suggest that Mogherini has gone so far as to ask Commissioner Hahn or other relevant Commissioners to deputise for her in the execution of her own powers qua VP, as suggested in Juncker’s mission letters.¹

Irrespective of the latter, Mogherini has certainly made considerable efforts at “overcoming silo mentalities” in the Commission by using her VP hat in coordinating teamwork. While announcements to that effect had led some commentators to believe that she would be more of a ‘VP/HR’, her early conduct has nevertheless shown that her loyalties lie first and foremost with the member states, thus underscoring the sequencing of her positions in line with that set out in the Treaty: ‘HR/VP’.

A new way of working in the Council

In her parliamentary hearing, the HR/VP designate stressed the need for greater engagement with member states at all levels to create “ownership by all of us, in all member states. We need to build our common vision together from the very beginning”. Mogherini demonstrated the sincerity of this conviction early on, with visits to member state capitals (Berlin, Warsaw, Copenhagen, etc.) to meet not only with top-level government officials, but also with members of the foreign, security and defence committees of national parliaments and with representatives of civil society. As such, she has been building up political capital as well as a deeper understanding of what drives member states’ foreign policies.

The HR/VP has been careful to stress that she is a catalyst for EU foreign policy: “People say that the member states will obviously always have a foreign and security policy and some people say we do not need a 29th one, and I completely share that.” In ways not seen before, and as illustrated by the number of EEAS statements released during her first 100 days, compared to the number issued during Ashton’s last year in office (see the table in the Annex), Mogherini has tried to maximise her role as catalyst. For instance, the new HR/VP used the very first Foreign Affairs Council she chaired as an opportunity to introduce some changes in the way of working in the Council:

First of all, we started the morning with an informal session on working methods and we have started working on some changes that we will introduce already from next time, a little bit more of informal exchanges, in a more open format with the

¹ On the HR side of her functions, Mogherini ‘delegated’ the coordination of the EU3+3 talks with Iran to her predecessor. It was a smart move to rely on Catherine Ashton, an experienced and trusted interlocutor in the process, for overseeing the final stages of the international negotiations, thereby minimising the risk of damaging her own reputation in case the talks collapse.

ministers and with guests - in general the Foreign Affairs Council concentrates more on political messages and decisions to orientate our common action, so concentrating more on what we can do rather than on analysing only the issues of the conflicts, and not only concentrating on conflict areas but also on mid-term and long-term strategies for the European Union's work.²

In press briefings, which she has been keen to deliver - and engage in - more than her predecessor ever did, Mogherini has made a point of sharing some of the action points decided upon by the Council: e.g.,

[an] element of the discussion of the action we are going to take is concerning the internal Ukrainian reform path. On one side, asking for the political forces to come with a government, with a coalition government, as soon as possible. We are planning a series of visits, both some of the Ministers and one Commissioner, actually a Vice-President of the Commission was already there last week, another Commissioner is going to visit soon - Commissioner Hahn - and I will pay a visit to Kyiv as soon as the new government is formed.³

In a more mischievous way of communicating with the press in order to catalyse a more pragmatic reflection in the Foreign Affairs Council on strategic relations with Russia - which have been occupying a dominant position on her agenda - an 'Issues Paper' was leaked to the press before it reached the member states. While this attempt at convincing the more-hawkish member states to consider further steps in the EU's relations with Russia could have easily backfired on the EEAS, the escalation of violence in eastern Ukraine allowed ministers to come out of their January meeting stressing unanimity in the Council in their approach to Russia - thereby effectively saving the HR/VP's face for having pushed what in some quarters was seen as an ambiguous 'business as usual' approach.

Some of the bolder institutional initiatives that Mogherini has rhetorically supported - with the aim of facilitating a more 'Common' Foreign and Security Policy - remain on paper. These include her vow - alluded to in the answers to the pre-hearing questionnaire - to foster flexible cooperation methods by pushing severely underused Lisbon Treaty provisions aimed at enhancing efficiency and effectiveness: constructive abstention and qualified majority voting in CFSP decision-making (cf. Article 31 TEU) and enhanced cooperation in the Common Security and Defence Policy, both in the operational field (cf. Article 44 TEU) and for the development of capabilities (Article 46 TEU). Similarly, the 'mixed' Council formats she promoted during her remarks in Riga (e.g. Foreign Affairs + Justice and Home Affairs on issues of security which surpass the internal/external dichotomy, such as the attacks in Paris January) still need to be implemented. Then again, in the spirit of "working in partnership for Europe", Mogherini did attend the November Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on Trade and chaired the November FAC on Defence and the December FAC on Development.

Finally, Mogherini has been working towards the development of a stronger alignment between her agenda and that of European Council President Donald Tusk, who represents the Union on CFSP matters at his level. The harmony in the substance of both leaders' remarks on the need to prioritise relations with the neighbourhood, upon their visit to Latvia in January, substantiates the point well. In the same vein, Mogherini has accepted a certain division of labour with chief negotiators of member states in the external representation of the Union. The 'Normandy format' of talks with Russia on the war in Ukraine is a case in

² Remarks by European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini after meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, 17 November 2014, Brussels.

³ Idem.

point, where the leaders of Germany and France keep in close contact with the HR/VP so as to ensure a unified stance of the European Union.

No full assessment of the EEAS (yet)

In an indirect response to the Council's invitation to the new HR/VP to submit a review of the functioning and organisation of the European External Action Service by the end of 2015, Mogherini specifically asked the European Parliament for 100 days in which to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the EEAS, stressing the need to streamline its decision-making structures. Whereas she has not yet completely fulfilled that promise, the HR/VP did announce the merger of the positions of Executive Secretary General and Chief Operating Officer (Alain Le Roy, former Under-Secretary-General of the UN, has been appointed to the post and has been warming up inside the EEAS ahead of his official start date on 1 March). Moreover, some organisational restructuring has been going on, with the welcome split of K.3 into two separate units (Security policy and Sanctions policy, thereby enhancing capabilities in high-priority areas), the merger of V.A.3 (Andean) and V.A.4 (Mercosur) into a new V.A.3 (South America), the incorporation of unit F.3 (ex-post control) into F.2 (delegation support and evaluation service) and the creation of FPI.4 (Partnership Instrument). At decentralised level, the FAC in January signed off on the idea to include security attachés in EU Delegations in "relevant" countries. Furthermore, the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) have been brought into the organigram, under the direct authority of the HR/VP. Mogherini seems to appreciate the value of the special envoys more than her predecessor did, with the reinstatement of an EUSR for the Middle East Peace Process in the offing. However, a replacement for Bernardino León as EUSR for the southern Mediterranean looks less imminent, which is surprising if one considers the importance that has been attached by the HR/VP and the Council to the situation in the region – in particular in Libya.

A "special partnership" with the EP?

When asked during her hearing at the European Parliament about anything she wished to change from her predecessor's term, the HR/VP designate mentioned her resolve to be much more present at the Parliament, with which she counted on having a "special partnership". She advocated the reanimation of joint consultation meetings, improving inter-institutional communication by deputising contacts and reinvigorating the Special Committee to share confidential information on CFSP and CSDP. 100 days since Mogherini's start as HR/VP, much of this still remains to be done. Whereas Mogherini has met with the AFET Committee on a monthly basis and once with EP President Schulz in a designated meeting, it is hard to observe – as of yet – a sea change in the structural relationship with the EP.

In sum: a more strategic approach

The extreme fluidity of the neighbourhood – east and south – has certainly been one of the key push-factors behind Mogherini's overall "securitisation" of the EU foreign policy agenda during her first 100 days. Security, due to the transnational nature of contemporary issues/threats (migration, terrorism, pandemics) is seen as a crucial domain wherein horizontal and vertical coordination needs to be improved. The new HR/VP has repeatedly provided evidence of her commitment to a more strategic mission, advocating a more "realist" reading of the values/interests balance in EU foreign policy. The approach to human rights spelled out during the parliamentary hearing, when Mogherini defined them not just as a "compass", but as a true "hardware of EU foreign policy", crucial in their impact on "long-term stability", is emblematic of such a results-oriented vision. Tellingly, Mogherini also announced a process of strategic reflection to update and upgrade the 2003 European

Security Strategy on her 100th day in office, thereby delivering on another of her promises. The resumption, on Mogherini's 101st day in office (February 9), of the EU facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, a key step for both countries' path to EU membership, should be welcomed as a strategic revitalisation of the Union's pull-factors aimed at promoting peace and stability in the neighbourhood.

Annex. Comparison of the number of EEAS statements issued in Mogherini's first 100 days as HR/VP with the number issued during by Ashton's last year in office

TYPE	1 November 2014 -8 February 2015	1 November 2013 31 October 2014)
HR/VP statements	58	148
HR/VP statements on behalf of the EU	3	41
HR/VP's Spokesperson statements	49	294
Joint statements (HR/VP + other EU officials)	6	5
"Mixed" statements (EU + international actors)	6	13

Source: Authors' own compilation.



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