EU’s foreign policy chief: What’s in the role?

Constantly on the road, making EU foreign policy more visible and its voice in the international fora louder, while forging consensus and leading political dialogues, the post of the EU foreign policy chief comes laden with expectations amid growingly contested and complex world politics.

“Someone dedicated, committed, with a foreign policy and possibly a security and defence background, so that the work that we have done in the four years and a half can be consolidated” – this is how the current High Representative Federica Mogherini describes who would be the best successor to her position. “In a moment when the rest of the world looks at us as a point of reference, we need to send a clear message that we continue to stay engaged and committed and that we are there, as a reliable partner, for our friends in the world.”

The role indeed shapes the standing of the European Union on the global stage. This comes as a result of many responsibilities it entails:

- conducting the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the Common Security and Defence policy. The High Representative contributes with proposals to shaping of the common foreign and security policy and ensures implementation of the decisions adopted by the European Council and the Council;
- chairing monthly meetings of foreign affairs ministers from all EU member states, striving for consensus on foreign policy priorities ranging from Venezuela or Middle East, to PESCO to
sanctions;
- operational conduct of EU missions and operations deployed as part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). EU currently has more than 4,000 staff in 6 military missions/operations and 10 civilian missions across the world;
- ensuring consistency and coherence of the EU's external action. (S)he is in charge, within the Commission, of coordinating other aspects of the EU's external action (e.g. trade, development, neighbourhood policy and humanitarian aid);
- representing the Union on issues relating to the common foreign and security policy. (S)he engages in political dialogues with third parties on behalf of the Union and presents the EU’s position in international organisations (e.g. UN, NATO) or negotiations (Iran Deal, Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue);
- attending regular meetings between EU leaders in the European Council;
- leading the EU’s diplomatic network of some 140 EU Delegations and Offices around the world;
- heading the European Defence Agency and the EU Institute for Security Studies.

The High Representative is appointed by the European Council acting by a qualified majority, with the agreement of the President of the Commission for a mandate of 5 years. HRVP, as a part of the College, is subject to European Parliament hearing and EP’s vote of approval of the entire College.

In carrying out his or her mission, the High Representative is supported by the European External Action Service (EEAS). This Service works in cooperation with EU countries' diplomatic services. It is staffed by officials and agents from the EU, as well as personnel seconded from national diplomatic services.
Looking forward, the common work done in the last three years of implementation of the EU Global Strategy, our collective compass in difficult times, sets a solid basis for EU foreign policy actions, and the EU to be the reliable, cooperative, pragmatic and principled global player that Europeans want and need.

As stressed in the latest Report on the implementation of the Global Strategy, to remain, and become ever more, the go-to power in a world in which multilateralism is questioned, 'we must continue to invest consistently in our collective capacity to act autonomously and in cooperation with our partners'.

Similarly, the New strategic agenda 2019-2024 adopted by EU leaders provides an overall framework and direction how to shape the future world and direction of the EU. It equally underlines the importance of multilateralism, and stresses the EU will remain a driving force behind it. The EU will use its influence to lead the response to global challenges, by showing the way forward in the fight against climate change, promoting sustainable development and implementing the 2030 Agenda, and cooperating with partner countries on migration.

The EU will uphold the European perspective for European States able and willing to join, and will pursue an ambitious neighbourhood policy. It will develop a comprehensive partnership with Africa. Together with global partners sharing our values, the EU will continue to work towards global peace and stability, and to promote democracy and human rights.

Both key documents point out that the Union needs to be more assertive and effective, and us to be more united in our stances, and more determined and effective in exerting our influence. It also means better use of our resources, and giving a clearer priority to European economic, political and security interests, leveraging all policies to that end. An ambitious and robust trade policy is a central element in that respect.

Background

It has been 20 years since the post of the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy was created under the Amsterdam Treaty. Javier Solana, the then Secretary General of the Council of the European Union, was the first one at the helm of EU’s foreign policy. The Lisbon Treaty expanded the role, adding new responsibilities as well as the function of the Vice-President of the European Commission. Since then the post is known in the EU jargon as the HR/VP, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

Federica Mogherini was appointed for the 2014-2019 period. She succeeded Catherine Ashton who held the post between 2009 and 2014.

www.eeas.europa.eu

Source URL: