

Federica Mogherini to Lead EU Foreign Policy: The Challenges on her Path

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Executive Summary

The future High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, is about to start her work in a challenging environment for international relations. Russia with the invasion of Ukraine has brought back memories of an era when international law was still only a non-binding rule to manage international order, and ISIS is clearly conducting mass atrocities under the eyes of the international community. Beside the emergencies, the roles for the Italian Foreign Minister, now representing the Italian Presidency of the EU, and future EU High Representative are multiple and complex. Will she be willing and able to make a shift in the world of the EU international relations? Her current and past experience are conveying unprecedented hopes on a more effective EU foreign policy. What is sure is that the EEAS is ready to take the challenges if accompanied by a cooperative and cohesive team in the next EU Commission.

Issues

Starting on November 1st, Federica Mogherini will take position as High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. Indeed, the time to take the lead of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) could hardly be a tougher one. Arguably, however, it is also a time ripe with potential for a new and more vigorous role of the EU in international diplomacy. Lady CFSP, as some journalists are now calling Mogherini, may be the right person in the right spot at the right time. She might be the perfect choice to strike the right balance in an increasingly shaky and divided Europe. At the same time, she might be a very qualified choice to administer the delicate political situation inherited by her predecessor, Catherine Ashton, whom was not immune from criticism during her time in office. Mogherini may be the face that represents a new diplomatic experience that has been so far quite successful. By looking at her personal history, it is impossible not to notice a career path somewhat similar, a little at a time, to the one followed by Javier Solana, father of the foreign policy of the EU. Mogherini is a socialist, and has been active in the Italian parliament at first in the Defense committee, and later in the Committee for Foreign Affairs where she held the presidency of the Italian Delegation to the NATO parliamentary assembly. In February 2014 Mogherini was appointed by Prime Minister Renzi as Minister of Foreign Affairs, a very delicate position especially because of the at the time forthcoming Italian Presidency of the EU.

Implications

Now the future EU High Representative faces a broad array of rather thorny challenges. Most urgently, Mogherini will have to administer instability on the EU Eastern borders. The Ukrainian situation is of course the most delicate, but the stabilization of the dialogue with neighboring countries deserves just as much attention. In light of its increasingly aggressive foreign policy, Russia cannot be considered a partner any longer. However, Russia remains a heavyweight in the global geostrategic power balance. Thus, the EU must engage in continued dialogue with Russia and have Russia among its key priorities, as Mogherini recently stated at the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament. The latest news of the NATO Summit in Wales proved her attitude on Russia to be the cleverer one. In July, her position at the lead of the EEAS got questioned for not being hard enough on Moscow and many claimed this position to be pro-Russian. However, given the news of truce between Kyev and Moscow, postponing sanctions, that for many illustrious foreign affairs experts were to come as from the NATO Summit, proved to be a successful one. The capacity of Italian-style diplomacy, and Mogherini's continued efforts, in this case has proven to be farsighted. The Eastern border is not the only troubled one for Mogherini's CFSP

Keywords

Mogherini, CFSP, EEAS, European Commission, Ukraine, ISIS, Mediterranean

Quotables

- A challenge for Lady CFSP is internal in nature: efficient EU diplomacy will require stronger synergies between the European Commission and the other EU institutions.

- Mogherini may be the face that represents a new diplomatic experience for the EU.

- The EEAS has been rather effective in developing in-house capacity for analysis and crisis management, while at the same time making the best out of the support and expertise of the most efficient diplomats of member states, now leading the EU Representations abroad. This is the time to translate this incredible potential in a concrete tool to be deployed for the best.

Abstract

The new European Commission, lead by Jean-Claude Juncker, will have a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy that cultivates a passion for foreign relations since always. She has devoted her career to this field as MP first, and Minister of Foreign Affairs now. Federica Mogherini is about to take her role in a challenging time for international relations. She may be the right person in the right spot at the right time. Threats and difficulties are multiple, and some of them in-house, but the European Union is in a urgent need of a stronger, successful, and credible role in the regulation of international relations abiding international law. Peace is a vision and a status to be shared.

The Southern border presents just as many challenges, with the crisis in the Mediterranean apparently far from de-escalation and still lacking whatsoever response from the Arab countries, suggesting their unwillingness to address instability in the region. While Mogherini's Italy is acting as main passageway of the immigration flow, the regional dimension of the crisis cannot be neglected. As a matter of fact, the Mediterranean is the privileged corridor for people escaping post-Arab Spring atrocities, violence by the IS, and increasing instability in Arab and African countries.

Lady CFSP, however, has the opportunity to be the spokesperson of the Italian Presidency of the EU in the most prestigious fora of the world; a position that enables her to establish partnerships and preferential ways for cooperation with the most influential actors, always presenting Europe as a positive role model for peace and security, a concrete help in building ties for her incoming post. Indeed, her potential for positive engagement in such fora would be greatly enhanced by broader economic stability across the Union, which in turn cannot be achieved without a revision of the Stability and Growth Pact, a program of reforms to finally achieve harmonization of fiscal and labor market policies, and a stricter control on the quality of democratic governance of Member States. As a matter of fact, diplomats seldom deal with peace and security alone. More often than not, their role includes cooperation for economic growth and the exploration of new markets.

Recommendation

This is the scenario in which Mogherini is about to take office. Yet another challenge for Lady CFSP is internal in nature: efficient EU diplomacy will require stronger synergies between the European commission and the other EU institutions. Without cohesion, achieving the ambitious goals of the Union will be difficult, to say the least. In this respect, the EEAS has been rather effective in developing in-house capacity for analysis and crisis management, while at the same time making the best out of the support and expertise of the most efficient diplomats of member states, now leading the EU Representations abroad. This is the time to translate this incredible potential in a concrete tool to be deployed for the best.

A slightly less pressing but still paramount challenge on the agenda of Mogherini will be the strengthening of EU relations with the US and the other NATO allies. Transatlantic cooperation should never be neglected, and should be based on the assumption that the transatlantic partnership is a community of equals in which every member can learn from the others.

Mogherini will also have to promote the position of the EEAS as the voice representing the will of an increasingly cohesive Europe, and represent the Union in its entirety at the UN and in other international fora. At this time in history, it is paramount that EU states speak with one voice. For example, a more cohesive EU diplomacy would be fundamental to solve the case of the two Italian Marines currently detained in India; a case that does not concern Italy alone, insofar as it represents a challenge to the established international legal system of which the Union is a major promoter.

A long-term challenge to add to the above mentioned one is the promotion of stability in the region through enlargement or through successful forms of partnership. The Western Balkans keep experience recurrent economic and political instability (bear in mind the upcoming elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The Caucasus region is living its own Cold War, with external actors slowing down development for fear of triggering reprisals. As mentioned already, the Mediterranean region is incredibly unruly, and the involved actors seem unwilling to take any risk whatsoever. This is especially true for what concerns the EU and the administration of migratory flows across the Mediterranean. In this sense, the forthcoming Frontex Plus programme, still in the drafting phase, might be the long awaited instrument to offer EU level support to the efforts that the Italian government has so far administered on its own and with tremendous distress.

One final macro-level challenge pertains the economic and energetic area. The Far East, Central Asia, and other G20 countries should remain in the roster of those actors with whom the EEAS is willing to cooperate for the promotion of the EU economic and energetic interests. At the same time, the EU should engage in dialogue with these countries embodying a model that should be emulated in light of its 65-year long history of peace and prosperity.

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