

## Rethinking the European Union and its Global Role from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Liber Amicorum Mario Telò

This edited volume, which has been drafted in honour of Professor Telò's research career, offers the reader an overview of the various scientific debates that he has been involved in throughout his distinguished career. The aim was to highlight, contextualise and build on his most innovative contributions to each of these debates. The volume revolves around four thematic areas, each of which brings together a number of contributions that offer timely reflections on a given question or challenge covered by Professor Telò's research. The first section, 'Reflections on the Future of Social Democracy in Europe', brings together chapters on the efficiency and legitimacy crisis facing contemporary social democracies, be it at the European or national levels. The second section, 'Reflections on the Prospects for European Governance', offers the reader

a cross-section of assessments on the state of the European polity, its politics and the policies that it produces, notably in the light of recent institutional reforms and crises. The third section, 'Reflections on the Implications of Multilateralism and Multipolarism for Europe', explores how both regional experiences in general and the EU's external action in particular have reacted to a rapidly changing international environment. The fourth and final section, 'Reflections on the Lessons drawn from Engaged Research in Europe', takes a step back and considers the role of the researcher in the evolving and challenging environment sketched out in the preceding sections. It focuses both on how to approach such a complex area of research as the EU as well as how to reconcile academic distance with societal engagement when working on controversial topics.

JEAN-MICHEL DE WAELE, GIOVANNI GREVI,  
FREDERIK PONJAERT, ANNE WEYEMBERGH

EDITED BY

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# Federica Mogherini Four Years Through Her Mandate as the High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission (HRVP)

Tereza NOVOTNA

In 2012, I started working with Mario Telò as a post-doctoral researcher within the GR:EEN project that he led at the IEE-ULB. We collaborated on an edited volume on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, a textbook, a number of public events and other projects. Throughout the years, Mario has always been a source of generous advice and inspiration for my work. I will therefore always be grateful to him for not only offering me my first academic job, but also for being such a great and committed person, mentor and colleague. Grazie mille, Mario!

Given the fact that during the GR:EEN project I focused on the European External Action Service (EEAS), the following pages will offer a few reflections on how Federica Mogherini has led the development of the EEAS, assessing her performance four years through her current mandate as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HRVP) by comparison with her predecessor, Catherine Ashton.

## **Introduction: Federica Mogherini at four years as HRVP**

November 2018 marked four years of Federica Mogherini's tenure as HRVP. Since she took up her office in 2014, the European Union (EU) has been tackling a series of international emergencies, ranging from the continuous conflict in Ukraine and tense relations with Russia to the refugee crisis that has been primarily caused by wars and internal instability in countries such as Syria, Libya and Iraq. Since the new US administration came in early 2017, HRVP has also been called to handle disagreements with the key ally, the United States (US), and got involved in other hotspots around the globe, such as North Korea.

Despite Mogherini's personal commitment to solving these crises, especially those closest to home, there is no sign yet of any viable long-term solution on the

horizon either to the East or the South of the EU's borders. On the other hand, the High Representative has successfully completed what Catherine Ashton, her predecessor as HRVP, had already started, such as the stabilisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo and negotiations on the Iran's nuclear program (even if the Trump administration has announced the withdrawal of US from that deal).

The HRVP has served in her capacity for about 80 per cent of her mandate which represents a significant benchmark from which we can assess her performance from an institutional standpoint, in particular her ability to shape the European diplomatic service. Moreover, we can examine relations between EEAS and other EU institutions and compare the steps that Mogherini took in this area with those of her predecessor.

### **From Ashton to Mogherini: background and approaches**

Both Catherine Ashton and Federica Mogherini represent European left-wing parties (that is the Italian Social Democrats and the British Labourists). At the time of taking up their jobs, they were both criticised for their lack of experience. In both cases, however, such criticism was not entirely fair: Ashton previously served as EU Commissioner for Trade while Mogherini was Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs for nine months and had been dealing with foreign policy issues since her university studies. In addition, both women were experienced parliamentarians: Ashton led the Labour group in the British House of Lords whereas Mogherini was elected to the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

Nonetheless, there are also striking differences between the two women. Mogherini is 17 years younger, studied abroad and can speak several languages. Ashton is fluent only in her mother tongue and, until becoming a member of the Commission in Brussels, worked mostly in the British public service. Last but not least, they have different personal traits. Mogherini is more open and communicative towards her staff and colleagues while also being better skilled at public diplomacy and interaction with media, perhaps because she is an experienced politician who, in contrast to Ashton, was twice elected an Italian MP (in 2008 and 2013).

Ashton was also heftily criticised because of her reported inclination to 'micromanage' and inability to delegate tasks, but also due to her mistrust towards the EU bureaucracy apart from her closest collaborators. Yet Ashton excelled in 'quiet diplomacy' behind closed doors, such as with the negotiations on the Iran nuclear issue and the normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Nonetheless, the two HRVPs came into their posts under different circumstances and were faced with different challenges. Ashton had the thankless task of building the EU's diplomatic service from scratch, which she spent a considerable part of her term in the office on, while Mogherini can fully devote her time and skills to the real substance of her work: the creation of a European foreign policy.

### **Relations with the European Commission**

Despite the usual claim about the double role of an HRVP, we can argue that any HRVP is in fact 'triple hatted': she wears an 'HR hat' related to her responsibility for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), a 'VP hat' as the Commission's Vice-Presidential and, finally, a third hat as the chair of the various formations in the

Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and of the European Defence Agency (EDA). Ashton bore frequent criticism for the fact that she has neglected her VP hat by ‘forgetting’ it at home in the drawer. As a result, relations between EEAS and the Commission were close to the freezing point. Throughout all four years, Mogherini has proactively fixed the problem by ‘putting her VP hat back on’.

To start with, thanks to the agreement with Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the Commission, Mogherini moved her office from the EEAS HQ to Berlaymont, the seat of the Commission, which facilitates her daily contact with other Commissioners. In spite of a heavy international travel schedule, Mogherini also regularly participates in the weekly College of Commissioners meetings. From November 2014 to October 2018, Mogherini attended 72.3 per cent of the College meetings. Ashton, in contrast, was often absent: during her five years as HRVP, Ashton took part in 45.7 per cent<sup>1</sup> of these meetings. Consequently, not only was the British voice often missing while taking decisions in the College, but she also met her Commissioner colleagues less often and hence knew them less.

After being elected, President Juncker has restructured the Commission into several clusters that are led by the Commission’s Vice-Presidents. Out of seven teams, Mogherini chairs the group which is in charge of the EU’s external policies (the so-called Group on External Action).<sup>2</sup> The rationale was to intertwine and coordinate purely foreign policy issues with other external policies as well as with the EU’s internal policies that have an external dimension, including international trade, migration, energy security and climate change. A Relex Group of Commissioners existed during the previous Barroso Commission in a slightly different form but it rarely met. In a similar vein, Mogherini is much keener on releasing statements and coorganising visits with her fellow Commissioners. It can therefore be argued that both Juncker and Mogherini have been more interested in pushing for the ‘comprehensive approach’ and connecting the EEAS with the Commission, both at political and institutional levels.

At the beginning of her tenure, Mogherini hired half of her Cabinet out of Commission officials. Stefano Manservigi, the first head of her Cabinet, was a life-long Commission official (he focused on, among other issues, home affairs and migration, an experience that Mogherini drew well on during the refugee crisis). Moreover, before joining Mogherini’s Cabinet, Manservigi served as EU Ambassador to Turkey, one of the key countries in tackling the migration wave. Oliver Rentschler, who was

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<sup>1</sup> The author calculated the data based on the minutes of the College of Commissioners meetings from November 2010 to October 2018, available at: <<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/index.cfm;jsessionid=B8%20C11F26C8AFD4857DCFB861B77DD4CA.cfusion14501?fuseaction=gridyear>> (accessed 17 December 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The Group on External Action consists of Commissioner responsible for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (Johannes Hahn, Austria), Trade (Cecilia Malmström, Sweden), International Cooperation and Development (Neven Mimica, Croatia) and Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management (Christos Stylianides, Cyprus). In addition, other Commissioners may be invited, including Commissioners responsible for Climate Action and Energy (Miguel Arias Cañete, Spain), Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship (Dimitris Avramopoulos, Greece) and Transport (Violeta Bulc, Slovenia).

a German diplomat before coming to Ashton's Cabinet, was kept on as Mogherini's Deputy Head of Cabinet. After the retirement of Pierre Vimont from the post of the Secretary General of the EEAS, that is the highest-ranking official within the European diplomatic service, Mogherini replaced him with Alain Le Roy, another senior French diplomat who was then in charge of the service's restructuring in 2015. Le Roy's nomination was allegedly an outcome of a bargain between Italian Prime Minister Renzi and French President Hollande who, in exchange for this top post within EEAS, agreed to Mogherini's appointment as HRVP.

Nonetheless, Alain Le Roy left the EEAS after about a year and a half due to 'personal reasons' and was swiftly replaced by Helga Schmid, the former EEAS Political Director/Deputy Secretary General, as of 1 September 2016. This reshuffle was probably the most significant personnel change in the EEAS Brussels headquarters under Mogherini. It followed a no less unexpected departure of Stefano Manservigi to the post of Director-General in the Commission's DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) in mid-May 2016. After these two senior officials left the Service, speculation abounded about the true reasons behind their resignations, namely disagreements over EU foreign policy with their boss, Federica Mogherini, and dissatisfaction with being relegated to executives of the Service rather than influential policy-makers.

In any case, HRVP Mogherini quickly nominated an Italian collaborator, Fabrizia Panzetti, to become her new chief of staff, whilst the French were assigned Schmid's former job for their diplomat, Jean-Christophe Belliard. As a result, Mogherini strengthened her leadership position within the service and, intentionally or not, surrounded herself by women, thus reinforcing the number of female staff in the EEAS management.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, another significant role was given to another lady, Nathalie Tocci, an independent Italian think-tank analyst from the Rome-based Istituto Affari Internazionali who oversaw the drafting of the EU Global Strategy, the key strategic foreign policy document released during Mogherini's tenure. All in all, these personnel reshuffles have indeed contributed to an improved climate and increased trust between the HRVP (and her office), the Commission and EU Member States.

### **Relations with the European Parliament**

Even though relations between Ashton and the European Parliament (EP) were better than those with the Commission, Mogherini has further upgraded them. In 2014, Mogherini sailed through her nomination hearing in the EP without any major glitch not only because MEPs did not want to upset the trade-offs about the highest posts at the top of the EU, but also thanks to her good performance. Since then, Mogherini has maintained good links with the EP by, for instance, regularly attending the EP's plenary sessions. This is in a stark contrast with Ashton's practices: MEPs were often annoyed with Ashton's lack of personal participation in the EP sessions, where she often instead sent a substitute. Moreover, Mogherini has so far kept an exceptionally

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<sup>3</sup> In the light of the upcoming European elections, Fabrizia Panzetti joined the team of the S&D Group president, Udo Bullmann, as of 1 June 2018. She was replaced by Stefano Grassi, an Italian, as the head of Mogherini's Cabinet.

good and frequent contact with the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and, in particular, with its powerful chairmen, Elmar Brok and David McAllister (both EPP, Germany). Yet Mogherini has also succeeded in improving relations with the EP Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) that is led by the no less powerful German, Ingeborg Gräßle (EPP). Ingeborg Gräßle waged a 'Cold War' with Ashton and EEAS over its overall budget and staff expenses. However, Mogherini managed to defend her EEAS budgets and kept good relations, although these could potentially deteriorate again if Gräßle and her committee will not be satisfied with the EEAS budget expenditures.

### **Relations with EU Member States**

Ashton allegedly once declared that it is difficult to be a servant of 28 masters, that is of 28 EU Member States. Although Ashton herself previously served as an EU Commissioner, her desire to be on good terms with EU Member States made her neglect her other 'supranational' role as the Vice-President of the Commission, which in the end constituted her main weakness. Ashton's effort to prioritise EU Member States can be evidenced in, for instance, nominating national diplomats rather than EU officials into about two thirds of the managerial posts in the EEAS headquarters as well as into the posts of EU Ambassadors in third countries. By doing so, Ashton created a deep discontent and tensions among the EEAS staff.

Although (or perhaps because) Mogherini was recruited from the post of foreign minister, in which she held control over a national diplomatic service, she has tried to shift the balance back somewhere in the 'middle' between EU Member States and EU institutions, including the Commission. Mogherini stopped the tendency to overload the heads of EU Delegations with appointees from national diplomatic services. The proportion of EU ambassadors from EU member states vs. those from EU institutions have hovered around 55-57 per cent vs. 43-45 per cent.<sup>4</sup> However, this welcome trend was not replicated by nominations of female EU ambassadors; in fact, this percentage decreased slightly below 21 per cent, hence reversing the incremental progress under Ashton.

As much as Ashton favored the French and, partly, the Spaniards and the Belgians by nominating them to the key ambassadorial posts, Mogherini increased the representation of the Germans to better correspond with the country's size, but also of the Italians, the Austrians and the Portuguese. Neither of the two HRVPs however chosen the sufficient numbers of candidates from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, making the EU entrants since 2004 to 'punch below their weight' as EU ambassadors. Despite the UK's decision to leave the EU, Mogherini has still been recruiting the British nationals in 2017 albeit on a much lower scale than under Ashton.

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<sup>4</sup> Author's calculations until the end of 2017. See also T. Novotna, 'Who's in Charge? Member States, EU Institutions and the European External Action Service', ISPI Policy Brief No. 228, ISPI Milan, 8 October 2014. Available at <<http://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/whos-charge-member-states-eu-institutions-and-european-external-action-service-11338>> and T. NOVOTNA, 'Europe as a Global Actor: United We Stand, Divided We Fall', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 55, n. s1, 2017, p. 177-191 doi: 10.1111/jcms.12601.

In addition, Mogherini changed the working methods when chairing the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in its various formations. While chairing the FAC with twenty-eight foreign ministers, for example, the new HRVP introduced a topic for the long-term discussion on the agenda of each Council, such as the Middle East Peace Process. In addition, following the European Council Conclusions (2015), the first half of 2016 was dedicated to drafting 'A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy' (EUGS), the first strategic document since 2003, while the second half of 2016 until the end of 2018 were spent on implementing it in the areas of defence and security.

To conclude, Federica Mogherini's words and activities four years through of her five-year mandate as HRVP represent a welcome change from a mainly reactive approach towards longer-term planning within European foreign policy, including her endeavour to combine all the instruments available to the common foreign and security policy with the toolkit related to the external aspects of the EU's internal policies. Nevertheless, due to Brexit, Europe faces probably the greatest challenge ever to its unity, with Member States tempted to return to their national policies instead of finding European solutions. Whether EU Member States have fully allowed Mogherini to shape a concrete EU foreign policy or whether her actions have fallen short of her rhetoric still remains an open question to be judged after her five-year mandate will end and once the new leadership comes in place after the European Parliament's elections in May 2019.