

After Lisbon

Is Europe Becoming a Global Power?

Ulrike Guérot | **The European Union now has a dual leadership composed of an EU president, Hermann von Rompuy, and an “EU foreign minister,” Catherine Ashton. This duo is supposed to provide the Union with a single voice in the wider world. So, will the European Union now finally be taken seriously or will foreign policy continue to be made by the most powerful of the member states?**

It is almost 40 years since Henry Kissinger demanded a single telephone number from the Europeans. The joke is as old as Methuselah. But now the European Union finally has one. Well, actually, it is not one but two telephone numbers, and if you include the Commission then it is three. And, frankly, it is questionable whether President Obama will ever dial any of them. Nevertheless, the European Union’s new competences and power structures are beginning to crystallize. They are still not completely clear. There will be toings and froings over von Rompuy’s and Ashton’s actual remit within the European Union. However it is clear that there will soon be more foreign policy governance at the EU level than before, and that is fantastic news.

Jean Monnet said that institutions generate gravitational force, extending their influence into the political sphere, clearing a space for them-

selves. This should also apply to the new posts at the top of the European Union and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Union’s foreign service. The objective is to turn the EEAS into an innovative, post-modern foreign policy instrument that will not only enable the European Union to defend its values and views in the world, but also better protect the common interests of the member states.

This noble goal was severely jeopardized by a grotesque dispute over personnel in the run up to the nominations. Weeks before the special summit in November, second rate names for the posts designed to embody the European Union’s future were circulating, while prominent candidates were refused nomination in order not to jeopardize their national careers. Important EU countries such as Germany failed even to make any personnel recommendations at all. The sym-

bolism of the Lisbon Treaty appeared to dissipate before its ink was dry. The European Union was on the verge of botching one of its finest hours.

Admittedly: von Rompuy and Ashton are not the most well known. However, they have the bonus of being unknown quantities – not an a priori disadvantage for a new office. Following the difficult nominations, everything now appears to be proceeding quickly and the establishment of the new posts and institutions is rapidly exerting a unique gravitational force within the system.

Citizen-Friendly Conductor

In the future, a European president will preside over the work of the European Council, the Union's highest body composed of the heads of the member states. Furthermore, together with the President of the Commission, the new president will be responsible for the preparation, continuity, and cohesion of the European Council's work. He reports to the European Parliament. In addition, von Rompuy will act as the European Union's foreign representative in matters of foreign and security policy. The treaty lays down guidelines for the exercise of office, however it does not specify the tasks in detail. It is also unclear whether the president will receive his own administrative apparatus. His executive powers will be de facto restricted; here the Commission President, today Jose Manuel Barroso, will prevail. The work of the Council of Ministers will also be largely beyond his remit. Here the rotating national presidencies, next up Spain, will steer the course. And with a view to foreign policy, it will be necessary to outline

his responsibilities relative to the foreign minister, who will head the European diplomatic service and the Council of Foreign Ministers.

Nevertheless, the prominent role of the EU president in the future system will enable him to present himself as the face of the European Union, and provide what the European Union is most lacking: a profile that European citizens can identify with. Through him, Europe will become tangible and visible. Beyond the filigree legal competence structures, and in spite of the pre-programmed conflict potential, as President of the Council of the European Union, von Rompuy will have the opportunity to prepare the European themes of concern to its citizens, establishing a set of priorities, and

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guiding the debate such that the individual EU institutions are all working together under his direction. This would enable President von Rompuy – as a man of strong ideas and chairman of the debate – to become the actual choreographer of the new Europe, without losing himself in petty-minded questions of authority or becoming sidelined. Whether this proves successful will depend on his personality – however the prestige of the new office should provide a good basis.

The Real Trump Card

The new foreign minister has a pragmatic mandate, but with a well-equipped power base. Of central importance is her role as vice president, firmly anchoring Ashton in the European Commission, while simultane-

ously presiding over the new EEAS.

The EEAS represents the successful overcoming of the previous pillar structure (common policies vs. inter-governmental decisions), which led to the division of the individual policy areas according to Council and Commission jurisdiction. The Council frequently had a political agenda, while the Commission had the structures and the financial means to implement policy. The EEAS, which will be composed of civil servants from the Council, the Commission, and the member states, will serve to bring together these two pillars. At the same time, the European Union will establish diplomatic missions.

Will EU foreign policy automatically present a unified face? Naturally not—or at least not to the same extent everywhere. For the foreseeable future there will still be national embassies in Washington, Moscow, or Beijing, which will have a greater influence

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than the EU missions. However, the European Union will be able to successfully play its new foreign policy trump card—the common diplomatic missions—elsewhere. In the Balkan states, Ukraine, or Armenia, EU policy, like structural aid and the pre-accession programs, has already generated considerable added value compared to the efforts of the national embassies.

Furthermore, many countries, above all the smaller member states, are hard pushed to maintain their own embassies everywhere. However, at a time when the world's geostrategy and that of Europe is undergoing a

shift, it is precisely these states that are of special significance. States such as Tajikistan or Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan or even Georgia, which until very recently tended to be of secondary importance, are now developing into strategic nodal points for European energy supply and European security architecture in general. The new EU foreign policy will be particularly effective in Tbilisi, Baku, and Odessa, places where it is especially needed. Here the EEAS will be able to demonstrate its new strength. Should the experiences prove positive, then in time the relevance of the EU missions will extend to other states and regions, for example the African states. The same applies to the Western Balkan states. Even now the EU missions in the region, albeit still divided according to Commission and Council jurisdiction, are the de facto first port of call for emerging foreign policy and its future in the respective countries. With the establishment of strong, unified EU missions, the preconditions, at least in institutional terms, will be in place for EU foreign policy to act as the main lever for development in the Balkans.

Post-Modern Foreign Policy

The European Union's next objective is the establishment of a post-modern foreign policy. This will include breaking down the classic departmental divisions, for example, the division between classic foreign and development policy, as well as that between foreign and security policy. These divisions are still reflected at a national level in the majority of the EU member states. The differences between the "communities" of foreign and de-

velopment of policy makers are great. The resources of the various jurisdictions are jealousy defended. Consequently, whether that section of the Commission responsible for development policy project work should be integrated into the EEAS or not, was and remains one of the most contentious issues for the EEAS. Nevertheless, the EEAS will work toward strengthening links between development projects and foreign policy, i.e. strategic goals, integrating civil military missions into foreign policy, and connecting climate protection goals with development policy. The interdisciplinary aspect, even though it will take time, should emerge as a decisive advantage of the EEAS, something at which the European Union has traditionally been strong. The turn away from “classic foreign policy,” could, for example, consist of establishing EU diplomatic missions responsible for climate protection in those Chinese megacities that are the greatest emission sinners.

Not a Power Like the US or Russia

Judging EU foreign policy on whether it will operate like the United States or Russia, or as a “counterweight” to the United States, is in danger of overlooking the salience of the new diplomatic service. Despite all the European Union’s institutional statehood and state-like elements, it is not about the imitation of the superpowers. The European Union will never be able to compete at this level with the likes of China or the United States. The objective is better coordination of the diplomatic services of the nation states and the EEAS. The task is not the substitution of the national by the Europe-

an, but rather the creative participation of the national diplomatic services in the European service. Only by such means will the European Union be true to its motto “unity in diversity.” It is less about one voice, than a well-led choir. The foreign minister as conductor would be well advised to integrate the national foreign ministers into her work

through a delegation of responsibilities, not least because she has a huge workload.

For example, place the Spanish foreign minister in charge of a mission for Latin America, maybe entrust Italy with a mission for Libya, put the French in charge of the Mediterranean region, or entrust the Polish with the task of keeping a special eye on Ukraine.

These measures would not just make sense in terms of promoting a better integration of national and European policy, they would also grant the member states more say and generate a greater sense of “ownership.” This would not only allow the expertise of individual countries in particular regions to be used effectively—specific policy goals could also be given more weight by channeling them through the European Union. Far from being a competitor, the EEAS could function as a transmission belt for national foreign policy goals, which the smaller member states in particular stand to profit from, while the EEAS itself reaps the benefits of a tightly woven fabric of experience, networks and traditions. At an institutional level, the European Union would be better equipped for estab-

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lishing its influence in regions such as the Middle East, if Ashton—as the European Union has already done in the case of Iran—were to concentrate on focusing and coordinating the policy approaches of the major states, and then reinforce them with the weight of the European Union.

Superpower without Teeth?

The Lisbon Treaty provides clear advantages in security and defense policy. For the first time, the European Union will delegate a specific defense policy task to a “group of states” and deploy a multinational “EU battlegroup.” The treaty also

establishes the so-called “permanent structured cooperation,” enabling those states that display

strong commitment to defense policy issues to join forces on a sustained basis and make decisions according to a qualified majority. These combined measures do not turn the European Union into a military power: it has no standing army nor the intention of establishing one. Nevertheless, the reform allows a whole series of flexible military measures beneath the combat mission level, elements of a post-modern foreign policy that combine classic diplomacy and civil military factors.

The more energy and commitment

the European Union invests in establishing European Union missions, then the greater the likelihood that non-member states will respond to a common European Union foreign policy, and the more unified it will ultimately be. Naturally, this will take time. The same applies to the two new offices.

The new personnel and institutions will push for a common EU foreign policy agenda, albeit gently, as offices and institutions require, in fact compel, compromise and consensus. The institutional framework and content of European foreign policy are mutually related. It is correct that the European Union has not so much suffered from the lack of a uniform policy analysis in recent years, but from the absence of a suitable instrument for its common implementation. However, with the Lisbon Treaty, this is now in place. Even if the European Union uses this treaty patiently and consistently, it is unlikely to be transformed into a superpower in the near future, but maybe it will become a trend setter for a modern form of foreign policy in a globalized world.

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