

Europe abroad: 20 years after Maastricht, Is there anybody there?

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Twenty years after Maastricht...

Twenty years ago, [the Treaty of Maastricht created the Common Foreign and Security Policy \(CFSP\)](#)^{*}, based on the assumption that EU countries will progressively act as a block and speak with a common voice on the international stage. However, when looking at the material and institutional means put at the EU disposal, the CFSP looked toothless when faced with the challenges brought by globalization and multipolarity, and has constantly been challenged for this simple reason.

So far, one has been constantly reminded of how out of touch Maastricht's initial aims for a CFSP were with the means the treaty deployed. Jacques Delors's warning in 1992 – "let's not talk of a single foreign policy - the objective is out of reach - but rather of the possibility of joint actions in foreign policy" – is more accurate than ever.

The EU has nevertheless been active abroad and developed a wide variety of external tools and policies outside the realm of CFSP. The most notable successes are its trade and enlargement policies, and in some cases the external dimension of internal policies, such as climate change.

... a new institutional framework set by the Lisbon Treaty

Today, the major challenge for Europeans is whether they really understand the danger of marginalization they face on the international stage. [To limit this loss of influence](#), the EU needs to be more effective, concentrating on a small number of external actions related to targeted priorities, and proportionate with available means.

These means have been progressively upgraded with the successive treaty changes, from Amsterdam (which created the post of High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy) to Lisbon, which finally set new tools intended to bring more coherence and effectiveness to EU foreign policies.

^{*} The words underlined refer to documents available on the website of Notre Europe (www.notre-europe.eu).

The main innovation in the new institutional framework established by the Lisbon Treaty is the High Representative (HR), who assumes the functions of the former Commissioner for external relations as well as those of the rotating presidency of the Foreign Affairs Council, and the European External Action Service (EEAS), which is headed by the HR. These innovations are useful additional tools. But they are just tools, and it will take time to bear fruit.

To date, the [process of negotiations for the creation of these innovations](#) has been long, laborious and marked by many obstacles and rivalries between EU institutions as well as member states. The HR and its diplomatic service are now effective since almost a year. It is therefore timely to try a first preliminary assessment and evaluate how these innovations have been implemented and to what extent they have coped with the promise to make the EU a more effective and coherent actor abroad.

On the one side, comments from the press, analysts and even diplomats or EU officials have been rather critical, if not tainted by a certain disappointment. On the other side, the reaction from EEAS officials is rather defensive, rightly claiming that it needs time to bear fruit, that it is a work in progress, and that the expectations are all too high compared with the means at their disposal. All this is true, and is in a way repeating the never-ending story of the CFSP since its inception.

The difficult implementation of the High Representative and the European External Action Service

It is fundamental for the EU to better coordinate and align its various external policies (be it trade, development, neighbourhood, etc.), as well as the multiple external dimensions of its internal policies (such as climate, energy, research and development, migration, etc.). It is only by doing so that the EU will be able to address complex and multifaceted challenges such as [building a prosperous and stable neighbourhood](#), which cannot be limited to one of these external policies but rather require a balanced combination of all of them.

The effective coordination was done in the past within the European Commission by the Commissioner for external relations. While this proved insufficient, there is no clear sign that there is better coordination today. In general, observers have argued that the HR has been too much focused on its role within the Council as chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, and bound to the member states, rather than on its capacity as vice-president of the Commission.

Major external tools such as trade, enlargement, or neighbourhood remain within the competence and administration of the European Commission, and therefore need to be bridged with the work of the EEAS. Moreover, in certain areas the EU external representation remains the competence of either the Commission (its President or some of its Commissioners) or in some cases the President of the Council. In this respect, speaking with one voice does not only apply to EU member states, but also imply that EU institutions themselves cooperate when they are active on the international stage, as for instance within the G20.

Coordination and coherence between [the two pillars of the EU external action](#) (the intergovernmental CFSP and EU external policies based on the community method) is also essential. However, it appears that these two pillars remain too much disconnected so far. This is first reflected in the [internal organization of the EEAS](#), which broadly duplicates the former divide between these two dimensions. This is also illustrated with the EU action in the Middle East, where the European neighbourhood policy (ENP) is disconnected from the security and political

issues such as conflict resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These are two realities that need to be addressed altogether.

Last but not least, the HR was also tasked with the responsibility to chair the foreign affairs council in order to ensure continuity of EU foreign policy. This is an opportunity for the HR to launch mid-to-long term reflexions on the future of EU foreign policy. However, the Foreign affairs Council is still very much focused with current affairs and crises, without looking much at the future.

Enhanced coordination, consistency and continuity of EU external policies

Building on this preliminary assessment, there are several ways to improve it.

A limited reallocation of resources within the EEAS

It is essential that the work of the EEAS be organized as it is, by regions and countries. This is conformity with the need to focus on differentiation instead of a "one size that fits all" approach, and allows the EU to better identify the concrete needs and expectations from partner countries. However, this approach should be complemented by a limited reallocation of internal resources to cross-cutting issues, such as the role and support of civil society abroad in order to consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights, which remain crucial issues in many partner countries, not least in the neighbourhood. The same could apply to energy, migration, global governance, etc. This would also be a first step in ending with the disconnection between community and intergovernmental issues.

Defining what is the EU interest

The HR, helped by the EEAS, needs to further reflect and make proposals in defining the EU interest, which is different from the addition of the 27 member states' national interests. It has a responsibility to make proposals, launch reflexions, and to put a framework, a timing, a goal, etc. for such a discussion to occur. This is particularly necessary regarding the [future of EU strategic partnerships](#). The EU has so far 10 proclaimed "strategic partnerships" but without real strategies. This would take place on the basis of innovative and forward-looking papers developed by the EEAS, in consultations with the member states bilaterally, in order to finally adopt altogether a strategy for what the EU wants to do with its relation with Russia for instance, and where it wants to see this partnership in 10 years' time. Whether it proved successful, this could then be developed for other strategic issues.

In general, the HR could also be more assertive in pushing forward and defending its proposals. This has for instance been illustrated with its report on [European defence policy](#), full of interesting and forward looking proposals, which has been given up too fast due to British refusal, while at the same time other member states (France, Germany, Poland, etc.) insisted that it should not be abandoned altogether but further discussed on many proposals it contained.

Inter-institutional cooperation

The EEAS needs to work in close connection with other EU institutions. Its role will be enhanced if it finds allies rather than competitors in other institutions, and not only in the Council. As stated in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 21 TEU), the Council and the Commission, assisted by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall ensure consistency and shall cooperate to that effect. An interesting project in this regard, which could be duplicated in the future, is the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) which is based on an inter-

institutional task force with representatives from the European Parliament, the Commission, the Council and the EEAS. The aim of the system is to develop an inter-institutional assessment of the long-term political and economic environment facing the EU over the next 20 years and identifying the main challenges which are likely to confront its institutions.

To further deploy EU external representation abroad

Some EU countries continue to challenge EU representation at international level, insisting that the HR should represent only the EU but not its member states. There are still in this area many open questions of allocation of competence that need to be addressed. In this debate, there are also positive developments that need to be built on. The continuity of EU foreign policy is now better ensured within the EU delegations abroad. The fact that the EU delegations chaired by an EU ambassador representing the EU abroad permanently brings better visibility and coherence. It is also the EU head of delegation who chairs the monthly meeting with all EU 27 national ambassadors, and therefore sets the agenda. In all that, the EU is stronger, more visible and competent to address the issues at stake. Finally, in this period of fiscal austerity, the EU delegations abroad could also play a role in progressively pooling consular services of EU member states in certain countries.

Differentiation in last resort

The HR should in certain cases support or even propose further integration by only a few member states when necessary. In areas where differentiated progress is possible – in particular in military matters – it is probably best either to pursue ad-hoc cooperation or to use the tools of enhanced cooperation and "Permanent Structured Cooperation" provided by the Lisbon Treaty. The fact that some ambitious member states take the lead in certain areas does not mean that these actions are not developed for the benefit of the entire EU.

At the end, the EEAS should not be designed and operate as an additional 28th diplomatic service. Given its limited means in terms of resources as well as competence, and the limited scope to see these enhanced in the short term, the EEAS should therefore rather be a symbol and vector for common action, and concentrate on its tasks of coordination, coherence, continuity and initiatives.

Conclusion

If the EU is to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy, twenty years after its creation, it needs more than ever to be able to count on convergence between the positions of its member states. In an increasingly shrinking Europe it is essential to ask whether it is time to accept a fundamental truth: that international strength comes only through union, and that we need to [think global and act European](#).

At the end, this is simply what our partners are expecting from us. Above all, a more effective European external action is no longer a dream of European enthusiasts or federalists, but a necessary response to collective changes in the international system. The alternative is to try to swim alone, in seas which have become too vast and turbulent for our individual states.