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Which Role Should the EU Play in International Relations? Understanding the Post-Lisbon Foreign Policy at Times of Change

by Maria Giulia Amadio Viceré

 **LUISS** SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

Which role should the EU play in international relations? Two workshops were organized jointly by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the LUISS School of Government (SOG) in Rome on March 2nd and April 14th 2015, with the aim of discussing and providing an answer to this question. The two seminars were attended by scholars, EU practitioners and representatives of think tanks and led to fruitful and dynamic discussions with LUISS students. This paper is the product of the joint project and intends to provide a complete picture of and insight into the issues and proposals raised at the meetings.

European Union | European External Action Service (EEAS) | Common
Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP)



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by Maria Giulia Amadio Viceré*

A series of two workshops entitled "Which role should the EU play in international relations? Understanding the post-Lisbon foreign policy at times of change" organised by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Luiss School of Government (SOG) took place at the LUISS University campus of viale Romania on March 2nd and April 14th.

First workshop

The first event on "The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service: One, No One and One Hundred Thousand" saw the participation of Alfredo Conte, Head of the Strategic Planning Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS); Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director of IAI and Special Advisor to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; and Raffaele Marchetti, Assistant Professor at LUISS University, as moderator.

Alfredo Conte introduced the debate, recalling the legal basis of the EEAS in the Lisbon Treaty and the historical context against which such organization has been established. It takes lengthy and elaborate preparations to create complex institutional structures. To date, not only has half of the time of the EEAS establishment devoted to its setting up, but its development took place almost simultaneously with the beginning of the Arab Spring. As Lady Ashton herself stated: "setting up the service was like trying to fly a plane [...] while you are still

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· Report of a series of two workshops entitled "Which role should the EU play in international relations? Understanding the post-Lisbon foreign policy at times of change" organised by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Luiss School of Government (SOG), Rome, 2 March and 14 April 2015.

putting the wings on.”¹

Since its foundation, the EEAS has had to face a number of significant challenges. Among these, achieving “unity in diversity” through the realization of a geographical equilibrium among Member States; the fulfilment of gender balance with a significant presence of women in managerial positions; and more structural issues, such as the transformation of Delegations of the Commission into Delegations of the EU in a short amount of time.

Since the creation of the Service, several political results have been reached. Some of these represent important political breakthroughs – such as the negotiation between Serbia and Kosovo; the negotiation with Iran, with the reaching of a provisional understanding at the end of 2013; and the prominence gained by the EU in the Middle East Peace Process, thanks also to the publication of the EU Guidelines,² for the elaboration of which the EEAS has played a key role.



Alfredo Conte

These achievements might be complemented by a broader, more comprehensive vision of the EU’s role in international relations. Reaching an agreement on nuclear proliferation with Iran, for instance, ought to be seen in the broader context of the Middle East tense relations between Iran and its neighbours, sectarian rivalries and so on. From a structural point of view, it should be noted that the EEAS does not have the authority to manage any resources as the latter are under the control of the Commission. Furthermore, rotation and self-preservation should be carefully balanced. Whilst, on one side, alternation is at the heart of the Service lead by the High Representative (HR), on the other, the EEAS also needs continuity to promptly articulate a coherent EU foreign policy. Last but not least, the team spirit should be further fostered. The new HR is taking care of all these challenges that appear to be even more crucial now, as the recent crises have, to some extent, come to lower the common denominator of competing interests among the Member States.

By focusing on the role of the HR and the strategic review process of the EU foreign policy, **Nathalie Tocci** continued the debate. The job of the High Representative is, to say the least, a multitasking one. The Lisbon Treaty does not offer any

¹ European Parliament, Debate on the 2013 review of the organisation and functioning of the EEAS, 12 June 2013, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20130612&secondRef=ITEM-016&language=EN&ring=A7-2013-0147>.

² Guidelines on the eligibility of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards (2013/C 205/05), in OJ C/205/9 of 13 July 2013, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52013XC0719%2803%29>.

particular solution to overcome such overload. The appointment of a deputy for the HR, for instance, is not envisaged, as a change of the treaty would be needed to establish such an institutional figure. International changes, which the EU has faced in the past years, have been further complicating this role. Among these, the re-nationalization of foreign policy; and the rising scepticism in traditionally pro-European Member States should be duly taken into consideration. The post-Lisbon EU has also witnessed the emergence and consolidation of a number of cleavages cross-cutting its own structure: the north-south cleavage triggered by the Euro crisis; the east-west cleavage generated by the Ukrainian crisis; and finally the vertical one between the elites and the public, caused by the financial and economic crises.



Nathalie Tocci

The risk of having a foreign policy consisting of contingent and reactive policies rather than of actions based on a clear, coherent strategic vision does certainly exist. Yet, some of the causes of such inherent risk should be traced back to the basic institutional features of the EU itself. Along such reasoning, it should be recalled, for instance, the chairing role of the HR in the Foreign Affairs Council and not the European Council, and the consequent impossibility of coordinating Head of States and Governments. Mogherini's absence in Minsk for the negotiations of the Ukrainian crisis might assume, in this way, a different meaning than the one pictured by the media.

Against the background of a challenging international arena, the EU and the US bear different, at times opposite, interests. Such divergent positions bring back into the spotlight the transatlantic relation strategic question. Whilst the US is shifting its strategic interests to the Asia Pacific area, the European neighbourhood is collapsing. US energy independence is in sharp opposition to the EU energy dependence, as well. Such divergent paths are particularly significant as a number of challenges and transitions are at sight. In the framework of a multilateral system that is weakening while the multipolar world is increasing and consolidating itself, a number of critical junctures emerge: Brussels will not be able to deal with Africa by itself and the consequences of a rising China and the tensions in the Pacific will certainly have an impact on the EU, as well.

The EU should try to make this transition possible in a peaceful way. Since the Union can only hope to have a role if it stays united, policy in the 28 should be synergetic. The HR should be a coordinator of national foreign policy whilst also making the link with the European Council, the intergovernmental forum of Head of State and Governments. Such coordination should apply to the wide range of EU technical instrument, which should be employed against the background of a

broad strategic vision.

Last but not least, it would be worth asking – what is the EU niche of action – and what it could be in the future? There are a number of things the EU, and only the EU, can achieve: play the backing part behind UN mediation in Libya; make a difference in the relationship with Iran and start a process of engagement therein; engage with the Western Balkans; and deal with the Russian question and the feasibility of the two competing processes of regional economic integration in Moscow's sphere of influence. Indeed, the strategic review process will be long, yet, as the debate highlighted, it will just be a question of finding the right pitch.



From left to right: Alfredo Conte, Raffaele Marchetti, Nathalie Tocci

Second workshop

The second debate, on “CFSP and CSDP policies in a rapidly changing world: is the rhythm tuned?” saw the participation of Rosa Balfour, Director of the Europe in the World Programme at the European Policy Center (EPC); Anand Menon, Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at King's College; Sergio Fabbrini, Director of the LUISS School of Government; and Nicoletta Pirozzi, Senior Fellow in the European Affairs Area at IAI. Professor Fabbrini introduced the discussion. A presentation of the initiative by Nicoletta Pirozzi followed.

According to **Rosa Balfour** the hybridity of the current EU system has not yet produced a new model of foreign and security policy cooperation, nor has it provided sufficient incentives for a qualitative improvement of it. What the Lisbon Treaty did for foreign and security policy was to try to bring together the tools and the decision-making processes and in addition try to overcome the traditional dichotomy between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism. The External Action Service, the diplomatic arm of the EU, is supposed to reunify the tools and the expertise coming from the Commission and the experience of the diplomatic skills coming from the Member States in a single body. Since its creation continuous international crises, most of which are right outside the borders of the European Union, have been shaking Brussels institutions, trying to bring them into action.

Before assessing the answers to such crises, it is crucial to draw a picture of the background from which the EU and its Member States are coming. Such background is one of luxuries: the luxury of having US security guarantees and the one of having NATO. Member States have had, in this way, different hats they could wear at different opportunities. EU member states can wear their EU hat, but

also their UN and many their NATO hat in some respects, this gives flexibility but, in others, it provides a context in which such possibilities can create smoke and mirrors to avoid taking on responsibility.

There have been external shocks that, in the past, have brought the EU into action at the international front acting as direct triggers towards a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP). Among these, the oil crisis; the end of the cold war and the break up of the former Yugoslavia; the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US; the importance of the intervention in Iraq, in shaping the EU security strategy. It remains open to question, however, whether the 2011 Arab Spring and the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea will provide similar triggers to the EU.



Rosa Balfour

Today, Member States are spontaneously divided and unity is seen as an achievement. Member States have been viewing EU foreign policy in a very transactional way, mainly exploring the costs and benefits of cooperation. What we are witnessing in an expanded European Union with 28 Member States is the spread of different patterns of cooperation. Occasionally such forms of cooperation are technical. Negotiations with Iran is a clear example of this. Other internal patterns of cooperation are taking place, as well. In the Balkans, for instance, Germany and Britain took the lead. As these instances are recurring more frequently the question to be addressed is whether such Member States are pioneering EU foreign policy or just constituting different *directoires* decreasing the incentives for further cooperation. Today, with respect to Russia, the suspicion is that it is a "Germany plus format." EU institutions and especially the HR argue, with respect to this, that Angela Merkel is constantly reporting back to the European Council. The latter, in turn, is coordinating with the Foreign Affairs Council, which is chaired by the High Representative. Through this line of reasoning there is no risk for the political line adopted in Minsk and the one in Brussels to be too divergent. Certainly, the HR has worked in the early days on improving the working method of the Foreign Affairs Council precisely to make it more relevant also in the eyes of Heads of States and Governments. However, there is no guarantee that this mechanism will take place or that the various positions negotiated in Minsk, Geneva, or in other formats and contexts, will actually be Europeanised. Furthermore, other Member States might not be particularly happy with these kind of formats. To put it differently, there is no guarantee that the ad hoc minilateralism, which is developing inside the EU to lead foreign policy initiatives, will lead to greater EU cooperation on foreign policy. It might conversely reflect patterns of fragmentation rather than lead towards greater integration or cooperation on foreign and security policy.

The growing importance of sectoral policies is acknowledged and reflected at the EU level in the importance attributed to what the Commission has been doing in external relations. Against such a background the establishment of the EEAS should be understood as a great opportunity to bring together such sectorial policies. A manifestation of this is in the comprehensive approach, trying to bring together a broad variety of tools – CSDP; development aid; humanitarian aid; training missions; diplomacy - to address the challenges in a holistic manner.

Another trend, which has been evident ever since the 1990s but it is now becoming increasingly manifest to the broader public is the growing role of the Heads of States and Governments as opposed to the Foreign Ministers. Clearly, the EU Council has been playing a more active role in the past years. On the inter-institutional level, this implies the HR and the EEAS's necessity to guarantee good cooperation not only with the Commission, but also with the European Council. The increasing relevance of such institution reflects the resilience of Member States' attachment to national sovereignty. This continues despite the evidence that states are far less capable on their own of shaping the external environment and despite the evidence that, ultimately, these states do actually cooperate in foreign policy, as in the case of sanctions.

It is too early to make an evaluation of the new team in Brussels, according to Rosa Balfour. But clearly everyone in the Commission and in the EEAS is thinking on how to respond to what is happening in the international arena. There are also review processes, which are ongoing and will begin to produce results during 2015.³ It is too early to assess the level of ambition and results of these reviews. Yet, what is crucial is to bring together Member States at a deeper level of appreciation of the common challenge and a cognitive convergence towards a common platform and the debate to be discussed. National parliaments should be involved in such process as well.⁴

Professor **Anand Menon** started his intervention referring to the EU Commission President Junker's interview to a German newspaper calling for the creation of a EU army.⁵ According to Menon, such an official statement was absolutely right in pointing to an area of chronic European weakness. The solution that was proposed, however, was counterproductive and might even hinder the progress towards the kind of EU security capabilities that EU needs. In response to such statement, the

³ In June the HR will be submitting to the EU Council a strategic review, which is supposed to provide the first basis for perhaps reviewing the 2003 Security Strategy. The review process of the Neighbourhood Policy has started as well and is currently through a consultation phase. In October-November 2015 a policy paper is supposed to be presented on this matter.

⁴ Germany's Foreign Minister in early 2014 introduced, for instance, a review process of Germany's role in the world and Europe, which has initiated debate in society about the international politics and what to do about it.

⁵ Jean-Claude Junker interview by Beat Balzli, Christoph B. Schiltz, André Tauber, "Halten Sie sich an Frau Merkel. Ich mache das!", in *Die Welt*, 8 March 2015, <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article138178098>.

British government issued a declaration in which it affirmed that defence is and will always be a national prerogative. The German Foreign Minister, in turn, declared this would be an interesting idea, which could be put in place at some point in the future.⁶ Yet, she did not define that future and did not say anything more specific than Junker had said.

Interestingly, such a debate has recurred time and again in the history of EU security. The last time the EU could have had a European army was in 1954 with the European Defence Community. Despite the failure of such a genuine attempt to create a European army, rhetoric about it and about the necessity of such creation has continued to retake periodically in debates on the European Union. This is surprising, according to Menon, as the ambitions of the EU in security and defence, as well as its results, have been very limited.



Anand Menon

The empirical record is clear. Since the launch of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in 1999, Europeans have become less capable of protecting their own security interest, despite the existence of a EU instrument to help them to do so. European capabilities today are worse compared to the threats we faced back in 1999. In the war in Libya, despite the rhetoric about the US. Leading from behind, Americans deployed more forces in the area than Europeans did. Ultimately, the mission would have not been successful in the way it was without the Americans. Even in Mali, the French would have not been able to fight without American airlifts to get their troops there in the first place. There is a chronic shortage of adequate military capabilities in Europe. Broadly speaking, two main reasons account for this. The first is money. At the NATO Summit in Wales Member States promised they would have spent 2% of their GDP on defence. The only Member State that will fulfil such a promise this year is Estonia. Six member states, including Germany, France and the UK, will be cutting their spending on defence in 2015, moving away from the 2% threshold. The second aspect is coordination. European states have all cut their defence budgets in the last 5-6 years. But they have done so without any coordination at all. All together Member States spend collectively around 190

⁶ Georgi Gotev et al., "UK, Central Europe frown at Juncker's European army", in *EurActiv*, 25 March 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/node/313221>.

billion euros on defence.⁷ Yet, such a budget does not buy as much as it could. Such 190 billion euros are in fact divided under 28 separate defence policies, training, logistics, equipment budgets, etc.⁸ As EU Member States cannot afford to buy them by themselves, they are lacking intelligence, drones, air to air refuelling, satellite reconnaissance. In other words, Europeans are competing with each other, while collaborating would allow them to make things quicker, better and cheaper. Such shortcomings take place in a world that today is more dangerous than at any time since the end of the cold war. The threats, some of which we contributed to create, are countless. Europe needs to take the lead in stabilising its eastern and southern neighbourhood and this will require military capabilities. Yet, security does not end in the neighbourhood. Our prosperity is tied to global stability, as Europe is a region that strongly depends on global trade. World trade, in turn, depends on the existence of a stable rule-based international liberal system.



First workshop participants

Menon stressed we cannot continue to rely on the American support. Washington wants to turn its attention to the east, wherein lies its long-term strategic interests. Whilst the US certainly has interests in Europe and in the Middle East, which require Americans to keep military hardware in this part of the world, they will expect Europeans to do more on their own. In practical terms, Europe could create a headquarter for its missions or provide the European Defence Agency with more resources. Yet, these would only be solutions to marginal problems compared to the most important ones, which are national. The notion of the EU army is a distraction, concluded Menon. Europeans need to focus on the fact that nation states in Europe can no longer protect their interests militarily. The best way to collaborate is via the EU as its institutional structure was set up to foster collaboration and the body through which they coordinate their foreign policy. NATO will remain the centre of European defence for the foreseeable future, and not simply because there is no alternative for the American nuclear umbrella. Yet, if Europeans strengthen EU military capabilities they will strengthen themselves as Europeans, they will strengthen the capacity of the EU to act and even strengthen NATO, as they will stop the freeriding over the Americans.

⁷ European Defence Agency (EDA), *Latest defence data published*, 31 March 2015, <https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/news/2015/03/31/latest-defence-data-published>.

⁸ Whilst 80% of weapons in Europe are bought domestically, in 2009 Europeans were undertaking 89 separate weapons programs, as compare to 26 in the US.

Alongside the above mentioned topics, the two seminars stimulated a rich debate among the participants, about fundamental institutional and policy challenges to be addressed by the EU and its Member States. Among the former, the inter-institutional relationship between the HR/VP assisted by the EEAS, the EU Council and the Commission; and the inherent contradictions of a foreign policy system based on multiple separation of power and underpinned by a supranational/intergovernmental dichotomy. Against such institutional background, the debate touched upon the role the EU should play on the international arena in light of the American shift of strategic interest towards Asia; risk and opportunities in addressing the situation in Libya; the managing of the Ukrainian crisis, including possible future political relationship of this country *vis-à-vis* the EU; and how to increase the security and defence capabilities of the EU and its Member States.

Updated 18 May 2015



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