Federica Mogherini has outlined an ambitious plan for EU foreign and security policy, but whether it is attainable remains to be seen

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Federica Mogherini officially took over as the EU's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on 1 November. **Johanne Døhlie Saltnes** *and* **Tine Elisabeth Brøgger** *write on the strategy which has been outlined by Mogherini for her five year term. They note that while there are reasons to be optimistic about the substantive agenda and action plan she has proposed, the role of High Representative is inherently challenging as it requires manoeuvring within the tensions created by the existence of intergovernmental and supranational obligations in EU foreign policy.*

The appointment of Federica Mogherini as the next High Representative of the European Union's foreign and security policy was not a traditional choice. Aside from being a member of the European Parliament since 2008 and serving as foreign minister in Italy for less than a year, it is safe to say that she was not well known outside of Italian politics prior to her appointment. Jan Techau, director of the think tank Carniege Europe, has noted that "in old-fashioned foreign policy, seniority and battle scars matter, neither of which Mogherini has in ample supply". Regardless of her lack of battle scars, however, what is more interesting is the actual policy agenda and vision she has for EU foreign and security policy in the five years to come.

Mogherini's agenda

Mogherini's main priorities for her five year term are summarised in three principles. These principles, we are told, are crucial in order to shape what the high representative calls "a *real* common policy" (italics added). The first of which, her self-proclaimed number one task, is the creation of *ownership* among the EU's 28 member states. This she plans to accomplish by travelling to all member state capitals to meet with relevant politicians and bureaucrats, thereby creating a foundation for the establishment of a "common vision together". At this stage, it is impossible to evaluate the extent to which this will generate the results she foresees, but it is indicative of a different approach to the start of her term than her predecessor, Catherine Ashton, pursued.

The second part of Mogherini's strategy calls for closer collaboration both within and between the EU's institutions. This involves a commitment to work more closely with the European Parliament and the Commission. In doing so she has decided to move the location of her cabinet to the Berlaymont Building, the headquarters of the Commission.

The last element of Mogherini's agenda stresses the significance of improving 'coordinated action'. Multiple policy fields, such as immigration flows, trade, climate and energy all have external impact and therefore require internal co-ordination and collaboration. In order to tackle this challenge Mogherini has already made an agreement with Jean-Claude Juncker to set up an inter-institutional working group. An early impression of Mogherini is that she is action-oriented: she seems adamant to back up her words with action.

There is an inherent tension in EU foreign policy that has implications for the role Mogherini is now setting out to fill. The role of the high representative requires working closely with the member states in order to ensure that the EU's foreign policy is in line with member state interests. However, the position of high representative demands something more than this because the EU is obligated to have its own foreign and security policy. This tension is made evident in Mogherini's remarks at her recent hearing in the European Parliament: "people say that member states obviously will always have a foreign and security policy, some people say that we don't need a twenty-ninth

one, and I completely share that".

Federica Mogherini. Credit: European External Action Service (CC-BY-SA-NC-ND-3.0)

What exactly does this mean? This statement seems to indicate a state-centric understanding of EU foreign and security policy. However, Mogherini's aforementioned decision to move her cabinet to the Commission headquarters is at odds with this kind of understanding. It serves to illustrate the underlying tension the position of high representative encompasses. In addition to this, relying solely on a pure member-state understanding of EU foreign and security policy is not only oversimplified, but also serves to circumvent an important recognition, namely the influence of bodies such as the European Defence Agency and the European External Action Service.

Furthermore, commonality was one of the major themes in Mogherini's speech during her hearing. While commonality is indeed important, more recently attention has also been given to flexibility and 'Enhanced Co-operation' mechanisms as possible options for co-operation in EU foreign policy, particularly in the field of security and defence – a topic which was given surprisingly little attention in her speech. The voluntary nature of the practice of EU foreign and security policy in general, coupled with institutional developments in the Lisbon Treaty, have made it possible for more differentiation in co-operation within the Common Security and Defence Policy. It might be that the principle of smaller groups of member states working together is becoming a growing institutional feature of EU security and defence policy. There may therefore be limitations to the kind of commonality Mogherini seems to be envisioning.

The focus on creating a more 'coherent and common' foreign policy actor is also prevalent in her understanding of the role the EU should play with respect to human rights. Mogherini clearly spelled out which areas she would focus on: media freedom, women's rights and freedom of religion. It is noticeable that the high representative's speech made no mention of democracy, good governance and the rule of law, all of which are important components of EU foreign policy.

However, the unavoidable tension of the high representative's role is also made apparent here. Mogherini said "on human rights, as Europeans we have a particular responsibility in developing a coherent agenda". The notion of there being a collective European citizenry – a "we" – relies on a different understanding of EU foreign policy. It suggests that it is more than its member-states. This is echoed by recent research suggesting that EU foreign and security policy is not always an aggregation of the interest of the member states.

Federica Mogherini has a lot working in her favour. At such an early stage she has already made a substantive agenda for her five year term and spelled out a clear-action plan for how to make it happen. What remains to be seen is whether or not her aspirations will be successfully implemented. Despite that fact that there is much reason to be optimistic, there are a few elements of her present strategy that could benefit from further clarification. In order to successfully foster a more 'coherent and common' EU foreign and security policy the high representative will surely be plagued by the inherent tension her role implies. However, the decision to move her cabinet proves that there is room for manoeuvre.

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