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A Note from the Editors EFAR@25

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Published in:
European Foreign Affairs Review

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Blockmans, S., Wessel, R. A., Chaban, N., Goldner Lang, I., Marín Durán, G., Orbie, J., & Pomorska, K. (2021). A Note from the Editors EFAR@25: Between Change and Continuity. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 26(1), 1-4.

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A Note from the Editors

EFAR@25: Between Change and Continuity

The present issue of this journal leads us into its twenty-sixth volume, which is kick-started with a special issue on the first (and next) decade of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The *European Foreign Affairs Review (EFAR)* was established twenty-five years ago by David O’Keeffe and Jörg Monar, with Nanette Neuwahl replacing O’Keeffe at a later stage. In the very first issue (1996, No.1), the Editors shared their reasons to establish the new journal:

[T]he European Union has undoubtedly become an international actor of the first order [and] it is time that the European Union’s foreign affairs should have a permanent forum for the analysis and discussion of central issues, questions and options. [...] The *European Foreign Affairs Review* will concentrate on the political, legal and economic aspects of the Union’s external relations. The *Review* is intended to function as an interdisciplinary medium for the understanding and analysis of foreign affairs issues which are of relevance to the European Union and its Member States on the one hand and its international partners on the other.

The first Guest Editorial in that issue was by Commissioner Hans van den Broek, who laid down various reasons for the Union to strengthen its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the light of the (then) upcoming Intergovernmental Conference.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the Union took the most recent step towards integrating and mainstreaming foreign policy issues in EU external action, thus aiming at more consistency, visibility and effectiveness in its implementation. While the objectives in Article 21 Treaty on European Union (TEU) now indeed combine various aspects of external action and whereas CFSP is less considered to be ‘the odd one out’, EU foreign policy-making in the Council has not changed considerably over the past twenty-five years. The Union continues to struggle with the tension between its aspirations to be a global player and the difficulty to reach consensus among its Member States. Certainly, new steps are being taken to strengthen the strategic autonomy of the Union, as evidenced in a large number of new international (free trade) agreements, new horizontal sanctions and investment screening mechanisms, and even capability generation in the area of defence policy. But proposals to enhance the Union’s efficiency in decision-making, based on shared intelligence

and joint analysis, continue to fall by the wayside as core groups of Member States (and third countries) chart the path of foreign policy, at times without properly informing the High Representative and the EEAS. In addition, there remains considerable unclarity as to what a more coherent and effective foreign policy would be intended for. The normative power Europe debate has long dominated EU external relations studies and seems to have made place for more ‘realistic’ perspectives. As suggested by Pierre Vimont, former Executive Secretary General of the EEAS, in his contribution to the special issue by which we start this new editorial era, the EU still hesitates on where to position itself on the spectrum between a ‘soft power’ pursuing normative influence or a ‘hard power’ that plays the geopolitical games.

‘European foreign affairs’ has thus gained even more appeal than it already had twenty-five years ago. Geo-political changes, migration, Brexit, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have again placed the topic high on the EU’s agenda. As EU Commissioner von der Leyen stated in her 2020 State of the Union.

In the face of the [COVID-19 health] crisis, some around the world choose to retreat into isolation. Others actively destabilize the system. *Europe chooses to reach out.* Our leadership is not about self-serving propaganda. It is not about Europe First. It is about being the first to seriously answer the call when it matters. [...] Without any doubt, there is a clear need for Europe to take clear positions and quick actions on global affairs.

All of this calls for continuity in our editorial policy. EFAR’s mission as formulated twenty-five years ago does not need to be changed fundamentally. In fact, it is still formulated along similar lines on our website:

The *European Foreign Affairs Review* is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal specializing in the role of Europe in the world, and in particular its position and policies in relation to third States and international institutions. The *Review* focuses on the political, legal, economic, social and cultural aspects of the EU’s external action. The *Review* functions as a multi-disciplinary medium for the understanding and analysis of the external relations of the European Union.

At the same time, the new Editors-in-Chief decided to establish an Editorial Board, to bring in expertise from different academic (sub-)disciplines. Together with this new team, the decision was taken to reinforce the peer review process, not only with the intention to further improve the quality of the contributions, but also to acknowledge that double-blind peer review has become an increasingly important requirement in national and international research assessments.

As a team we aim to maintain the high standards that were set by our predecessors and we are fully confident that the *European Foreign Affairs Review* will continue to be *the* quality journal covering all aspects of the EU's external relations for the next twenty-five years.

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