

# Federica Mogherini's first seven months in office: a balancing act between supranational and intergovernmental decision-making

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*Federica Mogherini took over as the EU's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on 1 November 2014. [Tine E. J. Brøgger](#) and [Johanne Døhlie Saltnes](#) assess her first seven months in office, noting that while the period has been characterised by instability both within and outside Europe, she has managed to successfully balance a desire for the EU institutions to have greater involvement in foreign affairs with respect for the Member States' leading role in specific areas such as the on-going standoff with Russia.*



At the start of her term as the EU's High Representative for foreign affairs, Federica Mogherini moved her office to the Berlaymont building, home of the European Commission. This move was part of her proposed strategy of working more closely with the European Parliament and the Commission and as such was an indication that the new EU foreign policy chief was not going to be catering simply to the Member States.



Since the start of her term she has been faced with growing instability both inside and outside Europe, which demand both short-term crisis responses and long-term strategic revisions. To what extent has Mogherini's strategy of working more closely with the EU institutions in formulating EU foreign policy been prevalent in what she has done so far as the EU's High Representative?

## Mogherini's first seven months as EU High Representative

The Russian annexation of Crimea was one of the first major international crisis situations Mogherini faced in her role as the High Representative. In the negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv, Angela Merkel and François Hollande have taken lead roles, leaving Mogherini and Donald Tusk more supporting roles in the European response. This situation makes it clear that there are limits to the extent to which the EU institutions are included in the practice of EU foreign policy and diplomacy.

While these events were unfolding, Mogherini was faced with a different challenge coming from inside the EU. During the early days of 2015 the newly elected Greek government threatened a veto of renewed and increased sanctions towards Russia at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting. Despite the fact that the Member States' heads of state were leading negotiations and that the Greek problem never materialised, these events have underlined the constant need for not only creating, but maintaining consensus among Member States on common European responses to international crises.

On 8 February this year Mogherini made a speech at the Munich Security Conference where she placed great emphasis on the need for an updated security strategy in order to face the new security context in Europe. Her speech clearly expressed an ambition that this strategy should not be "drawn up in a closet by a select few, but through a broad process that involves the Member States and the EU institutions as well as the foreign policy community including academia and think tanks". Mogherini has thus sought to actively emphasise the importance of the inclusion of the EU institutions in the formulation of the EU's security strategy.

The presence of the EU institutions in the formulation of the EU's new security strategy is further underlined in the Commission's [European Agenda on Security](#). The document articulates five key principles for the European security

agenda on security, among them the “need for a more joined-up and cross-sectorial approach” to handle different security threats within the EU. This principle involves deeper cooperation between the different EU agencies and coordination with Member States.

Support is also voiced for reinforcing the links between Justice and Home Affairs and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. What these points have in common is that they will require increased cooperation between the European Council and the supranational institutions in the EU and more involvement of supranational institutions in EU foreign policy overall. It is difficult to imagine that this would have been the focus if the Member States had drafted a similar document.

In establishing a new security strategy, Mogherini faces a tendency towards more differentiated security and defence cooperation in Europe. Increased differentiation suggests that coordinating EU foreign policy between different actors, both inside and outside the EU, is becoming more complex. During her first days in office Mogherini met with NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg. At the meeting she commented that “we have a common challenge in front of us: a security environment that is more worrying every day. Cooperation among us should improve. This is the only way of having effective military capabilities on the group”.

Improving cooperation between the EU and NATO is in no doubt important; however there is another element that should supplement this picture. NATO and the EU share 22 Member States that are not only formulating responses to present security challenges as individual states and EU and NATO members; they are doing it increasingly in regional and smaller frameworks. The Nordic countries recently agreed, building on cooperation in [NORDEFECO](#), to share maritime information, conduct more joint military drills, share air-bases and consider opening a new air policing mission known as the Northern Flag. These developments should be taken into account by Mogherini in her efforts to implement a new security strategy for the EU.

In addition to the launch of a new security strategy, Mogherini has worked with Commissioner Johannes Hahn in the launching of a 3-month consultation period for the establishment of a new European Neighbourhood policy (ENP). The Commission and the High Representative jointly drafted a consultation paper which sets the agenda and key questions for the consultation with partners and stakeholders.

The paper voices the need for a ‘stronger Europe when it comes to foreign policy’ and suggests not only that Mogherini’s close collaboration with commissioner Hahn in the process of drafting a new neighbourhood policy is indicative of her taking her role as vice-president of the European commission seriously, but that she recognises that the EU institutions should be part of the process. This represents another policy field in which Mogherini’s efforts are geared towards working with the EU institutions and not only taking cues from Member States in formulating policy.

The first six months of Mogherini’s term as EU High Representative have been rife with complex challenges, some beyond what is mentioned here. Different situations have called for different responses. On Russia, Mogherini along with the EU institutions have provided a supportive role to the Member States, which illustrates the limits of EU institutional involvement in EU foreign policy. However, in non-crisis situations Mogherini has in large part stayed true to her initial strategy of working more closely with the EU institutions. This is particularly true with respect to how she has approached the updating of the EU’s security strategy and neighbourhood policy. Mogherini’s decision to



Federica Mogherini, Credit: EEAS (CC-BY-SA-ND-NC-3.0)

move to Berlaymont has therefore proved not to be merely symbolic.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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