

The geopolitical developments the Union is facing require strong, swift and coordinated EU responses. They need to take account of the whole set of instruments and policy fields. Well-functioning and smooth EU-internal coordination is more important than ever.

- Yet, the current institutional set-up falls short of the needs and expectations. This is why we believe that a reform is crucial. We have to consider all relevant EU institutions and bodies, including the HRVP, the Commission, and the EEAS.
 - EU external action is increasingly shaped by trade, technology, industry, energy and financial matters. The respective instruments lie with the European Commission whose footprint in external relations has therefore become stronger.
 - The role of the HRVP and the EEAS has in turn declined. HRVP and EEAS are often sidelined. As a consequence, foreign policy considerations are not always sufficiently taken into account when formulating policy responses.
 - In a world where power politics and transactional approaches have become dominant, it is essential to formulate responses that take account of the whole set of instruments and are based on a comprehensive analysis – encompassing sectoral as well as CFSP (Common Foreign & Security Policy) related considerations. Effective coordination between institutions is therefore key.

Important that the HRVP initiates the debate at Gymnich and takes this forward. Invitation as it stands looks promising.

- We must seize the current momentum and initiate a reform process for stronger external action. We believe that several Member States share our analysis and our conclusion that a reform is indispensable.
- To formally launch the process, EUCO in October should ask the Council to initiate the work. The Presidency could report to the Council by the end of 2026.
- The main elements of the reform must be discussed amongst Member States, hence the need for a formal process.
- For a meaningful reform we must consider the broader institutional set-up for external action. We must look beyond the EEAS only. It will be key to end the sidelining of the HRVP and the EEAS, reduce the friction between the EEAS and the Commission. Important to set up a structure that strengthens EU's external action as a whole.
- Such a reform could include the following elements:
 - (1) Enabling the HRVP to coordinate external action in the Commission more effectively. She should be given – de facto, and not just de jure – the role and authority for coordinating "other aspects of the Union's external action" (art. 18 TEU), including amongst others development cooperation, humanitarian aid, defence and neighborhood. HRVP also needs to coordinate the Commissioners in charge of these policies and oversee the units

coordinating external relations in the SecGen of the Commission, as well as the network of delegations.

(2) Embedding the services of the EEAS to a large extent in the Commission's structures. This should increase the coherence and effectiveness of foreign policy making and align sectoral policies and CFSP more closely. It should also facilitate the HRVP's coordinating role within the Commission. The staff ratio requesting that at least 1/3 of EEAS's staff are seconded national diplomats should continue to apply to services transferred to the Commission.

(3) Strengthening the political steer given by the European Council to the Union's external action and the role of HRVP in EUCO. This is key for safeguarding the central role of Member States in foreign policy making. The HRVP would e.g. report to EUCO on the implementation of the orientations taken by EUCO in the field of external action.

- An effective reform can be implemented without a change of the Treaty.
- The central element of such a reform would be the unanimous revision of the EEAS Decision by the Council on the basis of a proposal from the HRVP and after consultation of the European Parliament and after obtaining the consent of the Commission.