

Franco-German food for thought on the reform of the EU set-up for external action

With the geopolitical developments we are facing, Germany and France emphasize the need to reform the EU's internal set-up for external action, to allow for stronger, swifter and more coordinated EU responses at the international level. We have to consider the institutional set-up of the relevant EU institutions and bodies, including the HRVP, the Commission, the GSC and the EEAS. In our view the reform should comprise the following elements:

Enabling the HRVP to assume her coordinating role within the COM: The HRVP should become an executive vice-president. 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 and shall 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. The HRVP must finally be empowered to assume her Treaty-based responsibilities.

Embedding the services of the EEAS to a large extent in the Commission's structures (e.g. in a distinct DG for external relations). This should increase the coherence and effectiveness of foreign policy making and dovetail sectoral policies and CFSP. 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 the services that are transferred to the Commission and also apply to the services coordinating external relations in the SecGen. The services in charge of CSDP will remain outside of the Commission.

Strengthening the political steer given by the European Council to the Union's external action and the role of HRVP in EUCO, to safeguard the central role of Member States in foreign policy making. The HRVP would report to EUCO on the implementation of the orientations taken by EUCO in the field of external action.

The role of the Council in the governance of external action instruments shall also be reinforced significantly in view of the next MFF.

We will ask the Council Presidency, the HRVP and the Commission to initiate the work. We are looking forward to a debate on this issue at Gymnich in early September. The Presidency should report to the European Council by the end of 2026.