

Press release of the Bridge Forum Dialogue a.s.b.l.

Conference ‘EU foreign policy – highs and lows! Lessons from the past’

The Bridge Forum Dialogue a.s.b.l. (BFD), in cooperation with the College of Europe Alumni – Luxembourg Regional Group, organised on 2 March 2021 a conference (video format) under the **chairmanship of Mr Klaus-Heiner LEHNE**, President of the European Court of Auditors.

Mr Lehne welcomed **the speaker, Mrs Federica Mogherini**, Rector of the College of Europe, former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EEAS) and Vice-President of the European Commission (2014-2019). As the EU’s chief diplomat, she was then the face of Europe in the world during challenging times for its foreign affairs.

Mr Kris PEETERS, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), replacing President Werner Hoyer, paid tribute to the College of Europe, in Bruges, Alma Mater of many EU Officials. He reminded the audience of the outstanding role Mrs Mogherini had in external affairs, explained the commitment of the EIB to the EU’s external role, underpinned by a lending figure last year of over 9 billion euros outside the EU.

Mrs MOGHERINI, in her personal capacity, shared thoughts and insights from her experience as the head of the Union foreign affairs and security policy, looking back at some of the historical achievements over her five-year mandate, including EU defence, Iran nuclear deal, climate action.

Among the lessons learnt she mentioned:

Firstly, a key element for these successes according to Mrs Mogherini resides in the authority and legitimacy entrusted by the EU Treaties to the EU High Representative in order to create synergies across and within different EU institutions. If a revision of the Treaties would occur in the future, a similar combination of responsibilities, duties and roles should be foreseen for other high-level EU posts. EU institutions should act more in a synchronised manner mindful that the Union is one and so is considered by its external partners.

Secondly, EU decision-making is often perceived as lengthy and complicated, not only by its citizens but also by international partners. Mrs Mogherini recalls, however, that EU institutions are perfectly capable of adopting tough decisions rapidly if there is the political will to recognise the urgency of the decision to be taken. She cites a number of examples from the field of defence to the recent Covid-19 response. Lengthy processes are the sign of lack of political consensus rather than technical difficulties or cumbersome procedures.

Thirdly, Mrs Mogherini invites to look beyond formalisms. The Council unanimity rule is a constraint but may also enable the EU to present a united front towards its counterparties. Where improvements can be made, Mrs Mogherini points out, is in the ownership and implementation of decisions taken in “Brussels” at national level. To be credible, especially in the area of foreign policy, where symbolism and statements are of high importance, the EU needs to speak with one voice. It is therefore crucial to bridge the remaining gaps between national and EU capitals.

During the **Q&A session**, Mrs Mogherini addresses sensitive topics. Mrs Mogherini advocates in favour of the need for the EU to maintain an open dialogue with Russia. She explains the importance of human rights and rule of law in EU external relations, describing the EU as a more credible and sustainable partner in the longer term than China. Ms Mogherini highlights, going forward, the vital importance of the EU enlargement in the Balkans region, the international role of the euro as well as the need to invest more in the relationship with India. Finally, Ms Mogherini considers that a revision of the Treaties, a cumbersome process, is not inevitable in her view, because the current legal framework offers flexibility and multiple unexplored possibilities, provided that the political will exists.

From her current position as Rector of the College of Europe, she is persuaded that the renaissance of the EU will start with new generations having new energies and ideas to shape the future of an ever closer Union

The video of the conference is available on the website of the Bridge Forum Dialogue: www.forum-dialogue.lu and on the player page:

<https://www.bce.lu/eu-foreign-policy-highs-and-lows-lessons-from-the-past/>



Photo from left to right:

Mr Klaus-Heiner LEHNE, President of the European Court of Auditors

Mr Kris PEETERS, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank



Mrs Federica Mogherini, Rector of the College of Europe, former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (EEAS) and Vice-President of the European Commission (2014-2019).