

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

Conference organised by The Bridge Forum Dialogue a.s.b.l.

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

Dear Rector Mogherini,
Dear Vice-President Peeters,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

I welcome you to this videoconference organised by The Bridge Forum Dialogue a.s.b.l. (the “Bridge Forum”) in cooperation with the College of Europe Alumni - Luxembourg Regional Group.

The series of Bridge Forum conferences has seen some of the most eminent personalities of the European politics and academics.

However, today’s conference still stands out.

We are particularly happy to have you, Mrs Mogherini, with us to discuss the EU foreign policy, its highs and lows and lessons from the past.

Thank you very much for joining us from Bruges.

Who would be better placed to address this topic than our speaker tonight?

Mrs Mogherini has been Foreign Minister of Italy and most notably the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission from 2014 to 2019.

Before that, she was a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 2008 onwards. Her Academic career is not less impressive.

As you surely know, she is now the Rector of the College of Europe.



She is also a fellow of Harvard Kennedy School and the German Marshall Fund, among other important positions.

As such, she perfectly bridges practice and theory of foreign policy.

As the European Chief Diplomat, Mrs Mogherini was the face of Europe in the world, for the second half of the last decade.

This was a time that showed some drastic changes in the external parameters for the European Union external actions: the United States, under the Trump Administration, turning from friend, to, if not foe, at least opponent on the world stage and China, unleashing its political and military power and Russia putting further back from a common ground.

The European Union's reliance on multilateralism and the rule based international order is the cornerstone of its foreign policy, was increasingly put into question.

It became very clear that acting in unity is essential for the European Union to remain, in the true sense, a global player that is able to actively shape the international order in which it operates



Kris Peeters, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank (EIB)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants to the first Bridge Forum Dialogue Conference of 2021,

It is my pleasure to introduce this evening's guest speaker, Federica Mogherini.

Mrs Mogherini is Rector of the College of Europe in Bruges - or Brugge as we say in Flanders -, which, for over 70 years, through its teaching and research, contributes and helps to develop the European integration. Indeed, its historic campus in Belgium and, since 1992, its twin campus in Poland, are the Alma Mater for many who work in the EU Institutions, both here in Luxembourg and elsewhere.

Prior to her current role, from 2014 to 2019, Mrs Mogherini was the European Union's High Representative and Commission Vice-President, responsible for foreign and security policy.

During her time in office, she oversaw the signature of the 2015 Iran nuclear accord, and the 2017 launch of the EU's permanent structured cooperation on security and defense, to name but two milestones.

She also served previously as Italy's foreign minister.

This makes her uniquely qualified to provide us with some thoughts today on the EU foreign policy, her own first-hand experience of how it works in practice, and lessons we should learn for the future.

I can think of no better time for this debate today.

As Mr President said, I am a new Vice-President of the European Investment Bank.

As The Bank of the European Union, the European Investment Bank has vested interest in this debate.

Last year, we committed over 9 billion euros, out of 65 billions euros of lending, to projects outside the EU, including record amounts in Africa, making us an important tool of economic diplomacy.



In recent years, we have been involved closely in EU support for countries affected by conflicts, as in Syria or in Ukraine. As already said by the President, Werner Hoyer,

the President of our Bank is now in Kiev, accompanying Charles Michel, President of the European Council, to discuss very important issues; that is the reason why he is not with us tonight.

We are currently very much focused on the global health and climate crisis.

It is now more than 20 years since the Amsterdam Treaty created the post of High Representative (HR).

And it is just over 10 years since the Lisbon Treaty led to the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

It is therefore natural to ask at the start of a new European political and budgetary cycle how this institutional set up is working.

For example, under a self-proclaimed “geopolitical” European Commission, what is the role today of the High Representative and the EEAS in a changing global context?

Until recently, Europe had become a lone voice in defending the multilateral institutions and frameworks for common global action put in place after World War Two.

Shaken by Brexit, challenged in our neighborhood by Russia and Turkey, in Africa by China, and by our closest ally, the U.S., on various topics – from trade to our approach to Iran – we launched our own drive to achieve our “Strategic Autonomy”.

Now America is back, under a new President committed to rebuilding some of the bridges burnt by his predecessor.

Will renewed U.S engagement on issues like climate, help or hinder our own efforts to speak with one voice?

The two pressing challenges of our time: the COVID-19 crisis and climate change are creating new tensions between rich and poor countries, even within our Union.

Both have the capacity to generate social instability and political crises in our partner countries around the world.



Clearly, Europe can help. We have the vaccines and the healthcare systems. We have renewable energy and other valuable technology.

But are we prepared to think together and to take the steps necessary to make an impact, together?

Federica, perhaps you can help us answer some of these questions?

It is for me a great pleasure and honor to give you the floor.

Federica Mogherini

Thank you very much Mr President, for inviting me and hosting me, unfortunately only in this virtual manner for the time being. I would also like to thank the Alumni of the College of Europe based in Luxembourg for having helped in the organization of this event. Indeed, I realise how valuable for the College and its students, this network just like the support of different institutions, including in Luxembourg and in international organisations.

Also I would like to thank you, Mr Vice-President for your kind words. My Flemish is still lagging behind but I try to learn this not so easy language.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would try to share with you, some thoughts, as you asked me to do. Do not expect a formal written speech. In my experience, after so many months of online meetings, the best way of making the most out of it, is having an informal interactive exchange, as we can.

After my initial talk, I would be very happy indeed to share with the audience, including friends and colleagues from European Institutions, some thoughts about my personal experience during these five years I spent in what is often defined as an “impossible position”. What I experienced in positive terms, as in terms of shortcomings; what lessons I have drawn.



I now don't represent anyone but myself. I will not even express here positions on behalf of the College of Europe.

I will do it candidly, openly and frankly.

Impossible Job?

I arrived in Brussels, coming from Rome, from a position of Italian Foreign Minister, assuming also at the time the rotating Presidency of the Council.

So I had seen the European policy first as a foreign Minister of a Member State holding the Presidency, and then, on the other side in Brussels, as EU High Representative.

Everybody was telling me before I started, that I was taking an impossible job. The function created by the Lisbon Treaty concentrated different tasks and responsibilities. The so-called famous two hats, being Vice President of the Commission, responsible for its external actions but also at the same time being President of very important Council formations, the Foreign Affairs Council, with the Foreign Ministers, the Defense Ministers or the Development Ministers.¹

Obviously, the High Representative has also to lead the diplomatic service, a proper Ministry, somehow, with huge complexity and highly competent people.

A third hat, rarely mentioned, is that the HR is also the head of the European Defense Agency.

So, when I arrived in Brussels, people were telling me: give up thinking that you can do properly everything; it is simply impossible.



The first lesson I would like to share with you is that not only it was possible but I wouldn't change a word of the Lisbon Treaty about the High Representative/Vice President.

If we managed to do some positive things during those five complicated years, it was because I could move different levels.

This includes the Bank (EIB), that was so important to put in place our actions notably in Ukraine, Syria or Africa. I always was grateful to the Bank and its President for our excellent cooperation.

All the times we managed to do something good and achieve something historical. You mentioned the Defense Initiative, the Global Strategy, the Iran Nuclear Deal, in all these cases and many others, as the partnerships agreements for managing migration with countries of origin and transit, all the times we intervened to support and save multilateralism and the UN system, the Climate Change Agreement, all of that was possible only when we succeeded to put together the different levels of actions available across the Institutions.

This was the case for the decisions on Defense and their implementation, After sixty years of debates about the European Defense, we actually put in place the foundations for a real Union of Defense, something on paper in Lisbon Treaty, as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the permanent organization on security, We managed to put together the Commission making proposals for actions and financial resources, the EU Parliament, of course, the External Action Services, the Military Committee and the European Defense Agency preparing the files, and the Council, not only the Foreign Affairs Council but also the European Council to which the HR is constantly invited.



Pulling together the strings has allowed us to move relatively fast because the Global Strategy was approved in June 2016, by the way just two days after the dramatic Brexit referendum.

The work on European Defense was implemented rapidly even if not always unanimously;

I will come back on that later on. -

[Need of institutional cooperation](#)

My work consisted in bridging together different Institutions and different parts inside them, for instance different DGs within the Commission, coordinating and creating synergies so that the decision-making and the implementation were the results of collective work.

I gave the example of the Defense but I could apply the same recipe to other areas where we achieved good results, as Climate Action, Iran Nuclear Deal, sanctions or trade or investment measures.

The key for successes were the capacity, the authority and the legitimacy of the High Representative, who has to coordinate and create synergies among and within Institutions.

He has to play as a door opener, with his dual role as VP/HR, in all the three hats of the function.

To underline my role of Vice President of the European Commission, I moved my main office from the External Action Service to the Berlaymont.



I benefited from an excellent understanding with the Presidents of the Commission (Mr. Juncker) and of the European Council (Mr. Tusk) as well as with many of my colleagues.

The first lesson I learned was that the Lisbon Treaty was perfect in describing this role. So much that I would actually encourage, when a revision of the Treaty will happen, to think of similar responsibilities and duties as HR/VP for other functions that might be created in in other areas.

Bridging the Commission and the Council has proved to be the only possible but also the most desirable solution.

At the end, it works, when playing at full, all the hats at the disposal of the HR.

This implies, second lesson learned, a constant focus on bridging the distance or the gaps among the Institutions and within the Institutions.

Our successes were actually the result of collective work as a puzzle transformed into a picture.

We have to continue our efforts passing the message that we are one within the Union

Think together is a basic principle to be considered. We need passing the message that we are one, that the European Union is united, not divided between “us” and “them” (the other Institutions).

Bridging the distance and controlling the potential competition or confrontation, that sometimes we see, is the second lesson I learned immediately.



Priority number one is to create synergy and cooperation among Institutions. Why? Firstly, you don't achieve effective results through endless discussions. We have to deliver an effective decision-making process. Secondly, our external partners don't see us as different Institutions; they see the Union flag, no matter which Institution represents the Union.

The external representation of the Union has to be coordinated and united.

In this context, an improvement of the institutional coordination and synergy resulted from the establishment of the Commissioner's Group on External Action. It was already existing under President Barroso, but it was then meeting in a rather restrictive format (normally the HR and the Commissioners in charge of Humanitarian, Development, Neighborhood, sometimes Trade). With Juncker we agreed from the very beginning that it should be chaired by the VP/HR and not by the President anymore, making it more operational, that it should meet on a monthly basis and importantly, that Commissioners should be invited on the basis of the agenda of each meeting.

It was an important change.

So, if we had a large meeting of this Group for Strategy, about China for instance, we could have 16 Commissioners participating including, IT, Digital, Science, Economy, Finances, Technology, Transport, Education, so almost all the Commissioners except the President.

The new practice allowed us to prepare the Commission proposals also having a view on the agenda of the Council.

So we could bring together the Commission and the Council, what does facilitate fine tuning the discussions and reaching more easily a consensus.

The VP/HR has to play a role on both sides.

When I was chairing the Foreign Affairs meetings, I was sitting opposite to my colleagues Commissioners, and leading the discussion on the proposals we made before together.

It might be strange for them and sometimes difficult for me, but my role was to facilitate the cooperation between the Commission and the Council.

You need a coordinator for the Commission policies as well as for the Council policies. Maybe, one day, we should also have someone like the VP/HR playing such a dual role in other areas.

I am sorry to get into details, but I know that in our audience there are many people familiar with these matters.

From the moment you involve many Commissioners, in the monthly meetings, you create a dynamic facilitating the preparation of the Commission proposals in their various aspects. This improves the information flows and contributes to a good cooperation, starting directly the day after the monthly meeting.

[Too slow decision-making process?](#)

Let me address two specific lessons I have learned. The first is the speed of the decisions. We know that the European decision-making process is often perceived as lengthy and complicated; we are accused of being too slow and embroiled in technicalities and delays. This is also sometimes the views of our external partners, accusing us of being too slow.

Well, the lesson I learned is actually, that the decision-making process both at the level of the Commission and the Council, can be extremely fast, if there is enough political will to recognize the urgency of the decision to be taken.

I already shared with you the example of Defense, where we acted unanimously and fast, in a conflictual field, as well as in time of Brexit, also when we had to decide unanimously and to implement rapidly.

The most striking example for me, of capacity to go fast if there is political will, was when we established in 2015, our first military operations in the Mediterranean sea (Operation Sofia). The decision was taken in May and operational in June.

According to our militaries, it would be impossible to do it in one month. We achieved it because we were able to mobilize enough political will all across the EU to start before the summer.

I could give other examples of fast decisions that were taken.

I think for instance that after a certain slow reaction last year, decisions that were taken on anti -Covid measures, being on the sanitary level and on the economic and financial support to the Member States, have been fast, again after a certain moment of slow reaction that was, I think, rooted in the fact that not all Member States were perceiving the urgency of the problem equally.

The other side of the coin is that sometimes you have a doubt. Is a decision not taken and implemented in a fast manner, is it because of difficulties, technical reasons or bureaucratic burdens or because of lack of political will?

When the will is there, then the EU can be extremely fast and efficient.

Unanimity rule

The last point I would like to raise as lesson learned in my experience, is the issue of speaking of one voice or the issue of unanimity.

It is a fascinating issue. Many people feel very strongly about that.

I have my own personal experience, maybe because I had as a Minister of a Member State.



For me, the starting point was that of trying to synchronize the voices rather than eliminating them.

I always thought that having many voices was a plus and not a minus.

I never identified that having many voices was a problem
It can even allow you sometimes to have a division of labour.

The important point to me is that we don't need one single voice, we need many instruments playing the same song

The real issue in my experience is, even if it may have slightly changed today - ask M. Borrel my successor- I'm free from assessment for the present, is that unanimity has never been the problem.

The HR is the chair of the highest number of meetings. He/she chairs the Council every month, Defense and the others.

I never experienced in five years, not even once, that a decision was not taken because of lack of unanimity. Never.

This is why, in my opinion, moving to majority voting may not solve the problems.

Obviously, to create a consensus for an unanimous decision requires a lot of work and energy and time; you have to start well in advance, to include different aspects of the discussion. It represent a demanding intellectual effort, but, on the other side, it provides you with a very powerful instrument afterwards.

I always thought that, as HR, I had to talk with our interlocutors as in China, in the US under Mr. Trump, or in Russia, but also many cooperative interlocutors.

If those interlocutors knew that a Council position was the result of a division, duly registered, not the position of the 27, it would weaken our position.

If the HR would express only the position of a qualified majority, the picture of our internal division would become apparent.

In this respect the position of the HR, in representing the interests and values for which we take decision, would be weakened.

There is a real problem, I believe, of ownership among the Member States
Formally, the unanimity rule was not the problem.
We could decide unanimously also on Defense or Brexit matters.

If some Ministers, coming back in their countries after having taken part to the decision, declare that “they have decided” or “Brussels has decided”, they create a problem.

This game of taking distance from a decision taken together could increase following a qualified majority rule.

The main issue is that you have to support the decision you have taken.

I have to admit that sometimes I have used the unanimity rule to achieve a consensus on the decision.

Sometimes it is a leverage, an instrument, to avoid a lack of decision that would be detrimental. This is a responsibility we will all share. Difficult to come back telling that the EU has not be able to take any decision on important issues.

If there is no consensus there is no decision taken.

If there is a lesson to be learned, it is to increase the level of ownership of the decision and their follow up.

Especially in the field of Foreign Policy that most often is not based on legislation.

Indeed, it does rarely turn into a legislative act.

What does it make it alive?

Sometimes, symbolism works.

Visits, statements, sending of delegations, words, play an effective role, as coordinating actions on the ground; this requires Member States to take ownership of what we decide at EU level.

If Member States express views different from the position agreed by all, that would put in danger the unity and the effectiveness of the Union.

They are not good guys versus bad guys here.

This a political issue.

Building a common ground among the institutions, try to overcome the distance by Institution's building was my job.

The lesson to be learned is the need to increase the ownership of the decisions.

The format of the decision would not solve the problem

Certain element of detachment by some Members is a real issue, solvable only by working together, coordinating actions in the capitals.

The HR has to make bridges, to overcome the sense of distance between the EU and the different capitals, to stimulate Institutions building is the way to go if you want to address the shortcomings we are facing.

I have to say that it is exactly because I learned this lesson that I decided to move to the College of Europe.



The mission of the College of Europe, created even before the EU itself, is to contribute to the shaping of the European construction. This is an essential mission today not less as it was 75 years ago. It tends to give a common ground for those who will serve the Institutions.

We need somehow to contribute to the Renaissance of Europe, including in the field of foreign policy.

I have to stop it here for the sake of time.

Thank you for the invitation, the attention and the excellent Forum provided.

Mr Lehne (Chairman)

Thank you very much, Mrs Mogherini, I think that was really an excellent presentation. I personally learned a lot of what you said; probably also the other participants. We cannot give you the applause that you deserve. You know in virtual conferences; this is quite difficult for technical reasons.

I pass now the floor to the Moderator.²

² M. Hugo Woestmann, Member of The Bridge Forum Dialogue

Questions and Answers

Mrs Mogherini, we had, during and before the session, many questions coming in. To be able to address most of them, we summarized them in a few broader subjects. The first question is the following.

1. EU-Russia relationship.

During your time as High Representative, you have been very careful to maintain a constructive relationship between the EU and Russia. How do you judge this approach today and, apart from recent unhappy developments, how do you see the relationship develop in the medium and longer term, also considering differences in approach among EU Member States?

Yes, remember that I started in 2014, until when Russia was considered as an Strategic Partner by the EU and, by the way, also by NATO.

The shift from that intervened in 2014 when sanctions were imposed, political high-level meetings suspended for a certain period of time, obviously because of the Russian intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

The Union was united to impose sanctions on Russia, under Catherine Ashton, my predecessor; these sanctions are kept until today.

The decision to sanction was agreed unanimously, and kept until today.

I experienced the most difficult time in our relations with Russia.

I remember very tough discussions with the Foreign Affairs Minister of Russia, Mr. Lavrov and very tense relations throughout the years.



I always considered that a three steps approach was to be followed.

First to maintain the unity and common approach on the sanctions and our solidarity on the tough line

Second, sanctions do not represent themselves a policy.

We were not anymore Strategic Partners; but what cooperation can we develop?

We have to build the dialogue part, in addition to the sanction part.

This is not easy.

The Five Principles are still the compass of our relations

First of all, contacts among people and societies, including economic diplomacy, are good for both sides

Also the key principle, on which I strongly believe, is that you can be tough but this should never impede an open dialogue. The more you are tough, the more you have to keep open the dialogue; the more you are open, the more you can be tough.

We have to keep developing the rest of our cooperation with Russia.

Let us safeguard what is remaining of the Nuclear Agreement with Iran after US went out of this Agreement and continue to cooperate with Russia, China and the rest of international community, on many items in Africa, Asia, America, Middle East with, for instance, our common position on the status of Jerusalem.

So a differentiated approach is the way forward with a special focus to the young generation.

I noticed at a certain moment, that the students that were benefiting the most out of the Erasmus Program, from outside of the EU, were the Russian students. I think it is an extremely relevant indicator. Investing in the young generation could be our best investment.

Finally, at a certain moment, we should also restore the principle of a partnership.

You don't change the history and the geography.

Russia is not going to disappear.

Being engaged and clear on our values and interests is the basis for our future cooperation with Russia.

2. Human rights. Foreign Investments in Africa

Mrs Mogherini, EU foreign policy has been considering very highly democracy, human rights, liberalism in partner countries. They are two questions in this context. Is this approach meeting expectations of the partner countries and second, is the EU outpaced in many instances - e.g. in Africa - by unconditional Chinese actions and investments.

Very good questions.

Yes, the EU is the most consistent player globally, investing in Human Rights, Rule of Law and Democracy based policies.

We compete on that only with Canada in terms of consistency.

I hope and believe that the US of today will go back to investing a lot in foreign policies based on human rights values.

Personally, I remember a sad moment when a former US Secretary of State declared publicly that from that moment onwards, the US policies were not based on human rights assumptions anymore.

That created for us an extremely difficult environment, our interlocutors telling us "Are you sure you are on the right track in your policy, if even your allies don't follow you on this?".

I have to say, to be honest, that sometimes the Member States on human rights issues are fluctuating in their approach. There are inconsistencies in human rights inside the EU.

The months and years of the refugee's crisis were particularly difficult for me.

Interlocutors asked me:

“Are you sure that human rights are fully respected inside the EU?”

My answer was that indeed you are right, there is still work to be done inside our borders. Human rights are never fully achieved.

We have to do more for our credibility and consistency at home

Members States are happy and eager to support EU human rights policies but they are also happy and eager that it done by the EU itself. It is more easily done by the EU than by the Member States. This also weakens the EU position.

Referring to your concrete question, indeed, many of our interlocutors in the world consider the focus on human rights as an European or Western obsession.

The truth is that we are simply advocating the application of universal values, notably the UN Charter and rules, which are universal ones.

This was at the basis of many debates during the different crisis we were confronted with.

My vision is that nothing can overshadow the importance of human rights and rule of law standards; they cannot be lowered even for security reasons.

Indeed, some argue, even in the EU that for security reasons human rights should be lowered.

I disagree.

The more you invest in human rights and rule of law, the more your society is resilient and the more secure is your country.

That is the European way and we have to be proud of that.

Last but not least Africa and China

Many times, I was told that our European money comes with too many strict conditions attached, human rights standards, rule of law and also complex procedures and transparency and accountability requirements.

Nevertheless, those who are in good faith, will recognize that if it takes time mobilizing the money, taking a lot of paper work, but at the end “you are reliable”, “we know that we can count on you “. Once a decision is taken, it is kept.

The lengthy decision-making process is also a guarantee of stability afterwards. Debtors may count on that.

Some will come back to me telling me that yes, it is true, the Chinese money comes fast and without any strings attached but then you find out the strings after 10 /15 years when you have to pay back the debt.

Ecological sustainability but also financial stability are key elements that all Institutions in good faith in all the third countries will always recognize.

3. Economic versus political diplomacy.

What is the right level and direction of economic diplomacy, as already referred to by EIB Vice-President Peeters, versus political diplomacy and how and by whom is foreign policy decided in the EU?

I strongly believe in the power of economic diplomacy.

I think this is something that is sometimes underestimated, not at the national level but at European level.

There is another instrument that I believe is underestimated in diplomacy at the European Union level. This is the power of culture in diplomacy, we are very much aware of our soft power, something we don't use enough.

The Vice-President mentioned something extremely important. He referred to the strategic autonomy element in the context of the economic power of the EU. I would like to echo that and support that a lot.

Normally strategic autonomy is referred to in the context of military and security perspectives. It is true, this is how the debate started and how the debate was growing in these last years. We have done a lot in that respect.

By the way, always keeping an eye to strengthening our relations with NATO in the same vein.

But I think the real frontier today about our strategic autonomy is clearly not so much the military one or the security one, it is the economic and financial one.

There were two occasions when this was self-evident in the last years.

Number One: Iran. Following the Iran Nuclear Deal, trade and investment with Iran became legitimate, not only for the Europeans but for everybody. It was an UN Security Council resolution: trade and investment are legitimated; UN sanctions were lifted. So, we invited banks and companies to invest and trade with Iran.

Then we found out that our economic and financial sectors including our business were too much exposed to links with the US to be safe from the influence of decisions taken elsewhere.

Another example: Cuba. The extraterritorial impact of the sanctions imposed by the US on banks and companies outside the US were hitting mainly the EU companies and banks. We found out that we had very little instruments to protect the strategic autonomy in the economic field of our investments and banking relations.

Another example: the use of the currency.

I have been asked, always in relations to Iran: can we use the euro for transactions for instance buying oil or gas, normally done in dollars. It seems to me to be a real shortcoming. We started to work on that at the Commission; work is still in progress. It is not really a competence for the High Representative; it is now more for the desk of Dombrowskis (Commissioner for Economy) than for the High Representative desk (Borrell) (but I think) it is essential to find a solution to be credible in the future.

4. EU- India relationship

Has the EU put enough emphasis and speed on developing political and economic relations with India?

Speed probably not.

Emphasis, focus and energy, definitely yes.

India for me personally was a particularly delicate case.

I was coming to Brussels from a country that had a painful case with India, that now is solved luckily. I was afraid that it could have been heavy on my shoulders, for a partnership with India that was already complex.

I am very proud that there was a turning point in my mandate in 2017, when we had an excellent Summit in Delhi that was extremely positive with many practical items on the agenda.

Europeans tend to be rather slow in understanding the power of India, not only its economic and geopolitical power, not only in the Pacific but also globally.

I am in favor of investing more there. It is not an easy partnership, not at all.

India has its own pace, which is not a fast one; it has a level of complexity that is nothing less than the EU. Projects are not easy to implement.

But it is definitely worth it. We have an enormous number of sectors where we have a win-win possibility for both of us.

Regionally we tend always to forget the power of India that is not smart we see the Asian powers in terms of China and Russia. I think there is a huge potential there.

5. EU-Balkans relationship

Another question coming right now:

How do you judge the lack of or the low level of EU support to the Balkans during the pandemic?

I am not in the position of judging if the level of support was high or low. It would be unfair from my side. I could not also enter into the discussion of the EU support to individual Member States.

But I am definitely in the position to say something on the Balkans and express my concerns

I have never been shy about that.

I think that the EU and some of its Member States in particular, have a difficulty to understand how strategically vital (not only important), the Western Balkans are for the EU.

We tend to see the Balkans as an area close to us, to which we can give an European perspective. They need our support.

Maybe because of geography and history, again, maybe because I am Italian - By the way, do you know which the capitals cities are closest to Rome? The Balkans cities - I am strongly convinced that it is more in the EU interest, first to support them, second to support their reforms agendas and third to integrate them inside the EU as soon as possible.

They have borders with no one else than EU countries; they are inside the EU. It is not an external part.

When came a new energy crisis in 2015, I remember we convened in the Berlaymont, a meeting of all the Heads of States of Member States and also of some Balkans Countries.

At the time, we were asking them to help us managing the crisis. They did. Why?

It is the place where the EU support reaches peaks of 80- 90 % of popular support. Tell me where else do we reach such figures in the EU?

The youth in the Balkans is open minded and motivated. They see the integration as a must.

Peace and Reconciliation for them will come with their integration, exactly as it was the case, 70 years ago, for our Member States.

I would not say anything about Covid support but I have to express my political concerns.

The slowing down of the integration process is something that we will regret.

I hope it can be reversed in the future.

It is in our interest from economic, security and geopolitical and many other points of view.

6. Treaty revision

A final question

As Rector of the College of Europe, an institution that does a lot of thinking and research on European politics and institutions, what would be your advice to a Working Group on the revision of the Treaty, as a first issue to be tackled?

We had just a month ago an extremely interesting virtual conference at the College of Europe, opened by the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Sassoli.

In that occasion, I thought that we might establish at the College of Europe a tradition of having a series of conferences on the future of Europe from now on. The European Institute in Florence has rightly promoted every year, the State of the Union Conference on 9 May.

I believe that, beyond looking at the State of the Union today, we have also a responsibility to allow the young people to reflect on the future of Europe. You might hear more on that in the future.

On the revision of the Treaties, I cannot share advices and reflections on institutional reforms neither represent here the position of the College.

As you rightly mentioned, we do a lot of research at the College, producing many publications of professors and students, containing different options and views.

Personally, and I hope I am wrong, before proceeding to a revision of the Treaties, I would make sure that the outcome is not worse than what we have today

It is true, we have some Treaties limitations, but one of the key lessons I learned, in my experience in Brussels, Strasbourg, Luxembourg and elsewhere, is that, if there is political will, the Treaties provide us the space for doing many more things than what we are doing today.

Sometimes, I have the impression that we use the Treaties hypothetical limitations to hide the lack of political will behind institutional limits.

Actually, I have the impression that, within the existing treaties, there is a lot more that could be done and explored.

I would not say that a revision might be an excuse of not doing what we could do actually but on certain issues there can be a legitimate doubt.

Sometimes, I have the impression that the best is the enemy of the good.

Putting on the table the horizon of something perfect, like a European Army for instance, could be an excuse of not doing something good that you could do already today.

Conclusion

Mr Lehne

Thank you very much, Mrs Mogherini.

I think that was more or less a perfect last word

But I still have to do some conclusions; I will do it quite shortly.

First, thank you very much for your words. I think we have learned a lot of lessons tonight, all of us that were listening to you.

You really have a huge experience. It is very helpful that you are now in this function where you are.



Simply, because you have defined two reasons.

First you can deliver information about the background of decision-making in foreign policy,

the cooking of foreign policy in the European Union, which of course is not an easy business as far as we all have understood. But I think at the end that it offers huge opportunities if there is an agreement and if there is a political will. It is not the Treaty, it is more the ignorance and the lack of political will.

This is connected with the second point you have mentioned. We have sometimes a lack of mental integration for European ideals. Probably there is still a lot to be done to build a strong European identity, especially when it comes to the foreign policy and defense policy.

I think you really are at the right place to trigger this and to teach about this, to create a different mood in the new generation for those people who will be in charge in the near future of taking decisions.

I wish the best to you and to all who were listening.

Stay Healthy.

Good evening!