



High Representative Federica Mogherini: Her Role and Performance in the EU Neighbourhood

Elżbieta Kaca

Federica Mogherini, the EU's top diplomat, has strengthened coordination over EU external affairs but has not managed to make a significant impact in Europe's closest neighbourhood. She succeeded in the speedy launch of the EU naval operation in the Mediterranean and the development of partnerships with several Sub-Saharan countries concerning migration, but in the case of the conflicts in Libya and Syria, the EU remained dependent on UN-led mediation. In relations with the eastern neighbourhood, Mogherini was side-lined by the Member States, which did not perceive her as an honest broker on Russian affairs. The next High Representative should make improvements in these areas while also following Mogherini's path of close cooperation with the European Commission and other stakeholders.

In 2014–2018, the number and types of crises emanating from Europe's neighbourhood were posing major challenges to the EU. Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) meetings were dominated by questions about the EU's response to the refugee crisis, including the external dimension of migration and the instability in Syria and Libya, as well as the war in Ukraine fuelled by Russia. In this light, one year before the end of Mogherini's term as the EU's top diplomat in November 2019, it is a timely moment to review her activities and roles¹ in relation to European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the major challenges to it posed by Russia and mass-migration. Even though it means skipping over Mogherini's achievements in other policy fields, such as the negotiations with Iran and the deal to curb its nuclear programme or efforts to negotiate the normalisation of Kosovo–Serbia relations, a case study of the EU neighbourhood is sufficient to show some trends in her performance.

The Legal and Institutional Determinants of Mogherini's Term

While the Treaty of Lisbon introduced the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) and strengthened EU competences in foreign affairs, the realities of the political dynamics within the EU hampered the execution of HR duties. As the EU's chief diplomat, the HR conducts

¹ See the various HR roles analysed in: S. Keukeleire, T. Delreux, *The Foreign policy of the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Two major HR roles will be analysed: policy entrepreneur, which involves shaping the EU foreign affairs agenda by contributing to various lines of EU policy and building EU consensus in this respect, while the role of implementation manager of agreed policies is to ensure the smooth process of performing tasks delegated to the HR.

the Union's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and common security and defence policy (CSDP), as mandated by the Council.² In this respect, the HR not only implements CSFP-related decisions and coordinates CSDP but also may issue proposals on policy developments to the Council. In other areas of external action (neighbourhood, development, etc.), the HR may submit joint proposals with the European Commission (EC). In addition, the HR chairs the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), with the participation of Member State ministers of foreign affairs, which offers the possibility to set the FAC's agenda and therefore impact its priorities. Moreover, to ensure the consistency of EU foreign affairs and bridge the Council and Commission, the HR is also a Vice President of the EC, coordinating its external relations portfolios. This is important as the EC plays a huge role in foreign affairs because of the increasing number of EU internal policies with an external dimension (i.e., justice and home affairs), management of the EU budget, as well as its numerous personnel and expertise.

In practice, the execution of HR competences is constrained by some structural factors. First, the complexity of the EU decision-making process, coupled with numerous actors, including the 28 Member States, the EC, and the European Parliament (EP), hampers the potential speed of action.³ The HR works on policies also characterised by various modes of decision-making. While in the mainly intergovernmental CSFP/CSDP the requirement for unanimity of Member States prevails, which involves a time-consuming process to reach consensus, in other external relations there is greater use of the "community method" (i.e., use of ordinary legislative procedure), in which more interaction with other actors, such as the Commission and EP is required. Second, the ambitions of the Member States to mark their presence in foreign affairs limit the HR's influence on crucial dossiers. The mandate of the previous HR, Catherine Ashton, revealed the biggest Member States tend to delegate leadership to the HR only when EU-wide consensus is unquestioned, but that in unexpected international crises, they frequently tend to opt for cooperation outside the EU.⁴ Moreover, the most important foreign policy issues are discussed at European Councils at the level of heads of state and government, which diminishes the role of the FAC, and therefore also the HR's role to impact major debates.⁵ Even though the HR participates in European Council meetings, the HR must cooperate with the president of the Council, who is responsible for facilitating cohesion and consensus within this body and represents the EU externally at the head-of-state level. Third, the major instruments used in foreign affairs (financial, economic) are managed by the EC, not directly by the HR. On a positive note, the HR's leverage over EU external action at the EC level has increased since the beginning of Mogherini's mandate. She agreed with EC President Jean-Claude Juncker that she will guide the work of commissioners whose portfolios include external policies (international cooperation and development, neighbourhood and enlargement negotiations, trade, humanitarian assistance and crisis management).⁶ This arrangement was non-existent during Ashton's term because former EC President José Manuel Barroso resisted delegating leadership to the HR in this respect.

Eastern Neighbourhood

During Mogherini's mandate, a major EU challenge in its eastern neighbourhood has been the unsettled Russia-Ukraine conflict resulting from Russian aggression against the territorial integrity of Ukraine in 2014. Even though the Minsk II deal setting conditions on Russia and Ukraine to resolve the conflict was brokered in February 2015 under the Normandy format (Germany, France, Russia, Ukraine), the deal has yet to be fully implemented by Russia and Ukraine. Consequently, the EU has been prolonging the sanctions on Russia, conditioned on the full implementation of the Minsk II agreement. Despite this, the EU agreed in March 2016 on partial cooperation with Russia on issues of EU interest, which came to be known as the

² See provisions in Title III and V, i.e., articles 18; 22.2; 27 of Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 326, 26 October 2012.

³ S. Keukeleire, T. Delreux, *op. cit.*

⁴ N. Helwig, C. Rüger, "In Search of a Role for the High Representative: The Legacy of Catherine Ashton," *The International Spectator*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2014.

⁵ R. Balfour, K. Raik, *Equipping the European Union for the 21st century. National diplomacies, the European External Service and the making of EU foreign policy*, FIAA, 2013.

⁶ "Mission letter to Federica Mogherini from Jean-Claude Juncker, President-elect of the European Commission," European Commission, 10 September 2014.

“selective engagement” principle. At the same time, the EU continued its Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy towards Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine under the ENP umbrella, which was slightly revised in 2015.

In this light, Mogherini’s role as a policy entrepreneur in these areas has been limited. In relation to the Russia–Ukraine conflict, the EU was not a participant in the negotiations under the intergovernmental Normandy format, which was launched before Mogherini’s nomination. Crisis management in this issue was led mainly by German diplomats, who were responsible for brokering the Minsk II deal together with France, animating further talks in the scope of the Normandy format, and ensuring an OSCE monitoring mission (the EU has not launched a CSDP mission), among others. Furthermore, when it comes to bridging Member State positions on sectoral and economic sanctions toward Russia, Germany was the leader in the negotiations and managed to obtain Member State consensus in July 2014, coordinate the sanctions with the U.S., and extend them further.⁷ The resistance of Member States to force Mogherini to act in EU–Russian relations was visible. She obtained a green light to pay an official visit to Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin only in April 2017, two and a half years after the beginning of her mandate.⁸ The visit was followed by the intensification of meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and focused primarily on the Syria conflict, Libya, and the Iranian nuclear programme. When it comes to Ukraine, Mogherini’s engagement related mainly to questions of EU bilateral relations with the country and discussions over implementation of the Association Agreement. To this end, she paid three official visits to this country while additionally participating in the EU–Ukraine summit in Kyiv in April 2015 (Annex 1).

The limited room for manoeuvre notwithstanding, Mogherini had the ambition to supplement EU sanctions policy towards Russia with some channels for cooperation. She saw it as indispensable to solve issues of utmost importance for the EU, mainly the Syria and Libya conflicts and negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme. While the first attempt in this respect at the beginning of her mandate failed, she scored later on. In January 2015, before the FAC aiming to discuss EU–Russia relations, she prepared a strategic document on EU–Russia policy in which she called for cooperation with Russia at the political, trade, and sectoral level, i.e., reconciling the EU’s Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements with the Eurasian Union.⁹ This approach was interpreted as going back to business as usual¹⁰ and considered by the Member States. However, Russia’s increased role in Syria (due to its military intervention in September 2015), coupled with the huge inflow of refugees to the EU in 2015, seems to have made the Member States agree on some options of cooperation as advocated by Mogherini.¹¹ In March 2016, the FAC, despite some resistance from the UK and several Central European countries that feared the EU position was softening,¹² backed the principle of selective engagement with Russia. As elaborated by Mogherini, this cooperation might relate to, for example, Iran, the Middle East peace process, Syria, North Korea, mass-migration, counter-terrorism, climate change, and other issues.¹³ This principle has not undermined, however, the general EU policy lines towards Russia, including the key condition of full implementation of the Minsk agreements for any substantial change in the EU’s stance towards Russia or strengthening EU resilience to threats posed by the country, as confirmed by FAC (“five principles policy” towards Russia).¹⁴ Therefore, the compromise that was obtained might be perceived as the lowest common denominator between the various Member State approaches to cooperation with Russia. The adoption of selective engagement enabled Mogherini to maintain frequent contacts with the Russian side and discuss the Libya and Syria dossiers, among others. In addition, the discussion over the EU stance on cooperation with Russia was followed up by launching EU–Russia experts debates within the arc of the EU delegation to Moscow (EUREN network). Even though the experts’ diagnosis showed huge discrepancies in EU–Russia relations,

⁷ H. Niklas (ed.), *Europe’s new political engine. Germany’s role in the EU’s foreign and security policy*, FIAA Report 44, 2016; H. Adomeit, *Sanctions as a bone of contention in the EU–Germany–US–Russia Quadrilateral*, CES Policy Brief, December 2017.

⁸ F. Wesselau, *Mogherini goes to Moscow but is missing in action in Ukraine*, ECFR, 27 April 2017.

⁹ “EU foreign policy chief’s paper on EU–Russia relations—text,” *Reuters*, 15 January 2015.

¹⁰ K. Liik, *The real problem with Mogherini’s Russia paper*, ECFR, 20 January 2015.

¹¹ R. Józwiak, “EU Debate Initiative Sparks Fears Of Concessions To Russia,” *Radio Free Europe*, 9 February 2016.

¹² H. Burchard, “EU pushes for closer Russia cooperation,” *Politico*, 14 March 2016.

¹³ “Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council,” Brussels, 14 March 2016.

¹⁴ “Outcome of the Council meetings, Foreign Affairs,” Council of the European Union, 14 March 2016.

some conclusions laid out in a series of policy briefs suggested a détente policy towards Moscow, such as the need to restore economic relations beyond the sanctions regime or limiting both EU and Russia geopolitical aspirations toward the neighbourhood.¹⁵ However, such opinions have had no impact on the Member State discussions on EU–Russia relations.

So far, Mogherini’s implementation of selective engagement with Russia has not brought improvements in EU–Russia cooperation in relation to Syria, Libya, or other issues.¹⁶ On the contrary, the use of a Russian chemical weapon against former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the UK in March 2018 significantly undermined cooperation with the EU, at least in the short term. Mogherini’s conciliatory rhetoric towards Russia insisting primarily on cooperation had the effect of increasing the uncertainties among some Member States about the EU institutional standpoint. In her statements towards Russia, she highlighted in the first place cooperation on Syria and the Middle East and downplayed potential conflicts and differences (with the exception of the beginning of 2015, when the rhetoric was harsher due to the deterioration of the situation in Donbas).¹⁷ This increased the uncertainties among some Member States about a possible softening of the EU position¹⁸ and boosting cooperation with Russia on economic areas. Although agreeing to the selective engagement principle, Member States did not detail the areas of cooperation and so any such list provokes various Member State interpretations. Furthermore, any of Mogherini’s actions on Russia are viewed through the prism of her position, considered soft, towards the country when she was Italy’s minister of foreign affairs (February 2014–October 2014), which was a major source of criticism of her nomination to the HR post.¹⁹ Last but not least, the geographical imbalance in nominations by Mogherini of high officials to the EEAS to work on the Russia dossiers has not helped her reassure some Member States that she is an honest broker. Even though recruitment to the EEAS should be based on an adequate geographical balance,²⁰ her high-management staff related to Russia is dominated by officials from countries open to various angles of cooperation with Russia (Germany, France, Austria, Portugal) and none from countries highly concerned about Moscow’s foreign policy, i.e., the UK, Baltic States, or Poland (Annex 2).

Mogherini’s general conciliatory approach to Russia notwithstanding, she has facilitated the tightening of cooperation between EU and NATO in pragmatic terms. Due to frequent contacts and good relationship with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, she has managed to intensify this cooperation.²¹ During the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016, a Joint Declaration on the NATO–EU strategic partnership was signed, covering cooperation in such areas as countering hybrid threats, cybersecurity, military interoperability, and fostering resilience of EU partners in the neighbourhood.²² This was followed by enlisting 74 actions in the scope of EU–NATO cooperation, including projects related to the exchange of practices, information-sharing, and operational cooperation, i.e., standardisation in defence.²³ Those steps have increased the Member States’ capacity to act in the event of threats coming from the EU’s southern and eastern neighbourhood and have therefore contributed to political cohesion between EU and NATO.

In terms of shaping EU policy towards the six Eastern Partnership countries, Mogherini’s personal engagement was rather moderate in terms of diplomatic activities as she had deputised Commissioner for ENP and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn. Besides four visits to Ukraine, she paid official visits to South Caucasus countries (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) only in 2015–2016. To compare, in the case of the

¹⁵ “The EU–Russia Expert Network on Foreign Policy—Chronicles,” EEAS delegation to Russia, 23 August 2018.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ C. Wangsson, M. Hellman, “Normative Power Europe Caving In? EU under Pressure of Russian Information Warfare,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 56, no. 5, 2018, supported by own analysis of F. Mogherini’s remarks, speeches and interviews on Russia-related questions in 2014–2018.

¹⁸ A. Rácz, K. Raik, “EU–Russia Relations in the New Putin Era: Not Much Light at the End of the Tunnel,” *EVI*, June 2016.

¹⁹ “Federica Mogherini must overcome Russia criticism,” *Financial Times*, 31 August 2014.

²⁰ See: Art. 6.6 of “Council Decision 2010/42/EU establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service”; OJ 2010 L201/30.

²¹ R. Heath, “Mogherini’s mid-term report card,” *Politico*, 4 December 2017.

²² Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 8 July 2016.

²³ *Third progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by NATO and EU Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017*, 31 May 2018.

southern neighbourhood (10 countries), the intensity of diplomacy was similar, with 16 official visits to various countries (Annex 1). However, the low level of the eastern neighbourhood was visible in Mogherini's highlighted priorities. In her annual forecasts in 2016–2018, only one priority out of 12 each year was related to the east, while four touched upon the southern neighbourhood in 2018, three in 2017, and four in 2016.²⁴ Nevertheless, some of Mogherini's impact was visible in horizontal issues of the ENP, meaning overall strategy and financial instruments set up.

Mogherini has managed to change the EU policy narrative about its goals in the neighbourhood. Together with the EC, she led a process of revision of the ENP. The new strategy adopted in November 2015 insists on stabilisation of the neighbourhood, not democratisation, as the focus was put on economic development, migration, and security.²⁵ While this reflected the policy needs in the southern neighbourhood, in the case of the EaP, this change involved the risk of scaling back the EU's transformative ambitions in this region. However, the strategy has only partially led to revisiting the substance of EU cooperation in the EaP region. The conditionality in relation to performance in reforms has remained a core principle of this policy.²⁶ The EaP roadmap to 2020 presented by the EEAS and the EC in December 2016²⁷ was mainly focusing on sectoral issues, but still, it included a pillar of cooperation on democracy and governance-related issues. Moreover, due to a revision made by Member States in July 2017, the updated roadmap addressed to a greater extent also issues of strategic importance for the region, i.e., strengthening security cooperation and countering hybrid threats (cybersecurity), strategic communication and increased financing for free media as well as implementation of DCFTAs (increased credit lines in the local currency for small and medium-sized enterprises).²⁸ At the end of the day, such a compromise to have an EaP agenda of limited ambitions was rather the result of the huge discrepancies between the Member States over the future development of the EaP.

Second, Mogherini and the EEAS impacted proposals for ENP financial instruments. In the scope of the new EU budget negotiations for the years 2021–2027, the EEAS in cooperation with the EC proposed folding in the separate European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the major source of financial resources for EaP countries. The institutions want to include ENI in a larger external tool covering EU aid globally, the Instrument for Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation (NDICI). While this would definitely increase the EEAS/EC's role in terms of using financial resources to further its goals worldwide (i.e., in a crisis), the consequences on EU collaboration with EaP countries might be negative. The issue is that it risks unfavourable institutional change and the unpredictability of funding, what may reduce neighbouring countries' level of cooperation with the EU.²⁹ The ENI is currently in Member State negotiations and the outcome is unclear.

As an implementation manager, Mogherini had a window of opportunity to impact EU actions to fight Russian propaganda. In March 2015, she was commissioned by the Member States to develop an EU action plan on strategic communication to challenge ongoing Russian disinformation campaigns.³⁰ In this respect, she has, however, undertaken only limited actions. Besides the creation in September 2015 of a small task force called East StratCom responsible for myth-busting Russian disinformation by analysing trends, explaining narratives, and addressing disinformation and developing proactive strategic communications campaigns, the action plan presented in June 2015 did not include any proposals of new EU measures.³¹ It was based on existing EU support to media and EU communication policy in the neighbourhood and it has

²⁴ F. Mogherini, "Twelve things to bring with us in 2018," 1 January 2018, www.federicamogherini.net/twelve-things-to-bring-with-us-2018/?lang=en; www.federicamogherini.net/twelve-things-2017/?lang=en; <http://www.federicamogherini.net/dodici-cose-per-2016/?lang=en>.

²⁵ E. Kaca, "Revision of European Neighbourhood Policy: Half-Hearted Reform," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 111 (843), 2 December 2015.

²⁶ *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit*, Council of the European Union, 24 November 2017.

²⁷ *Eastern Partnership—Focusing on key priorities and deliverables*, EEAS/EC, 15 December 2016.

²⁸ *Eastern Partnership—20 Deliverables for 2020 Focusing on key priorities and tangible results*, EEAS/EC, 9 June 2017.

²⁹ E. Kaca, "End of a Separate European Neighbourhood Instrument? The Risks of the Commission's Proposal," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 89 (1160), 13 July 2018.

³⁰ *European Council Conclusions*, 20 March 2015.

³¹ *EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication*, Ref. Ares(2015)2608242, EEAS, 22 June 2015.

not introduced any significant novelties in those areas. Nevertheless, East StratCom, operating without its own budget and with limited personnel (oscillating between 9 and 14 mainly seconded Member State officials, i.e., personnel from Denmark, Finland, UK, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic in 2015–2018) proved to be a useful tool in increasing knowledge about the Russian actions (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of East StratCom’s Work

Activity	Results
<i>Disinformation Review</i> : a compilation of news articles with key examples of pro-Kremlin disinformation, as well as news and analysis on the topic.	Around 102 Disinformation Review newsletters; 3,800 cases of disinformation messages in 18 different languages (November 2015–April 2018)
<i>The Disinformation Digest</i> : analysis of the East StratCom Task Force on Russian disinformation	Analysis delivered weekly.
East StratCom network, which tracks cases of Russian disinformation	Around 400 members of the network in more than 30 countries report disinformation articles to the task force.
EUvsDisinfo Facebook page	33,500 followers
Website: https://euvsdisinfo.eu/	1,400–4,800 views of the most popular posts in 2018
Twitter: @EUvsDisinfo	36,700 followers

Source: PISM, 28 August 2018.

However, overall, the limited results of Mogherini’s efforts were widely criticised by various stakeholders. In November 2016, the EP, in a resolution on EU strategic communication,³² demanded increased EU action in this field, including more funding for free-media support and reinforcement of East StratCom by increasing its budget and staffing. In March 2017, 65 experts and 21 parliamentarians signed a letter criticising Mogherini for disregarding the challenges posed by Russia’s actions in the EU and calling for more active actions in this respect.³³ Finally, in October 2017, the foreign ministers of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sweden, and the United Kingdom sent a letter to the HR to draw her attention to the need of strengthening the East StratCom Task Force in countering pro-Kremlin disinformation.³⁴ The HR then asked the foreign ministers in November 2017 for an increased budget for the task force, which was granted, with €1.1 million in the period 2018–2020.³⁵ However, in June 2018, the European Council again asked the HR and EC to prepare an action plan (and to deliver it by December 2018) with specific proposals for a coordinated EU response to the challenge of disinformation, including appropriate mandates and sufficient resources for the relevant EEAS Strategic Communication teams.³⁶ In this light, Mogherini might be partially to blame for inaction on EU strategic communication. Indeed, the limited budget of the task force depended primarily on the Member States’ political will and decision to commit funds. However, she showed limited interest in this topic by delivering the minimum action required by the European Council and making this body recall her to work out a new action plan on strategic communication.

³² *Report on EU strategic communication to counteract anti-EU propaganda by third parties*, European Parliament. Resolution, 23 November 2016.

³³ *Open Letter of European security experts to Federica Mogherini: Please start taking the Russian disinformation threat seriously!*, European Values Think-Tank, 20 March 2017.

³⁴ *EU to strengthen strategic communication at Lithuania’s initiative*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania website, 13 November 2017.

³⁵ *Online disinformation and the EU’s response*, EP Research Service, 24 April 2018.

³⁶ *European Council Conclusions*, 28 June 2018.

Southern Neighbourhood

In relation to EU policy in its southern neighbourhood, a major challenge was the refugee crisis, which culminated in 2015, with conflicts in Syria and Libya stimulating the inflow of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. While the involvement of the Member States, and therefore also the EU's, in solving these conflicts was limited, the external dimension of EU migration policy became a high political priority, which gave the HR the chance to act.

During Mogherini's mandate, both in relations with Libya and Syria, the EU's role was mainly limited to humanitarian assistance, while in terms of searching for stabilisation of the political situation in those countries, it relied on UN mediation. In the Libya case, Mogherini was mainly supporting the UN Special Envoy (since June 2017, Ghassan Salamé) in efforts to mediate various factions in the country through participation in frequent meetings of the Libya Quartet—EU, UN, African Union (AU), League of Arab States.³⁷ Even though the UN brokered a deal on a Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) and the formation of the government of National Accord in December 2015 brought relative stabilisation to the country, no long-term solution was obtained and the talks on the revision of the LPA are ongoing. In the case of Syria, the EU is not present in any negotiations currently held. Mogherini has been stating support for UN mediation talks in various formats, i.e., participants in the Astana process, meaning Russia, Iran, and Turkey.

As a policy entrepreneur, Mogherini's role was more visible in the area of external migration. In this respect, she mainly contributed to the establishment and launch in 2015 of the EU CSDP military mission EUNAVFOR MED *Operation Sophia*, aiming to fight migrant-smugglers on the Mediterranean Sea.³⁸ In light of the increasing death toll in the Mediterranean and specifically the accidental drowning of about 900 people in April 2015, Mogherini, supported by Italy, pushed the Member States to agree to the mission, which had been called for by Italy and Greece since 2013.³⁹ She obtained very quickly—just a few days after the accident—a unanimous decision of the Member States to launch the naval military mission. Its further mandate was confirmed by the Council decision of May 2015, which envisioned identifying, capturing, and disposing of smugglers' vessels coming from Libya to the EU (namely to Italy) on the "Southern Central Mediterranean" route, both in international waters and in Libyan territorial waters. While the mission started with surveillance activities in June 2015, to make it fully implement its mandate, a green light from Libya or at least the UN Security Council to agree to mission actions was obligatory. This involved Mogherini's diplomatic efforts to ensure sufficient backing. At the UN level, the EU Member States present in the UN Security Council (UK, France, Lithuania, Spain) and Italy⁴⁰ negotiated the text of the resolution while Mogherini supported the Member States' efforts, for example, by travelling to China to obtain the relevant support.⁴¹ In Libya, however, no legitimate government was in place in 2015 to negotiate the issue and Libya's ambassador to the United Nations in June 2015 rejected access for the mission to its territorial waters.⁴² In this context, the UNSC adopted in October 2015 a resolution authorising *Sophia* to operate only in international waters due to the threat of a Russian and Chinese veto over accessing the territorial waters without Libya's consent.⁴³ When the UN-backed government of National Accord was created in December 2015 and operational in March 2016, Mogherini again tried to get Libya's consent and she held frequent talks with Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, but without success.⁴⁴ Instead, Libya asked the EU to help with training its coast guard.

³⁷ Speech by HR/VP at the High-Level Event on Libya under the UN auspices, New York, 20 September 2017.

³⁸ All the documents cited in this section are available at www.operationsophia.eu/media_category/documents/, 7 September 2018.

³⁹ S. Blockmans, *New Thrust for the CSDP from the Refugee and Migrant Crisis*, CEPS, July 2016.

⁴⁰ "Libya blocks UN action on EU migrant plan," *Euractiv*, 3 June 2015.

⁴¹ "EU seeks UN support to tackle migrant smuggling," *BBC news*, www.bbc.com.

⁴² "Libya blocks...", *op. cit.*

⁴³ *Operation Sophia, the EU's naval mission in the Mediterranean: an impossible challenge*, House of Lords, EU Committee, May 2016.

⁴⁴ *Remarks by HR/VP Federica Mogherini during her visit to the EUNAVFOR Operation Sophia*, EEAS, 15 April 2016.

Table 2. Results of *Operation Sophia*, June 2015–May 2018

The arrest and transfer to the Italian authorities of 143 suspected smugglers and traffickers, destruction of 545 vessels and rescue of 44,251 souls.
Training of some 191 personnel of the Libyan Navy Coast Guard (56 to be trained in 2018)
In terms of executing the arms embargo since June 2016, more than 1,200 hails (calls to a ship), more than 70 friendly approaches, and three vessel inspections conducted, leading to two seizures of prohibited items.

Source: EC Progress Reports, 2018.

The limited geographical mandate of the mission has hampered its effectiveness significantly. The mission seems to have had little deterrence on migration and a very small impact on dismantling the smugglers' business, with mostly low-profile smugglers and smaller boats intercepted (Table 2).⁴⁵ The reason for this was that smugglers adjusted to *Operation Sophia* and operated mainly from the coast and territorial waters of Libya, transferring to or sending people in mainly smaller rubber boats in international waters instead of larger wooden fishing boats. To overcome the criticism of these gaps, other supporting activities have been added to the mission mandate in succession. Mogherini advocated mainly Member State agreement on the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy training performed by EUNAVFOR MED staff,⁴⁶ which was added in 2016. The aim was to enhance the Libyans' capability to disrupt smuggling and trafficking in Libya and to conduct search-and-rescue activities in Libyan territorial waters. In parallel, she supported France and the UK in their push to make *Sophia* execute the arms embargo to limit the risk of internal fighting in Libya.⁴⁷ The countries were also concerned about arms reaching terrorist groups in Libya proclaiming allegiance to ISIL.⁴⁸ This led to the adoption of a relevant UN resolution authorising such action.⁴⁹ Moreover, in 2017–2018, further tasks were added to *Operation Sophia's* mandate, such as surveillance of illegal trafficking of oil exports from Libya and better information-sharing on crime in the Mediterranean. At the end of the day, the supporting tasks have overburdened the mission, bearing in mind that the budget has been cut twice (from €11.82 million initially to €6.7 million in 2017).

In this light, Mogherini was able to prolongate the mission's mandate twice (in 2016 and 2017) to December 2018, an evident diplomatic success given the heavy criticism coming from the UK parliament in 2017. A UK House of Lords report stated that *Sophia's* results made it a failed mission. It suggested that using expensive, military assets for mainly search-and-rescue activities was inadequate and might be substituted by commercial vessels.⁵⁰ Notwithstanding the issue of *Sophia's* effectiveness, Mogherini came off as a good manager in terms of coordinating the mission. The speed of its launch was unprecedented—in operation just two months after receiving the Member States' mandate to act. Moreover, she worked to bridge various stakeholder positions in this respect. For instance, she organised the common foreign and defence ministers council to prepare the mission proposal before a special European Council on the refugee crisis in April 2018.⁵¹ *Sophia* was also the first military operation in which cooperation agreements were signed by Frontex, Europol, Eurojust and the Italian authorities, among others.⁵² Importantly, cooperation and coordination at the tactical and operational levels between EUNAVFOR *Sophia* and NATO *Operation*

⁴⁵ *Operation Sophia: a failed mission*, House of Lords, EU Committee, July 2017; *Operation Sophia, the EU's naval mission in the Mediterranean: an impossible challenge*, House of Lords, EU Committee, May 2016.

⁴⁶ *Remarks by HR/VP Federica Mogherini during her visit to the EUNAVFOR Operation Sophia*, EEAS, 15 April 2016.

⁴⁷ "EU seeks UN backing to enforce Libya arms embargo," *Euractiv*, 6 June 2016.

⁴⁸ J. Barigazzi, "Libya resists EU naval mission in its waters," *Politico*, 18 April 2018.

⁴⁹ Resolution 2292, United Nations Security Council, S/RES/2292 (2016), 14 June 2016.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ S. Blockmans, *op. cit.*

⁵² A. Bakker, D. Zandee, *At the gate: Civil and military protection of Europe's borders*, Clingendael, February 2014.

Sea Guardian have been enhanced through regular information-sharing and logistical support, including refuelling.⁵³

As an implementation manager, Mogherini also marked the HR's influence by shaping EU policy on the refugee crisis in the area of the external dimension of migration, aimed at securing migration routes. While she was side-lined in the negotiations of the EU deal with Turkey, she was commissioned by the Member States in June 2016 to operationalise the "migration compacts" with Senegal, Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria, and Mali⁵⁴ to limit migration flows on the "Central Mediterranean" route (mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa through Libya to Italy). This approach, advocated by Italy, involved increased financial aid (€8 billion for a period of 2016–2020), mainly from the European Development Fund, EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, and the EU External Investment Fund in exchange for cooperation in the migration sphere (i.e., readmissions). In terms of diplomatic activities, Mogherini coordinated mainly other stakeholders' actions,⁵⁵ with 10 high-level visits of EU commissioners and foreign ministers organised. The conclusion of new partnerships was supported by launching close institutional cooperation at various levels. This involved Mogherini's collaboration with the Member State *sherpas* (personal representatives of heads of state) network and leading a project team of Commissioners covering various areas related to the partnership. Moreover, she launched coordination between EU delegations and Member State embassies through the creation of dedicated European migration liaison officers in those countries. Last but not least, to ensure the sustainability of the cooperation, Mogherini visited Senegal, Ethiopia, and Mali in 2016–2017 and kept migration a priority in the scope of the annual ministerial meetings between the EU and G5 Sahel countries.

So far, the results of the concluded partnerships have been mixed.⁵⁶ A success story might be the partnership with Niger, a migrant transit country, which was praised by Mogherini for helping to reduce human smuggling through its territory. However, a side effect of securing this route was that human trafficking was redirected to more dangerous routes through deserts. In other countries' cases, the results were modest and there was no progress on the conclusion of readmission agreements with the EU, a prerequisite for the return of irregular migrants who had made it to the EU.⁵⁷ While transit countries are more eager to cooperate with the EU, countries of origin are not interested in limiting the scale of migration to the EU, since remittances by migrants to European countries significantly exceed the EU financial aid offer.⁵⁸

In addition to establishing the migration partnerships, Mogherini worked to improve the protection of migrants and refugees in Libya by setting up an EU-AU-UN Joint Taskforce in November 2017. Its aim was to accelerate assisted voluntary returns to countries of origin and the resettlement of those in need of international protection. While the task force was relying on available EU funding, it was granted an additional €150 million in February 2018, and in its first year of action resulted in the voluntary return of close to 30,000 migrants from Libya to other countries, among other results.⁵⁹ It seems that the high scale of the returns was achieved thanks to Nigeria's admission policy. With the serious deterioration of Nigerian migrants' situation in Libya in 2017, the Nigerian government became more engaged in securing its citizens' safety and ensuring flights back to its territory.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the task force is an example of Mogherini's success in terms of bridging various organisations within the sphere of migration cooperation.

⁵³ *Third progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by NATO and EU Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017*, Brussels, 31 May 2018.

⁵⁴ *European Council Conclusions*, 28 June 2016.

⁵⁵ *Remarks by the HRVP Federica Mogherini at the press conference on the progress under the Migration Partnership Framework*, EEAS, Brussels, 18 October 2016.

⁵⁶ C. Castillejo, *The EU Migration Framework. Time to rethink?*, German Development Institute, December 2017.

⁵⁷ *Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration*, EC, 16 May 2018; *Fifth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*, EC, 6 September 2017.

⁵⁸ C. Enríquez, P. Lisa, A. Okyay, A. Palm, *Italian and Spanish approaches to external migration management in the Sahel: venues for cooperation and coherence*, Elcano/IAI Working Paper, 20 June 2018.

⁵⁹ *Joint Communiqué by United Nations Secretary-General, African Union Commission Chairperson, European Commission President during Third Trilateral Meeting*, United Nations, 23 September 2018.

⁶⁰ H. Amara, "Nigeria starts large-scale evacuation of its citizens from Libya," *Reuters*, 6 January 2018.

Conclusions

As a policy entrepreneur, Mogherini has not significantly impacted EU affairs in its closest neighbourhood. Member States have been reluctant to cede leadership to her. A case in point is the eastern neighbourhood, where the states preferred to act themselves in relation to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and in shaping policy towards Moscow. She was not perceived by some Member States as an honest broker on Russian issues, which was detrimental to her action in this field. Notwithstanding those limitations, Mogherini has managed to obtain a green light from the Member States to develop cooperation with Russia in certain areas of EU interest, such as in the Syria conflict. However, due mainly to Russia's lack of political will, no progress has been achieved in this respect so far. Moreover, she has changed the rhetoric around the ENP, as its revision in 2015 focused primarily on stabilisation of neighbourhood. This has not affected the substance of Eastern Partnership policy, as its core principles have been kept. The EaP programme till 2020 had limited ambitions due to discrepancies between the Member States over its future development.

In relation to the southern neighbourhood, where the EU has remained reliant on UN mediation in the Libya and Syria conflicts, Mogherini has influenced the external dimension of EU migration policy. She succeeded in making Member States launch and prolong the *Sophia* mission, even though she has not managed to get the mission access to Libyan territorial waters, which hampers its effectiveness. Obviously, the political circumstances were difficult and one should blame the unstable internal situation in Libya for that.

As an implementation manager of tasks assigned to her by the Member States, Mogherini has proved capable of shaping policy substance. This was achieved thanks to strengthening the coordination role of EU external affairs by exploiting the HR's position as vice president of the EC and leading cooperation well with EC officials, foreign ministers, and other stakeholders. For instance, she obtained quick results not only by establishing *Operation Sophia* but also migration partnerships with several Sub-Saharan Africa countries. However, in the eastern neighbourhood, she has not engaged fully in adhering to Member State guidelines at the level of EU institutions, as demonstrated by the example of the limited progress on strategic communication. In this case, the HR's actions evidently hampered the EU's reaction to Russian disinformation. At the end of the day, the Member States cannot accept that their ideas will be thwarted or ignored at the EU level depending on the HR's interests.

In this light, it seems Mogherini proved to be effective primarily in areas of direct Italian interests, such as management of migration on the "Central Mediterranean" route and in addressing Libyan security. Her background has helped her performance in those areas and her preferences for actions would not be a source of criticism if she was equally engaged in the eastern neighbourhood.

A lesson learnt for the future is that next HR should put more effort into the role of honest broker in search of a compromise between the Member States on various dossiers. It would not help the HR to automatically be involved in the Member State negotiations, but at least it would facilitate undertaking diplomatic initiatives in certain areas, such as EU relations with Russia. The HR's actions are visible and therefore they might lead to a change of threat perception in the EU. The next HR should follow Mogherini's path of managing EU external relations by cooperating closely with the EC and other stakeholders. This could contribute to increasing consistency in the highly fragmented area of EU foreign affairs and a toothier HR with leverage over EC-managed financial and economic instruments.

Annex 1. Mogherini's Visits Outside the EU, 01.11.2014–30.09.2018

Region/country	Number (specifics)
Eastern Partnership countries	7 (4 to Ukraine)
ENP southern countries	16 (including 4 to Lebanon, 3 to Jordan, 2 each to Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria)
Russia	1
North America	12 (6 to the U.S.)
Middle East (other than ENP)	9
Turkey	3
Western Balkans	23
Africa	8
Asia	10
Other	6
Total	95

Source: PISM, 30 September 2018. Data collected from the European Commission calendar and Mogherini's official diaries (bilateral official and working visits are included, while visits related to regional forums, regional summits and high-level conferences are omitted).

Annex 2. Nominations of Senior Management in EU–Russia Relations during Federica Mogherini’s Mandate

Position	Name and surname	Country of origin	Period of activity	Previous experience
Managing Director EURCA— Europe and Central Asia (covering Russia)	Thomas Mayr Harting	Austria	November 2015–ongoing	Austrian diplomat (1979–2011); EEAS official (2011–2015)
Deputy Managing Director Europe and Central Asia, Director of Dir EAST–Russia, eastern partnership, Central Asia, Regional cooperation and OSCE	Luc Pierre Devigne	France	June 2016–ongoing	EC official (1996–2016)
Head of Division–Russia	Fernando Andresen Guimaraes	Portugal	September 2015–February 2018	Portuguese diplomat (1992–2003) and EC/EEAS official (2004–2015)
Head of Division–Russia	Jan Bogaerts	Netherlands	March 2018–ongoing	Dutch diplomat (2009–2017)
Chair of COEST and COSCE Working Party Parties	Jutta Edthofer	Austria	March 2018–ongoing	Austrian diplomat (2003–2010), official in EEAS since 2010
Chair of COEST (EU’s Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia)	Jan Bogaerts	Netherlands	September 2017–February 2018	Dutch diplomat (2009–2017)
Chair of COEST	Caroline Vinot	France	2016/2017	French diplomat
Head of EU delegation to Russia	Markus Ederer	Germany	September 2017–ongoing	German diplomat (2014–2017, 1988–2010); EU head of delegation to China and Mongolia (2011–2014)

Source: PISM, 26 August 2018.