Sieps
Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies

Niklas Helwig

Diplomacy Under Pressure

The High Representative and Europe's Changing Foreign Policy Landscape

Today's geopolitical realities demand greater clarity about leadership in EU foreign policy – either through renewed intergovernmental trust in the High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) or by embedding external action within the European Commission. Maintaining the current halfway arrangement will lead to a gradual decline of EU diplomacy.

EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS January 2026:1epa

Table of Contents

Summary

This paper analyses the evolution of the function as EU's chief diplomat, formally the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), from its inception under the Lisbon Treaty to the present day. Conceived to bridge the intergovernmental and supranational dimensions of EU foreign policy, the office has instead been shaped by shifting geopolitical realities, growing institutional competition and increasingly divided member-state politics. Tracing developments under previous incumbents and Kaja Kallas, this paper shows how the HR/VP's role has adapted to successive crises. The study argues that the office's greatest asset is its ability to move between diplomacy, coordination and strategic leadership. Yet, this paper also finds that the effectiveness of the role has diminished as the Commission and high-level member-state foreign policy have gained prominence.

The conclusion outlines two paths for reform: renewed political investment in the European External Action Service or full integration of external action into the Commission to ensure coherence and strategic direction. With both options facing political challenges, a targeted reform coinciding with the start of the next institutional cycle might present a realistic way forward. If member states avoid reform, the HR/VP will lack the resources to politically coordinate future crises between the EU and its member states, leaving the EU exposed to ad hoc and reactive foreign policy.

About the author

Niklas Helwig is a Leading Researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author.

1. Introduction

Two decades after the Lisbon Treaty reforms were conceived, the office of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) stands at a crossroads. Created as the institutional answer to Europe's long-standing quest for a single foreign policy voice, the 'double-hatted' role was designed to unite the intergovernmental and supranational dimensions of EU external action. Supported by the newly founded European External Action Service (EEAS), it symbolised a moment of post-Cold War optimism – an ambition to make the European Union a coherent and influential global actor. Yet the world into which the first HR/VPs stepped has changed significantly. Hard power has returned as a dominant force in international politics, economic interdependence has turned into strategic vulnerability, and the Council's consensus has grown increasingly fragile. As a result, the HR/VP today operates in a far harsher geopolitical and institutional environment, where diplomacy alone is no longer enough to sustain influence.

'Two decades after the Lisbon Treaty reforms were conceived, the office of the High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) stands at a crossroads.'

This paper explores how the HR/VP's role has evolved from Lisbon's optimism to today's geopolitical realism. It argues that the office has remained remarkably adaptable but increasingly constrained – caught between the expanding authority of the European Commission and the assertiveness of member-states. The analysis proceeds in four steps. Section 2 traces the intellectual and institutional foundations of the Lisbon reform and situates the creation of the HR/VP and EEAS within a period of confidence in Europe's global role. It then outlines three structural shifts that have since redefined the post: the return of power politics, the rise of economic statecraft and the politicisation of foreign policy within the EU. Section 3 examines the practice of the office under Catherine Ashton, Federica Mogherini and Josep Borrell, showing how each adapted to changing constraints. Section 4 turns to the early tenure of Kaja Kallas and explores her approach amid renewed international conflict and institutional competition. Section 5 concludes with policy options. It argues that member states face a strategic choice: either reinvest politically in the EEAS and the HR/VP's coordinating role or integrate external action more explicitly within Commission structures to eliminate duplication and clarify leadership.

2. Context: From Lisbon Optimism to Geopolitical Realism

The evolution of the office of the HR/VP mirrors the broader trajectory of the EU's foreign and security policy ambitions – characterised by repeated efforts to enhance the Union's effectiveness as a global actor while facing persistent structural obstacles. The creation of the double-hatted HR/VP post, supported by the newly established EEAS, was the centrepiece of the 2009 Lisbon Treaty reforms. The main idea was to combine the intergovernmental function of the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), a post held by Javier Solana at the time, with the supranational role of the Commissioner for External Relations. In addition, the HR/VP was given the permanent chair of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), while his or her subordinates would chair the CFSP-related working groups – most notably the Political and Security Committee (PSC).

This feat of institutional engineering can only be understood in the political context of the early 2000s, when the reforms were conceived. The decade between the Treaties of Amsterdam (1997) and Lisbon (2007) was marked by optimism about the EU's emerging role as a global stabiliser. During these years, the Union launched its first civilian and military Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, institutionalised foreign policy structures within the Council and Commission, and began to act autonomously in diplomacy. The most prominent example of the latter was the 2003 initiative by Germany, France and the United Kingdom (E3) on a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear programme, which evolved into the EU3+3 nuclear negotiations – under the lead of the HR/VP and also involving the US, China and Russia.

Against this backdrop, the European Convention (2002–2003) advanced ambitious ideas for integrating foreign and security policy, including the merger of Solana's post of High Representative for CFSP into the European Commission. As sovereignty-minded member states such as the United Kingdom, France and Spain resisted such deep integration, the final compromise envisaged the creation of a powerful 'EU foreign minister' equipped with the procedural and administrative means to bridge the divide between the intergovernmental CFSP – controlled by the Council and member states – and the Commission's external economic portfolios and budgetary instruments.

The push for an upgraded role was also shaped by the precedent of Solana's tenure, during which he had raised the EU's international profile through active and visible diplomacy. Yet, Solana himself expressed scepticism about the potential synergies of merging the two roles, arguing instead that the greatest benefit lay in giving the new HR/VP the permanent chair of the FAC, thus replacing the inefficient rotating presidency in foreign affairs (Solana 2002).

It is one of the ironies of the EU's evolution as a foreign policy actor that the launch of the Lisbon Treaty framework in December 2009 coincided with profound structural shifts in its external environment. Just as the institutional architecture designed to strengthen the EU's international role entered into force, the global order began to move away from liberal optimism towards a new era of strategic competition. This transformation would directly affect the EU's capacity – and particularly that of the HR/VP – to act as a meaningful diplomatic player. None of these shifts was immediately visible at the turn of the decade, yet they intensified during the tenure of the first three HR/VPs, gradually redefining the parameters of EU foreign policy.

'... the global order began to move away from liberal optimism towards a new era of strategic competition.'

First, the 2010s saw the return of hard power as a dominant currency in international relations, which in turn narrowed the space for diplomacy and multilateral cooperation. In the early 2000s, the EU had promoted 'effective multilateralism' as a guiding principle of its external action, aspiring to reshape the international order in its own liberal image – through peaceful cooperation, diplomacy and the rule of law (Helwig et al 2025). Yet, warning signs soon appeared that the world was moving in a different direction. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Russia's war in Georgia in 2008 and China's rapid rise after its WTO accession revealed that military coercion and strategic rivalry were again shaping global politics. Successive HR/VPs thus had to navigate an environment in which military power and geopolitical rivalry became more salient, and where the diplomatic and normative instruments traditionally favoured by the EU were often insufficient.

Second, economic statecraft became central to international competition, challenging the EU's traditional faith in interdependence as a force for peace (Gehrke 2022; Balfour and Ülgen 2024). The EU began to re-evaluate its dependence on Russian gas, once seen as a cheap source of energy, after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and drastically reduced imports after the full-scale invasion in 2022. At the same time, economic sanctions emerged as a core foreign-policy instrument – first in 2014 and decisively after 2022 (Helwig et al 2023; Portela 2024). In another example, China's subsidised investments into strategic industries exposed the EU's asymmetric vulnerabilities. For the HR/VP, foreign policy increasingly overlapped with the Commission's economic and regulatory domains, raising new questions about authority and coordination (Olsen 2022; Conzelmann and Vanhoonacker 2025).

Third, the EU's internal political environment became more fragmented. The expansion of the Union to twenty-seven members amplified pre-existing geographic and strategic cleavages: northern and southern priorities diverged over migration; eastern and western capitals differed on Russia and defence; and long-standing tensions persisted between Atlanticist and more autonomy-minded member states (Tocci 2017). Over time, these structural differences became politicised by the rise of nationalist and populist movements within member states, which often framed EU foreign policy through the lens of domestic sovereignty and identity (Destradi et al 2021; Cadier 2024). The consensus-based decision-making model of the CFSP, already fragile, became increasingly vulnerable to obstruction and transactional bargaining. These dynamics eroded the HR/VP's capacity to forge unity in the FAC.

3. The HR/VP in Practice: 2009–2024

Leadership in a shifting geopolitical landscape

Despite the early signs of change, Ashton's tenure unfolded in a context of relative systemic stability. The central challenges she faced – the Iran nuclear negotiations, the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue and the EU's role in the Libya crisis – were high-stakes but still conducted within the rules-based multilateral order (Helwig 2024). In each case, EU and global institutions mattered: the UN Security Council mandate for Libya, the E3+3 format for Iran and structured mediation on Kosovo under the EU banner. Ashton's work epitomised a period in which the EU could rely on the language of diplomacy and institutional legitimacy rather than coercive power. Even if specific crises – most notably the debates surrounding the Libya no-fly zone – exposed the institutional constraints of the HR/VP position (Helwig 2013; Koenig 2014), the broader international climate remained conducive to the HR/VP's diplomatic visibility and effectiveness.

'By the time Federica Mogherini assumed office in 2014, the external environment had shifted dramatically.'

By the time Federica Mogherini assumed office in 2014, the external environment had shifted dramatically. The first Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's growing assertiveness and the conflicts in the EU's southern neighbourhood had transformed the security landscape. The migration crisis made seemingly distant wars and instabilities in the Middle East and North Africa tangible for European publics, politicising foreign policy in new ways. Mogherini's period in office thus marked a transition from diplomacy underpinned by optimism to one defined by contestation and uncertainty (Amadio Viceré 2018). She could no longer remain above politics in the way Ashton had. Her mandate demanded greater strategic initiative and visible political engagement. The twin shocks of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump in the US in 2016 further accelerated this awakening (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 2019). Brexit raised doubts about the Union's cohesion, while Trump's rejection of multilateralism and his criticism of NATO underscored Europe's strategic dependence on the US.

Mogherini responded by crafting a more ambitious narrative of European strategic autonomy. The EU Global Strategy of 2016 reframed the Union's external action around resilience, security and 'principled pragmatism' (Sus 2021). Under her leadership, projects such as Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund were launched, giving the EU new defence policy instruments. At the same time, she sought to preserve the Iran nuclear agreement after the US withdrawal (Alcaro 2018). These efforts symbolised both her commitment to multilateral diplomacy and the limits of Europe's leverage in a shifting world.

With Josep Borrell, the HR/VP office entered what he would later describe as Europe's 'moment of awakening as a geopolitical player' (Borrell 2024). Although his instincts were rooted in cooperative diplomacy, Borrell was quickly forced to operate in a world where

hard power and coercion had returned to international relations. His early tenure was shaped by China's assertiveness, tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the pandemic's exposure of global dependencies. However, it was Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 that defined his mandate (Sus 2024). The war forced the HR/VP to focus more on organising EU military assistance. Borrell pushed member states to adopt unprecedented measures: the use of the European Peace Facility to finance arms deliveries to Ukraine and efforts to gather political support across the EU and globally for the war-torn country. He was instrumental in building consensus around joint EU commitments that would have been unthinkable only a few years earlier.

Borrell also spearheaded the Strategic Compass, which for the first time attempted to set out a vision and concrete goals for EU security and defence. These initiatives gave the HR/VP a central role in orchestrating the EU's response to an existential security challenge (Sus 2024). Yet, as the war dragged on, his confrontational and at times uncoordinated style strained relations with national capitals and the Commission. Questions re-emerged about whether the HR/VP could sustain leadership over the long term in an EU still dominated by intergovernmental decision-making (Hadfield and Demir 2024). His tenure revealed both the potential and the fragility of the EU's geopolitical awakening: the HR/VP could act decisively in a crisis, but only when external shocks created sufficient unity among member states. Once that unity waned, institutional and political constraints quickly reasserted themselves.

The shifting balance between the EEAS and Commission

The fifteen years since the Lisbon Treaty have witnessed a gradual but profound transformation in the institutional environment surrounding the HR/VP. Intended as a bridge between intergovernmental and supranational logics, the post has instead exposed their persistent tension. Over time, the European Commission has become the dominant institutional centre of gravity in external affairs, while the HR/VP's ability to coordinate the Union's foreign policy across institutions has weakened.

'Over time … the HR/VP's ability to coordinate the Union's foreign policy across institutions has weakened.'

For Ashton, the central institutional challenge was to give shape and meaning to the new role itself. She inherited the task of establishing the EEAS almost from scratch, merging staff and cultures from the Council Secretariat, the Commission's former Directorate-General for External Relations (DG RELEX) and the member states' diplomatic services. This process was inevitably contested, with sensitive questions of hierarchy, competence and loyalty (Erkelens and Blockmans 2012; Onestini 2015). Ashton faced resistance not only from member states wary of losing control over foreign policy but also from within the Commission, where President José Manuel Barroso was reluctant to cede influence over external relations. Barroso largely treated the HR/VP's mandate as an encroachment on the Commission's prerogatives. Ashton herself was cautious in asserting her vice-presidential role inside the Commission, focusing instead on her diplomatic portfolios and delegating the EEAS daily management to trusted high-level staff.

By contrast, Mogherini entered office in 2014 with an established albeit not yet smoothly functioning diplomatic service and a somewhat clearer institutional environment. She also used the change of the Commission leadership to exercise a more political and visible form of leadership. Under President Jean-Claude Juncker, the Commission had branded itself as a 'political Commission' (Kassim and Laffan 2019), breaking with its technocratic tradition and giving Commissioners greater discretion to shape policy. Mogherini used her vice-

presidential mandate to its full extent, linking diplomacy more closely with Commission policies. Juncker granted her substantial leeway to represent the Commission externally and to mobilise its internal resources for foreign policy. Mogherini built systematic links between the EEAS and key Commission directorates, particularly those dealing with neighbourhood, development and trade policies. This allowed her to pursue initiatives such as the EU Global Strategy with stronger analytical and bureaucratic backing than her predecessor had enjoyed (Tocci 2016; Barbé and Morillas 2019). She also initiated more regular meetings with external relation–relevant Commissioners to ensure that the Commission's agenda and CFSP initiatives were better aligned. The vice-presidential aspect of her role thus gained substance.

The institutional context changed again under Borrell. When Ursula von der Leyen took office as Commission President in 2019, she proclaimed her ambition to lead a 'geopolitical Commission' (Haroche 2023; Håkansson 2024). This signalled the Commission's intent to play a more assertive political role in external affairs, which raised questions about the HR/VP's coordinating authority. The Commission's influence expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic – when it led vaccine diplomacy – and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when it shaped sanctions and energy policy, leaving the HR/VP in an increasingly constrained position.

Borrell's personal relationship with von der Leyen was notably strained. Unlike Juncker, she saw the HR/VP as one part of her hierarchical team rather than an elevated political actor. Disagreements over communication, crisis management and institutional protocol frequently spilled into the open. Borrell's foreign policy views on key issues such as China or the Middle East clashed with von der Leyen's positions, and the two offices operated largely in parallel during key foreign policy crises. In practice, this meant that the Commission President's cabinet and Secretariat-General, underpinned by new structures such as the Group for External Coordination (EXCO), became the central node for international decision-making, sidelining the HR/VP's coordinating function inside the Commission. Meanwhile, the Commission's external portfolio kept expanding through new directorates such as DG for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) and the external dimensions of green and digital policies, which aligned with the President's political priorities rather than those of the HR/VP.

'Borrell's personal relationship with von der Leyen was notably strained ... she saw the HR/VP as one part of her hierarchical team rather than an elevated political actor.'

Politics within: member states and consensus fatigue

Over the fifteen years since the creation of the HR/VP office, the internal political context in which EU foreign and security policy operates has also changed profoundly. Even as institutional capacity grew, political unity among member states became harder to sustain. The old fault lines in European foreign policy – between Atlanticists and advocates of strategic autonomy and between Eastern and Southern priorities – have never disappeared. They have instead become more visible and politically salient. During the early years of the HR/VP, Ashton could still rely on a relatively cooperative FAC, where consensus, though laborious, was usually attainable. Debates, such as over the EU's position on how to intervene in Libya, revealed differences of approach, but these were primarily about policy and instruments, not about fundamental strategic orientation. Member states still broadly invested political capital in reaching joint solutions and positions. Ashton's political challenge was less about managing overt obstruction and more about forging compromise within the still-evolving post-Lisbon framework.

By the time Mogherini entered office, that consensus had begun to erode. The migration crisis, terrorist attacks in Europe and the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 injected additional urgency into foreign policy debates. Governments operated under growing domestic pressure to deliver quick and visible results in foreign policy. On highly polarising questions – such as relations with Russia or solutions to the migration crisis – the political room for compromise narrowed sharply. Under Mogherini's tenure, the European Commission (2018) advocated for moving towards qualified majority voting (QMV) in foreign policy, but a substantial procedural or even treaty change remained politically unrealistic. Mogherini herself never appeared as a strong advocate on institutional reform and focused on policy content instead. The more pressing problem at the time was not the unanimity rule itself but the frequent failure of member states to implement what they had already agreed.

Under Josep Borrell, the problem became more acute. The rise of populist governments – in particular Hungary – made it harder to forge consensus even on issues where the EU's strategic interests seemed obvious. The outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022 created a moment of unity, but it also revealed the fragility of that unity. While most member states moved quickly to support Ukraine and endorse sanctions against Russia, Hungary – and at times others such as Cyprus or Greece – used their veto powers to delay or dilute decisions. As Müller and Slominski (2025) observe, obstruction has increasingly served as a form of 'soft hostage-taking' in EU foreign policy, with governments using veto threats as leverage rather than as expressions of principled dissent. Hungary, for example, linked its consent to sanctions and aid packages to disputes over frozen EU funding related to rule-of-law concerns, while Cyprus conditioned its approval of Belarus sanctions on concessions in EU–Türkiye relations. This more transactional and performative style of diplomacy within the Council weakened the HR/VP's ability to project coherence externally.

'The outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022 created a moment of unity, but it also revealed the fragility of that unity.'

Borrell sought to reopen the debate on QMV in foreign policy, signalling a notable departure from his predecessors. He argued that the EU's credibility as a geopolitical actor depended on its capacity to act swiftly and collectively (Borrell 2020). The case of military aid to Ukraine under the European Peace Facility demonstrated both the problem and its potential solution: a quick decision was possible only because the militarily non-aligned countries, Austria and Ireland, chose to abstain rather than block consensus. Yet attempts to generalise such flexibility – through constructive abstention or the use of Article 31(3) TEU to introduce QMV in limited areas – met strong resistance. Many member states – not just Hungary – cautioned that relaxing unanimity would erode their sovereignty and increase the influence of larger capitals.

The evolution of internal politics also affected how the HR/VP could engage the European Council. Over time, the European Council itself became more assertive in foreign policy, often pre-empting or revising positions reached in the FAC (Wessels 2015). Leaders' summits increasingly functioned as the real decision-making forum, leaving the HR/VP to manage implementation rather than strategy. At times, the President of the European Council – particularly under Charles Michel (2019–2024) – conducted external diplomacy in parallel, which raised concerns about coherence and competition among the EU's main external representatives, including the HR/VP and the Commission President.

4. Kaja Kallas: The High Representative in the Geopolitical Era

The nomination of former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas was heavily influenced by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the heightened salience of security in European politics. For the first time, the European Council appointed an HR/VP who is both a former head of government and from an Eastern European member state. By selecting a recognised Russia 'hawk' – or, as Kallas herself prefers, a Russia 'realist' (Kallas 2025) – who had consistently advocated during her premiership for robust military support to Ukraine and for stronger deterrence against Russian aggression, EU leaders signalled a clear political intent: to prioritise the Russia challenge and project a more assertive strategic posture.

'Despite this acknowledgement of Europe's geopolitical reality, Kallas's first efforts to translate a more hard-line agenda into policy quickly encountered resistance.'

Despite this acknowledgement of Europe's geopolitical reality, Kallas's first efforts to translate a more hard-line agenda into policy quickly encountered resistance. In March 2025, concerned about the potential withdrawal of US military assistance to Ukraine, she proposed an ambitious €20–40 billion support package to be financed through binding member-state contributions based on GDP. While the goal of reinforcing Ukraine's defence was widely supported, the formula exposed significant disparities among member states – most notably the gap between France's large economic weight and its comparatively modest military assistance (EUnews 2025). In the end, Kallas had to settle for a scaled-down €5 billion scheme to fund the delivery of two million rounds of ammunition, 80 per cent of which had been supplied by September 2025 (European Parliament 2025). The episode illustrated that, even in an era of sharpened geopolitical awareness, EU foreign and security decision-making remains a careful process of consensus-building and interest management rather than a straightforward exercise of top-down authority.

Kallas's political stance was further complicated by the intensifying war in the Middle East. The conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza once again exposed long-standing divisions among member states. Countries such as Germany, Austria and Hungary maintained unwavering support for Israel, while others adopted a critical view of Israel's military campaign and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Together with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Kallas faced criticism for her initially cautious response and for not taking a more explicit position on Israel's actions. It was only by the summer of 2025 that she aligned herself with Commission proposals to introduce targeted sanctions against members of the Israeli government and associated trade measures (Politico 2025a). According to one EEAS diplomat, this perceived bias towards Israel had cost her political capital with member states known to champion the Palestinian cause, such as Spain, who 'might stop sniping at her' if they saw their policy lines reflected at the EU level.[1]

Kallas's diplomacy in the Middle East reflected the narrowing diplomatic space the EU faces more broadly in global affairs. Since President Donald Trump began his second term in the White House in early 2025, the US has pursued a markedly transactional, unilateral and hard-power-driven approach to international politics. In relation to the Gaza war, this 'peace through strength' doctrine translated into unwavering US support for Israel, while Washington simultaneously sought to broker a ceasefire through regional intermediaries, particularly Qatar and Egypt. The EU, by contrast, was largely confined to the sidelines.

[1] Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 30 September 2025.

Within this limited scope, the HR/VP concentrated on negotiating a humanitarian arrangement with Israel to facilitate the flow of aid into Gaza. The effort, however, drew criticism for its modest results (Sourani et al 2025). When the Trump administration announced a ceasefire agreement in October 2025, Kallas pledged that the EU would 'do its part' and, as a first, step re-activated the EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah (EUBAM Rafah) to help monitor the pedestrian crossing between Gaza and Egypt (EEAS 2025). This first move symbolised the Union's intention to re-engage, but it also lay bare the narrow space available to it.

There were other signs that the evolving US approach to global affairs under President Trump has diluted the role of EU institutions and diplomacy. Engagement with Iran has traditionally been high on the HR/VP's agenda, given the office's central role in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Unlike her predecessor Borrell, who refrained from personal participation in the nuclear talks, Kallas took part in two meetings with the E3 foreign ministers and their Iranian counterpart, signalling renewed political commitment to diplomatic engagement.[2] However, since the US attacks on Iranian nuclear sites in June 2025, Iranian willingness to cooperate has sharply declined. The result was the reactivation ('snapback') of sanctions related to Iran's nuclear proliferation activities in late September 2025. These sanctions had previously been suspended following the JCPOA's entry into force ten years earlier. The US strikes were widely portrayed in the media as a serious blow to EU diplomatic efforts, which had been ongoing at the same time, prompting speculation that Washington had used the EU's parallel negotiations as a decoy to lull Tehran into a false sense of security (Politico 2025b). EEAS officials have rejected this interpretation, emphasising that the attacks did not come as a complete surprise and that both the E3 and, by extension, the HR/VP had been informed shortly beforehand.[3] Nevertheless, with the snapback mechanism now formally under the purview of the UN Security Council, the scope for renewed diplomatic progress on the Iranian nuclear file – and, by extension, on one of the HR/VP's legacy portfolios – appears more limited than at any point since the deal was first concluded.

'The continued importance of the EU's economic external relations has strengthened the Commission's hand in foreign policy …'

Institutionally, the influence of the HR/VP and the EEAS has further weakened under the von der Leyen II Commission. The continued importance of the EU's economic external relations has strengthened the Commission's hand in foreign policy, allowing it to expand its reach into domains traditionally associated with the HR/VP's mandate. With the new Commission, two additional Commissioners were given dedicated external relations and security portfolios, each supported by their own DG and thus their own administrative 'armies'.

First, the appointment of Dubravka Šuica as European Commissioner for the Mediterranean was particularly significant. Her portfolio covers partnerships across the southern neighbourhood and the external dimension of migration policy. To support her work, a new DG MENA was created, initially headed by the heavy-weight and former EEAS Secretary-General Stefano Sannino – until he had to step down amidst corruption charges related to the set up of the diplmatic training programme at the College of Europe. It provides the Commission with its own geographic and political expertise in the region. This structure allows the Commission to negotiate agreements directly with partner countries in the Mediterranean without necessarily passing through the EEAS. While Šuica has maintained close cooperation with

[2] Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 24 September 2025.
[3] Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 24 September 2025.

the HR/VP – illustrated by the Pact for the Mediterranean jointly presented in October 2025 (European Commission 2025a) – the balance of power has shifted. Backed by substantial administrative resources and a substantive delegation of tasks from von der Leyen (European Commission 2024c), the new Commissioner operates increasingly as an institutional equal to the HR/VP on the southern portfolio rather than a supporting actor.

The reorganisation also addressed a long-standing demand from several Eastern European member states, who had argued that the Eastern Neighbourhood warranted a distinct institutional focus. Consequently, the former DG NEAR, which had previously covered the entire European neighbourhood, was split into two directorates: DG ENEST (Eastern Neighbourhood and Enlargement) and DG MENA (Middle East and North Africa). While this may improve regional focus, it also raises serious questions about whether such a structure undermines the original Lisbon Treaty rationale for establishing the EEAS – namely, to create single geographical desks and avoid duplication of external relations functions across EU institutions.[4] DG MENA's expertise remains primarily regional, while competences in trade, financial partnerships and migration policy continue to reside with other DGs.[5] The result is an increasingly fragmented institutional landscape in which the boundaries between the HR/VP's diplomatic authority and the Commission's external competences are becoming progressively blurred.

'... the boundaries between the HR/VP's diplomatic authority and the Commission's external competences are becoming progressively blurred.'

A second high-profile innovation in the new Commission was the appointment of Andrius Kubilius as European Commissioner for Defence and Space. Given the heightened salience of security and defence in the current political debate, it was clear that President von der Leyen wanted the Commission to hold a portfolio explicitly labelled 'defence'. Yet, as defence cooperation and operations remain organised under the strictly intergovernmental framework of the CSDP, they continue to fall outside the Commission's formal competence. Kubilius's mandate therefore focuses on the defence-industrial dimension, implemented through DG DEFIS. While the Commission's growing role in strengthening Europe's defence-industrial base is less politically contentious, the title Defence Commissioner remains somewhat misleading, as it implies competences extending into military affairs and risks encroaching upon the prerogatives of the HR/VP (Toral García 2025).

In practice, the coordination between the Commission's defence-industrial initiatives – most prominently the flagship European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) adopted under the Ordinary Legislative Procedure – and the intergovernmental capability development processes, managed largely by the European Defence Agency (EDA), raises unresolved questions about coherence and overlap (Helwig and Iso-Markku 2024). Under Kubilius's lead, the Commission has steadily expanded its role into defence capability facilitation – for example, via the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030. While member states welcome the added financial and regulatory weight that the Commission can mobilise, most view the growing role with unease. They continue to insist that capability planning remain firmly member-state driven and, accordingly, favour a strengthened role for the EDA.

Another area where the Commission is increasingly venturing into tasks previously led by the HR/VP is EU–NATO cooperation. As Hoeffler and Hoffmann (2024) observe, intensifying EU–NATO inter-bureaucratic cooperation has already empowered the European Commission as the EU's main interlocutor with NATO. This trend has now been further

[4] Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 30 September 2025.
[5] Interview with Commission official, Brussels, 15 October 2025.

institutionalised through the appointment of Commissioner Kubilius, explicitly tasked by von der Leyen to liaise with NATO on capability development (European Commission 2025b). At the same time, the CSDP under the authority of the HR/VP has lost visibility and ambition – particularly outside the maritime domain – and has faced operational difficulties, for instance with the termination of the EUTM Mali mission. Despite formal cooperation between the HR/VP and the Defence Commissioner on initiatives such as the 2025 Defence White Paper, the HR/VP has clearly lost profile on security policy at a time when it constitutes one of the Union's most strategically significant portfolios.

The weakening position of the HR/VP is further underlined by the budgetary pressures facing the EEAS. High inflation and rising security costs have squeezed the service's operating resources, forcing staff to reduce non-essential expenditure, including travel. While all EU institutions have been required to implement savings, the EEAS is particularly exposed due to its limited bargaining power in the interinstitutional budget process, the high fixed costs linked to its global presence and a complex, top-heavy management structure. Upon taking office, Kallas was confronted with these constraints and had to introduce cost-saving measures, including the review of staffing levels in several delegations (Politico 2025). EU officials downplayed the immediate impact of these adjustments, noting that core diplomatic functions remain intact. However, there is growing concern that the EEAS will have to brace for far more substantial cuts in the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations.

The position of the HR/VP was also affected by the investigations launched in December 2025 by Belgian authorities into alleged irregularities involving former HR/VP Federica Mogherini and former EEAS Secretary-General Stefano Sannino in the awarding of the EU Diplomatic Academy contract. Although the probe does not concern the EEAS's foreign policy work, it has highlighted internal governance challenges and tarnished the service's reputation. Crucially, the episode adds to perceptions of institutional fragility at a moment when the EEAS is under pressure to defend its role and resources.

'... the Commission has consolidated its position as the central coordinator of the EU's sanctions machinery.'

The position of the HR/VP as one actor among many – rather than the central figure in EU foreign policy – is particularly evident in the Union's Russia sanctions policy of recent years. Since 2022, the European Commission has assumed a leading operational role in sanctions coordination, which reflects the prominence of sectoral measures targeting financial institutions, the energy sector and trade with Russia, as well as the listing of foreign entities. In practice, each relevant Commission service contributes its share to the sanctions package, with DG FISMA coordinating the process together with the Secretariat-General. The EEAS remains responsible mainly for political listings, but the overall package is now drafted and consolidated inside the Commission and approved by the College of Commissioners before being transmitted to the Council working groups for discussion and approval. This represents a marked shift from the pre-2022 practice of bottom-up deliberation in the Council. Member states now engage directly and continuously with the Commission – often through non-papers – rather than relying exclusively on CFSP-based coordination through the Council and EEAS.[6] While the Russia sanctions framework remains exceptional due to its unprecedented sectoral scope, it nevertheless illustrates how the HR/VP's role has narrowed to political and diplomatic aspects, while the Commission has consolidated its position as the central coordinator of the EU's sanctions machinery.

[6] Interview with Commission official, Brussels, 15 October 2025.

Like every HR/VP before her, Kaja Kallas has brought her own style to chairing meetings of the FAC. Whereas Josep Borrell had been eager to invest considerable time in discussions with foreign ministers and to tackle even the most contentious issues head-on, Kallas has adopted a more pragmatic and results-oriented approach, favouring focused agendas and shorter exchanges.[7] The most significant institutional change in the Council concerns the declining relevance of the PSC. Once regarded as the linchpin of CFSP (Juncos and Reynolds 2007), the PSC has gradually lost influence in recent years. This erosion is largely attributable to two factors: the growing centrality of the European Council in foreign policy decision-making – the PSC is not systematically involved in drafting European Council conclusions – and the increasing tendency of member states to channel key foreign policy debates to COREPER II, where they retain the rotating Presidency and thus greater procedural control (Maurer and Wright 2021). As a consequence, the arrangement established by the Lisbon Treaty – whereby the HR/VP and the EEAS chair the FAC and the PSC to ensure continuity and coherence – has paradoxically contributed to the weakening of these bodies' overall role within the EU's foreign policy system (Juncos and Pomorska 2024). Member states have progressively shifted their attention and influence towards the European Council and COREPER II, reducing the institutional space in which the HR/VP can exercise political leadership.

'Kallas and Costa have yet to prove that they can work together on an ambitious Ukraine policy …'

With the nomination of the new EU leadership, high expectations were attached to the prospect that the Commission President, the HR/VP and the President of the European Council would work more closely together. Relations were often strained under the previous trio of Ursula von der Leyen, Josep Borrell and Charles Michel. In particular, Michel frequently pursued his own foreign policy initiatives through a parallel diplomatic channel, bypassing EEAS and at times clashing openly with the Commission President. The arrival of European Council President António Costa marks a sharp departure from this dynamic. He has adopted a more reserved and collegial approach, with a reduced foreign policy profile. Costa has undertaken a few targeted trips to Africa and South America, and he represented the EU at President Trump's Peace Summit in Egypt, in some ways complementing Kallas, who has been less present in the 'Global South'. Yet, while Costa could, in principle, serve as a natural institutional ally for the HR/VP in forging a coherent line among member states, his cautious leadership style has so far limited his willingness to press capitals towards stronger, more unified positions.[8] Kallas and Costa have yet to prove that they can work together on an ambitious Ukraine policy, for example, where political, military and economic support – and the prospect of EU membership – intersect, giving the European Council a central role.

5. A 'Swiss Army Knife' for EU Foreign Policy

Since the first double-hatted HR/VP took office in December 2009, the structural conditions for effective leadership in EU foreign policy have steadily deteriorated. Heightened geopolitical tensions, the growing prominence of the European Commission's economic foreign policy portfolios and increasingly contested member state politics have all constrained the HR/VP's ability to exercise authority. Diplomacy, the traditional core of the HR/VP's portfolio, has lost prominence in an era defined by economic statecraft and power competition. Simultaneously, the Commission has evolved into a president-centred institution, further eroding the HR/VP's internal standing, while member states have gradually disengaged from supporting the EEAS, as reflected in fewer high-profile

[7] Interview with EEAS official, Brussels, 30 September 2025.
[8] Interview with Commission official, Brussels, 1 October 2025.

appointments to the EEAS diplomatic staff and declining political attention. A system conceived in a moment of integrationist optimism has thus collided with the realities of power politics.

Yet not all hope is lost for the office. The HR/VP has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for institutional adaptation. The flexibility embedded in the Treaty allowed successive incumbents to interpret the role in light of prevailing circumstances (Helwig 2024): Catherine Ashton focused on operational diplomacy and institution-building; Federica Mogherini strengthened the policy and strategic dimension; Josep Borrell shifted towards hard security and crisis response. This adaptability remains the office's greatest strength – the HR/VP functions as a 'Swiss army knife' for EU foreign policy, capable of adjusting between diplomacy, coordination and strategic leadership as needed.

The vice-presidential role within the Commission is especially significant given the growing centrality of the Commission in external action. A Commission President who views the HR/VP as complementary rather than competitive could unlock the institutional potential of the double-hatted structure. While the original Lisbon ambition of coordinating the full spectrum of external action has become increasingly unrealistic, the HR/VP still retains an important bridging function – that is, ensuring that member-state priorities are reflected in Commission planning and using insights into the Commission's external instruments to better prepare CFSP initiatives and debates in the FAC.

The future of the EEAS: 'muddling through' no longer an option

The more fundamental question concerns the future of the EEAS. From its inception, the service contained a structural flaw: it was deliberately designed as institutionally separate from the Commission to reassure member states wary of supranational overreach. However, this design has left the EEAS caught between intergovernmental and supranational logics. Despite successes in enhancing EU's global presence (Bicchi and Schade 2022), member states have never fully trusted the service to steer the political agenda in Brussels and gradually withdrew support. The Commission developed its own external structures that have diminished the EEAS's relevance. As a result, the service today occupies an ambiguous position – squeezed between an assertive Commission and increasingly transactional member states.

'This is precisely where the HR/VP and the EEAS should matter: as the institutional bridge capable of connecting the political, diplomatic and economic dimensions of EU external action.'

At first sight, the EU's current 'muddling through' approach may appear to come with few downsides. Despite growing institutional fragmentation and an increasingly assertive Commission, the Union has – through the Commission's economic instruments and ad-hoc initiatives by national leaders – managed to steer the course in transatlantic relations and maintain broad consensus on Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Yet the more the EU relies on its economic, financial and regulatory tools in the growing geopolitical competition, the more vital it becomes to ensure a coherent link between defence and foreign-policy planning on the one hand and Commission-driven instruments on the other. This is precisely where the HR/VP and the EEAS should matter: as the institutional bridge capable of connecting the political, diplomatic and economic dimensions of EU external action.

If the EU wishes to increase the coherence of its foreign policy – and to justify the considerable resources allocated to it – member states must act. They face **two broad options**, although both are hard to pursue in the present political environment**:**

First, **member states could reinvest politically in the EEAS** and treat it as the institutional ally in Brussels that it was originally intended to be. This would require strengthening its resources, improving career incentives to attract high-calibre national diplomats and entrusting the HR/VP and the permanent EEAS presidency with a more ambitious agenda-setting role.

Alternatively, **member states could embrace institutional integration** by revisiting the 2010 EEAS decision and incorporating the service into the Commission's structures. Such a reform would end duplication between the EEAS and Commission services, enhance coordination in external action and reinforce the HR/VP's position within the institutional hierarchy. While this would mean accepting a more supranational character for EU foreign policy, member states are already operating within that logic in domains such as sanctions, trade and defence industry policy.

Both reform paths are politically difficult for member states. Strengthening the EEAS is hard to prioritise at a time when national governments are consolidating their budgets and their own diplomatic services face increasing demands. Conversely, fully integrating the CFSP into the Commission – an idea already contentious when the Lisbon treaty was negotiated – is even less plausible today amid a more polarised political environment and a renewed emphasis on national sovereignty.

A more realistic way forward may be a targeted reform of the EEAS that clearly defines its core diplomatic and political functions and clarifies its relationship with the Commission early in the next institutional cycle. Such an effort would be particularly important for small and medium-sized member states – including Sweden and the Nordic countries – which have fewer administrative resources to shape a Commission-led geopolitical EU and stand to benefit most from the added value of collective diplomacy.

'The EU's geopolitical environment demands a foreign policy machinery that is institutionally empowered and coherent.'

Maintaining the current halfway arrangement – a fragmented system in which the HR/VP's authority depends on personal diplomacy and ad hoc coordination – is unsustainable and will lead to the slow decline of the EEAS. The EU's geopolitical environment demands a foreign policy machinery that is institutionally empowered and coherent. Whether through renewed intergovernmental trust or deeper integration, the Union must clarify the centre of gravity of its external action if the office of the HR/VP is to remain relevant in the years ahead.

References

Aggestam, L. & Hyde-Price, A. (2019) 'Double trouble: Trump, transatlantic relations and European strategic autonomy', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57, pp. 114–127, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12948

Alcaro, R. (2018) *Europe and Iran's Nuclear Crisis: Lead Groups and EU Foreign Policy-Making*. Cham: Springer.

Amadio Viceré, M.G.A. (2018) *High Representative and EU Foreign Policy Integration*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Balfour, R. & Ülgen, S. (eds) (2024) *Geopolitics and Economic Statecraft in the European Union*. Brussels: Carnegie Europe, 19 November. Available at: https://carnegieeurope.eu (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Barbé, E. & Morillas, P. (2019) 'The EU global strategy: the dynamics of a more politicized and politically integrated foreign policy', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(6), pp. 753–770, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1588227

Bicchi, F. and Schade, D. (2022) 'Whither European diplomacy? Long-term trends and the impact of the Lisbon Treaty', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 57(1), pp. 3–24, https://doi.org/10.1177/00108367211000791

Borrell, J. (2020) 'When member states are divided, how do we ensure Europe is able to act?', *EEAS HRVP's Blog*, 2 October. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/when-member-states-are-divided-how-do-we-ensure-europe-able-act-0_en (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Borrell, J. (2024) 'Europe rediscovering harshness: speech by High Representative Josep Borrell at Georgetown University', *European External Action Service*, 14 November. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/us-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell-georgetown-university-%E2%80%9Ceurope-rediscovering-harshness_en (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Cadier, D. (2024) 'Foreign Policy as the Continuation of Domestic Politics by Other Means: Pathways and patterns of populist politicization', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 20(1). https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orad035

Conzelmann, T. & Vanhoonacker, S. (2025) 'The European Union in a geo-economic world: towards a new inter- institutional balance?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13774

Destradi, S., Cadier, D. & Plagemann, J. (2021) 'Populism and foreign policy: a research agenda (Introduction)', *Comparative European Politics*, 19, pp. 663–682, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-021-00255-4

Erkelens, L. & Blockmans, S. (2012) 'Setting up the European External Action Service: an act of institutional balance', *European Constitutional Law Review*, 8(2), pp. 246–279, doi:10.1017/S1574019612000168

EUnews (2025) 'Member states bring Kallas back to earth: Ukraine plan slashed from €40bn to €5bn', 20 March. Available at: https://www.eunews.it/en/2025/03/20/member-states-bring-kallas-back-to-earth-ukraine-plan-slashed-from-40-billion-to-5-billion/ (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

European Commission (2018) *Communication from the Commission to the European Council, the European Parliament and the Council: a stronger global actor: a more efficient decision-making for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy*, COM(2018) 647 final, Brussels, 12 September. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0647 (Accessed: 13 November 2025).

European Commission (2025b) *Mission letter to Commissioner Kubilius*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/1f8ec030-d018-41a2-9759-c694d4d56d6c_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20KUBILIUS.pdf (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

European Commission (2025c) *Mission letter to Commissioner Şuica*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/24039223-f92e-40a0-a440-a27d9715051a_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20%C5%A0uica.pdf (Accessed: 14 November 2025).

European Commission (2025a) *Joint Communication on the Pact for the Mediterranean*. Available at: https://north-africa-middle-east-gulf.ec.europa.eu/document/download/11646283-cc32-49ae-9639-744d0d6d7da8_en?filename=Joint%20communication%20on%20the%20Pact%20for%20the%20Mediterranean.pdf (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

European External Action Service (2025) 'Press remarks by the High Representative at the International Humanitarian Conference for the Civilian Population in Gaza'. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/chile/international-humanitarian-conference-civilian-population-gaza-press-remarks-high-representative_en (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

European Parliament (2025) *Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas on behalf of the European Commission* (Parliamentary Question E-002495/2025 (ASW)), 6 August. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2025-002495-ASW_EN.html (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Gehrke, T. (2022) 'EU open strategic autonomy and the trappings of geoeconomics', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 27(Special Issue), pp. 61–78, https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2022012

Hadfield, A. & Demir, M. (2024) 'More or less Borrell? A critical analysis of Josep Borrell as the European Union's High Representative', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 62, pp. 64–75, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13670

Håkansson, C. (2024) 'The Ukraine war and the emergence of the European Commission as a geopolitical actor', *Journal of European Integration*, 46(1), pp. 25–45, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2239998

Haroche, P. (2023) 'A "geopolitical commission": supranationalism meets global power competition', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 61(4), pp. 970–987, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13440

Helwig, N. (2013) 'EU foreign policy and the High Representative's capability–expectations gap: a question of political will', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 18(2), pp. 235–254, https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2013015

Helwig, N. (2024) *The EU High Representative: Foreign Policy Leadership in a Changing World*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Helwig, N. & Iso-Markku, T. (2024) 'The EU's different modes of defense governance: more European defense, but how?', *EconPol Forum*, 25(4), pp. 15–21.

Helwig, N., Jokela, J. & Portela, C. (2020) 'Sharpening EU sanctions policy: challenges and responses in a geopolitical era', *Finnish Institute of International Affairs Report 63*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

Helwig, N., Sinkkonen, V. & Siddi, M. (2025) 'The European Union's evolving vision for the international order', in Sinkkonen, V., Laine, V. & Puranen, M. (eds.) *Competing Visions for International Order*. London: Routledge, pp. 55–65.

Henökl, T.E. (2014) 'The European External Action Service: torn apart between several principals or acting as a smart "double-agent"?', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 10(4), pp. 381–401, https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v10i4.605

Hoeffler, C. & Hofmann, S.C. (2024) 'Organizational overlap and bureaucratic actors: how EU–NATO relations empower the European Commission', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 62(5), pp. 1260–1277, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13571

Juncos, A. & Reynolds, C. (2007) 'The Political and Security Committee: governing in the shadow', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 12(2), pp. 127–147, https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2007014

Juncos, A.E. & Pomorska, K. (2024) 'The role of EEAS chairs in council negotiations on foreign and security policy post-Lisbon', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 62(1), pp. 3–20, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13471

Kallas, K. (2025) 'Defence: speech by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas at the Annual Conference on European Defence', *European External Action Service*. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/defence-speech-high-representativevice-president-kaja-kallas-annual-conference-european-defence_en (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Kassim, H. & Laffan, B. (2019) 'The Juncker presidency: the political commission in practice', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57, pp. 49–61, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12941

Koenig, N. (2014) 'Between conflict management and role conflict: the EU in the Libyan crisis', *European Security*, 23(3), pp. 250–269, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2013.875532

Maurer, H. & Wright, N. (2021) 'Still governing in the shadows? Member states and the Political and Security Committee in the post-Lisbon EU foreign policy architecture', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(4), pp. 856–872, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13134

Müller, P. & Slominski, P. (2025) 'The soft hostage-taking of EU foreign policy: Hungary's rule-of-law conflict with the EU and Russia's war against Ukraine', *Journal of European Public Policy*, pp. 1–27. doi: 10.1080/13501763.2025.2453033.

Olsen, K.B. (2022) 'Diplomatic realisation of the EU's "geoeconomic pivot"', *Politics & Governance*, 10(1), pp. 5–15, https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i1.4739

Onestini, C. (2015) 'A hybrid service: organising efficient EU foreign policy', in Batora, J. & Spence, D. (eds.) *The European External Action Service: European Diplomacy Post-Westphalia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 65–86.

Politico (2025a) 'Israel undermining decades of humanitarian principles, EU's Kaja Kallas says', *Politico*, 18 June. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-undermining-decades-humanitarian-principles-eu-kaja-kallas-says/ (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Politico (2025b) '"We aren't worthless": Europe confronts its irrelevance in the Middle East as Israel vs. Iran war rages', *Politico*, 10 August. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/we-arent-worthless-europe-irrelevance-middle-east-israel-iran/ (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Politico (2025c) 'EU diplomacy set to downsize staff and budgets under Kaja Kallas', *Politico*, 20 May. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-diplomacy-downsize-staff-budgets-kaja-kallas/ (Accessed: 14. November 2025).

Portela, C. (2024) 'Sanctions and the geopolitical commission: the war over Ukraine and the transformation of EU governance', *European Papers – A Journal on Law and Integration*, 2023(3), pp. 1125–1130.

Solana, J. (2002) *Address by Javier Solana to the External Action Working Group of the European Convention*, Brussels, 15 October. Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_by_javier_solana_to_the_external_action_working_group_of_the_european_convention_brussels_15_october_2002-en-7231e991-2f8d-41e9-977a-d32e714c3be9.html (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Sourani, R., Younis, I., Jabarin, S. & Shaqqura, H. (2025) 'A month on, Kallas' meaningless Gaza "deal" has failed', *EUobserver*, 14 August. Available at: https://euobserver.com/eu-and-the-world/ar7d6cf225 (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Sus, M. (2021) 'Supranational entrepreneurs: the High Representative and the EU Global Strategy', *International Affairs*, 97(3), pp. 823–840, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab037

Sus, M. (2024) 'Exploring the dynamics of policy change in EU security and defence: policy entrepreneurs behind the Strategic Compass', *West European Politics*, 47(4), pp. 942–966, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2232704

Tocci, N. (2016) 'The making of the EU global strategy', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 37(3), pp. 461–472, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1232559

Tocci, N. (2017) *Framing the EU Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Toral García, J. (2025) 'The High Representative of the Union (HR/VP) and the New Commissioner for Defence and Space: necessary cooperation for the future of the European Defence Union', *Finabel*. Available at: https://finabel.org/the-high-representative-of-the-union-hr-vp-and-the-new-commissioner-for-defence-and-space-necessary-cooperation-for-the-future-of-the-european-defence-union/ (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

Wessels, W. (2015) *The European Council*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.