

## **A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO UPGRADE EU FOREIGN POLICY**

**STEFAN LEHNE**

As the financial crisis recedes and the European Union (EU) regains a measure of internal stability, pressure in Europe's neighborhood is on the rise. The Ukraine crisis and turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa have elevated foreign policy to the top of the EU's agenda. Whether the EU can make its external action more effective will depend in large part on institutional decisions made in 2014—the selection of a new leadership team and the reorganization of the European Commission.

### **Mismatched Tools and Tasks**

- To resist Russian pressure on Eastern European countries and support them in building closer relationships with Europe, the EU needs to create a more coherent foreign policy and fully mobilize its resources.
- Equally serious risks to EU security will likely arise in its Southern neighborhood, where mass poverty, weak state structures, and religious radicalism threaten stability. The EU is at present unequipped to address these challenges.
- The strengthening of the high representative and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) provided by the Lisbon Treaty have brought improvements but have not turned the EU into a credible international actor.
- It is still not possible to pull together the powerful instruments of the European Commission regarding trade, aid, and enlargement and the EU's foreign policy tools in support of effective external action.
- While a 2013 review of the EEAS offered a chance to address design flaws, it essentially failed to improve the situation. But a new opportunity is opening up.
- Following European Parliament elections in mid-2014, a new high representative, president of the European Commission, and president of the European Council will be appointed and the commission will be reconstituted.

### **Steps to a More Coherent and Comprehensive Foreign Policy**

**Get the right people in the top jobs.** The EU needs real heavyweights who are capable of leading and supporting an ambitious foreign policy.

**Reorganize the European Commission into policy clusters.** Portfolios would be grouped in topically related clusters centered on key commission tasks. One commission vice president would head each cluster. This would allow the high representative to better coordinate matters of external relations and foreign policy.

**Appoint deputies to the high representative.** The council should mandate that two or three of the commissioners working on enlargement, the neighborhood, or development act as deputies for the high representative's political tasks.

**Undertake efforts to prepare such reforms rapidly.** Consultations need to include member states and the European Parliament.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Stefan Lehne is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, where he researches the post-Lisbon Treaty development of the European Union's foreign policy with a specific focus on relations between the EU and member states.*

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#### **CONTACT**

Christine Lynch  
Senior Communications Manager  
+32 2 209 29 93  
clynch@ceip.org

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