

Foreign Affairs

High expectations ahead



MAKING EUROPE PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN THE WORLD

by Gabriele Albertini, chair

There is no doubt that European politics has to cope with a very difficult and complex foreign affairs agenda. The European identity is defined by what Europeans do all over the world, and the decisions they make regarding territorial tensions, conflicts and ongoing evolutions.

I believe that the first subject we should deal with, in a serious and courageous manner, is Afghanistan. The outcome of the election forces us to adopt a renewed strategy, indicating that political and social balance is still a long way from being achieved. The September 2009 attack on Italian military forces in Afghanistan provides further proof of this.

Moreover, the Middle East still represents an emergency for our committee. The region, considered a bridge and contact point with Asian culture, is significant for Europe. Much attention must be paid to the successful evolution of the ongoing peace process.

Looking a bit further afield to Iran, the post-electoral confirmation of the fundamentalist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of the Islamic republic and the public demonstrations that followed in July 2009 are a cause for concern as they reveal a lack of openness towards any democratic development.

We really hope that after the expected ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament and the EU institutional system as a whole can have an enhanced role when deciding upon the bloc's external policies.

Although we have ideas and principles, we don't always dispose of strong and effective tools to implement them. This sometimes presents an obstacle to portraying Europe's identity and credibility among international actors. This is surely the underlying issue at stake.

The escalating war in Afghanistan, the threat of nuclear proliferation, the challenge posed by climate change and the quest for energy security are just a few of the challenges the EU's foreign and security policy will have to address in the next five years.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy are among the few policy areas in which citizens would like to see more, not less EU cooperation and integration.

The European Parliament's direct policy tools are mostly limited to non-legally binding reports, opinions and resolutions. However, when combined with the *de facto* right to reject newly-nominated commissioners and – even more importantly – control a significant part of the foreign policy budget, the Parliament is in a good position to actively help shape the Union's foreign policy.

In addition, the chamber has established itself as a respected global authority in the field of human rights and democratisation, for example by awarding the annual Sakharov Prize and conducting electoral observer missions.

The implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon, if it comes into force, will most likely take up much of the agenda of the European institutions, including the European Parliament, in the years to come. New provisions on the High Representative, the new European Diplomatic Service, enhanced cooperation, a single legal personality and structured corporation and new competences for energy security and climate change will reshape European foreign policy.

One of the most important tasks for the foreign affairs committee will be the confirmation of the High Representative, assuming that the Lisbon Treaty enters into force. The Parliament is likely to make her or she agree to a number of demands before giving its approval. Some of these have been voiced in the past:

- The adoption of an inter-institutional agreement between the Parliament and the Council defining their working relations in the field of external action, including regularising information procedures and sharing confidential information;
- The introduction of an ad hoc hearing procedure with the High Representative;
- Regular meetings between the Council's political and security committee with chairpersons of the relevant Parliament committee and subcommittees on emerging crises or events concerning international security;
- Reinforcement of collaboration with the existing multilateral parliamentary assemblies and committee assemblies.

Around half of the committee's members are new. The chair, Gabriele Albertini (EPP, Italy), has not been a member of this committee before. This is likely to enhance the influence of the political group coordinators who together set the agenda. Other veteran MEPs will also take the opportunity to "guide" their new colleagues as far as procedure and content are concerned.

“More EU cooperation in sight”

Names to look out for are former Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering (EPP, Germany), Socialist group veteran Hannes Swoboda (S&D, Austria), Heidi Hautala (Greens, Finland), chair of the sub-committee on human rights and a former group leader, Arnaud Danjean (EPP, France), chair of the sub-committee on security and defence, former committee chair Elmar Brok, (EPP, Germany), former Polish European Affairs Minister Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (EPP, Poland), Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE, Germany), Charles Tannock (ECR, UK), Libor Roucek (S&D, Czech Republic), Jose Salafranca (EPP, Spain) and Ernst Strasser (EPP, Austria).

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