

One of the major changes brought along by the Lisbon Treaty was the establishment of an institutionalised, 'triple-hatted' High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) that will both lead the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC, which is separated from the former General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC)) and take place in the European Commission as Vice-President and Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. An integral part in the implementation is that the HR shall establish an External Action Service (EEAS) for the European Union ([article 27 TEU](#)), comprising both national and European staff, and aiming at increasing and streamlining a European voice outside the EU's borders. March will be important in bringing some clarity to this development.

- **WHY?**

The European Union has long been criticised for punching below its weight on the international scene. Inter alia, it has frequently been called "*an economic giant but a political dwarf*" and people have been confused with its structure of consensus-based multi-level governance where blurred centers of power and institutional deliberation has led to a perceived lack of a *general phone number* to use when wanting to reach the EU.

The Lisbon Treaty goes a long way towards addressing this. Through the establishment of a HR connected to both the European Commission and the European Council and empowered with an own corps of diplomats, the EU is now hoping to address this deficit in Foreign Affairs. These changes were already envisaged in the first draft of the European Constitution of 2004, but because of the difficulties in ratification, the HR could not start her work before 1 December 2009.

- **THE LATEST STATE OF PLAY**

With the HR in office for a mere three months and the new Commission appointed only in early 2010, the work is now set to begin. The first step is naturally to get the basics in order; which in this context means the establishment of the EEAS. Given the ordinary turf wars between the three major EU institutions (Commission-Council-Parliament), this will not be an easy task.

However, anyone interested in this development should pay extra attention to March's events in the European Union. [As was reported on the ELDR website already on Wednesday](#), HR Catherine Ashton participated in an exchange of views together with MEPs in the Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg.

The next step is now expected at the end of March, when she is set to unveil her choice of strategy for implementation of this new body created by the Lisbon Treaty, which aims at bolstering the Union's coherency and efficiency in Foreign Affairs. This is a very important step, as it will set the fundamentals for the EU's future foreign policy and thereby ability to act.



- **WHAT DO THE LIBERALS WANT?**

At the annual Spring Council of the ELDR Party in Rome last weekend (12 March), one of the major items on the political agenda was precisely the EEAS through a resolution stating ELDR's position on it.

In the discussions, it was stressed that the potential importance of achieving an efficient EU body for external action could not be underestimated. Furthermore; rightly constructed, such an establishment should serve liberals' interests well in terms of i.a. deepening the internal dialogue on foreign policy matters between EU Member States and promoting an extended process of EU integration with a much clearer accountability granted by the HR.

**The adopted urgency resolution** calls for a swift implementation of the EEAS that does not allow for Member States to pursue excessive self-interest and prejudice and thereby further contribute to the EU speaking with twenty-seven single but weaker voices instead of a single, strong voice. With a collective population of nearly 500 million citizens that almost constitute the double compared to the US and more than three times that of Russia, the EU needs to start making use of its relative strength, especially in its external relations.

European Liberals and Democrats are therefore prepared to give an initial, unequivocal support HR Catherine Ashton in her difficult strive and call on her to be brave and quickly assemble the EEAS along the lines of what is most important for the EU. The window of opportunity offered by the provisions in the Lisbon Treaty is too good to squander.

Getting the foreign policy right is important for liberals. Therefore, do remain posted to the ELDR website for further in-depth analysis as we see more progress on this issue.