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MOGHERINI AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: three pressing engagements

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It may be a cliché, but we expect Southern European politicians to shift the EU's focus of interest towards the south and, in foreign policy terms, that means reinforcing its Mediterranean policy. It will not be only priority for the new High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini. The crisis in Ukraine, the tension with Russia, and transatlantic relations (shaped over the next few years by the TTIP negotiations), will take up a lot of her time. But the multiple crises in North Africa and the Middle East and their proximity to continental Europe must add the region to the EU's list of foreign policy priorities.

The Mediterranean is also an area in which Mogherini can show her desire to make her other role, that of the vice-president of the European Commission, meaningful. This may be achieved by systematically coordinating the Commissioners for trade, neighbourhood policy, international cooperation and humanitarian aid, while working closely with the Commissioners responsible for areas such as energy and immigration. This work should take the form of rapid response to the various crises that arise during her mandate as well as the design of long-term strategies and policies. Before the end of 2014, Mogherini has three opportunities to make the Mediterranean once more the scene of a more ambitious, more strategic European foreign policy.

The first is to demonstrate the European will to contribute to the consolidation of the Tunisian transition. This process has become the last hope, with Tunisia an exception for its normality, inclusion and political alternation in relation to the rest of the countries in the so-called "Arab Spring". Having approved a consensus constitution and held legislative elections in a normal setting on the 26th of October, to be followed by presidential elections on the 23rd of November, Tunisia will need European backing in order to help deal with the worrying economic situation and worsening insecurity problems. As Francis Ghilès has said, this means matching discourses and resources. Just as the success of the Tunisian transition should be a strategic objective for the EU, other actors (from authoritarian regimes to terrorist groups) may be interested in the complete opposite. Mogherini must not miss the opportunity to stand alongside the Tunisian authorities at this decisive moment and work with the other Commissioners and member states to

effectively respond to the needs of the country. The Tunisians, just like the rest of the actors in the region, should be able to confirm that committing to inclusion and dialogue will bear fruit.

The second opportunity means bringing together willing parties with the objective of avoiding the total collapse of Libya. The climate of violence, the political and institutional implosion and the economic conditions in the country have deteriorated in a worrying way in recent months. Although the responsibility for all this (and also for turning the situation around) is, above all, in the hands of the Libyans themselves, the actions of neighbour states and the other international actors with influence and interests in the country may tip the balance, offering incentives either for agreement or for confrontation. As **Frederic Wehrey and Wolfram Lacher** warn, the temptation (or the intention) of many actors may be to plump for one side or the other. By end of the year the second meeting of the neighbour countries of Libya should have taken place in **Madrid**. The EU cannot hope for these countries to resolve the Libyan conflict but it must listen to their legitimate worries (not forgetting that the EU is also one of Libya's neighbours) and put pressure on them not to make things worse. While, in the short term, setting a democratic transition in motion and bringing about a cessation of hostilities seems impossible, the objective must be to avoid the escalation of the conflict, contain the security risks and begin a process of dialogue between the principle Libyan stakeholders in order to reverse the current trend. In order to achieve this, Mogherini will need the complete support of the leading European countries, to find allies among the regional actors and to set any agreement within the United Nations framework.

The third opportunity is to lead an ambitious reform of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The adaptation of this policy made in 2011 has not fulfilled expectations, and ever more voices propose a more ambitious revision. That revision was criticised for being a bureaucratic exercise lacking in political direction, with technicians charged with making improvements to an already existing base. Facing the growing crises in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, calls for reform resonate, such as that made by **Stefan Lehne** of Carnegie Europe to press reset on the policy, or **Michael Leigh** of the German Marshall Fund urging the new High Representative to make its revision her main priority. Some member states have already begun to move on this. On the 24th of October, the ministers of **three of leading member states** (Poland, France and Germany) discussed how the policy should be reformed. Interest on the part of the European capitals is good news but Mogherini and the brand new Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy, Johannes Hann, should in the next weeks confirm their willingness to take up the reins of this process.

It may be a surprise that this list does not include the conflict in Syria, negotiations between Arabs and Israelis, reconciliation between Palestinian factions, political transition in Egypt, the much desired (and never achieved) regional integration of the Maghreb, the Union for the Mediterranean Union, irregular immigration and the drama of refugees, and many other subjects. But it is not because they are not important; they are, very. But they are situations in which Mogherini, just like anyone else chosen to take on the role, is unlikely to have the opportunity to make significant advances in the coming months. In some cases, this is just because of timing, in others, it is because of the limited capacity not just of the High Representative, but of the EU itself.

A separate case is the nuclear agreement with Iran, which, though it does not form part of European Mediterranean policy, may yet have large regional impact. It is one of the great gambles of European diplomacy and it has been decided that Catherine Ashton will lead the negotiations until the 24th of November. The signing of a good agreement would, in injury time, be a good end to her mandate and an

excellent debut for Mogherini. But, once again, this is not in her hands (it is probably not in Ashton's either). Having said all that, success in the negotiations with Iran along with Mogherini making progress on any or all of the other three fronts (Tunisia, Libya and reform of the ENP) should put the new High Representative in a strong position to make an impact in the other areas (the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syria, regional integration, etc.) during the mandate that lies in front of her.