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Guest Editorial

Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy: Year 1

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It is now roughly a year since Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) took the major qualitative step forward represented by the entry into force of the provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty and above all by the appointment of its first grand-sounding but only vaguely defined High Representative. The European Council in Cologne in June 1999 bravely, but correctly, opted for the higher risk alternative of giving the job to a senior politician with an impressive track record as Spanish Foreign Minister and Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Kosovo crisis and, by so doing, surrendered the alibi that this was just another modest, incremental step down the road not very impressively followed so far. Moreover, when, later in the year, they double-hatted Javier Solana as Secretary-General of the Western European Union (WEU) they more than half committed themselves to making the 'S' in Europe's CFSP into something of real substance and significance.

So how has it gone since then? Institutionally things have moved ahead steadily and reasonably smoothly. While Solana is certainly not backed by anything that resembles even a medium-sized foreign ministry, he does, with his team of advisors and the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit, have a capacity which goes well beyond the purely secretariat resources hitherto allocated to CFSP. A new Political and Security Committee, carefully described as 'interim' but surely destined to demonstrate the old truth that 'ce n'est que le provisoire qui dure', has been established in Brussels giving him a sounding board and a means by which the member states can be directly involved on a day to day basis in the handling of business, particularly in a crisis. The much predicted turf war with the Commission has not broken out; on the contrary the Solana/Patten duo have admirably demonstrated their determination to work together and, following the decisions of the Lisbon European Council in March, have been given the joint task of putting a bit more coherence and drive into

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the EU's expensive but not very well focussed activities in the Balkans. Solana himself has proved his worth by cementing the opening to Turkey offered at the Helsinki European Council and by ensuring that the recent European-African summit was not wrecked on the reefs of the Western Sahara. Above all perhaps – and no one who lived through the agonizing experience of 1991 and Jacques Poos' disastrous claim that Europe could handle the crisis in the former Yugoslavia would under-estimate this – CFSP has managed to get through this first year without falling flat on its face. The other side to that coin, however, is that it has not yet been really tested.

It would be a heroic and misguided gamble to assume that it will not be so tested in the next year or so. Most indicators point the other way. The coincidence in what has been close to an interregnum in both the Kremlin and the White House is clearly drawing to a close. The former is now in the hands of a new and enigmatic leader some of whose intentions seem relatively benign to European interests, others less so: One thing seems sure and that is that President Putin is determined to restore at least some of the former Soviet Union's influence and prestige and that could well be pretty unsettling for his neighbours, many of whom aspire to be members of the EU. We shall have to wait until November to know who is the new incumbent of the White House and then no doubt, on previous form, a good deal longer to know the shape of his foreign policy. However, one thing we need not doubt – that policy will present the Europeans with plenty of challenges and a good number of opportunities. Missile defence will be to the fore in some form or another, as will the endless tug of war between unilateralism and multilateralism as the guiding star of US foreign policy. In the Middle East events are moving, jerkily and uncertainly, towards some kind of climacteric, with the outcome likely to affect many of Europe's interests but as yet entirely uncertain. The Balkans have surely not yet exhausted their capacity to spring unwelcome surprises and to pose choices which bristle with costs and risks. The EU itself is the key player in one massively important foreign policy issue, its own enlargement, and seems to be approaching it more like a sleep-walker unsure whether he is in the midst of a nightmare than like someone with the determination to cut through the technical problems and provide the sense of strategic direction which every politician in Europe proclaims is necessary. That is a big and daunting list of challenges to be tackled which takes no account of unforeseen and unforeseeable events that will no doubt in due course add to its length.

If there is one characteristic that already distinguishes Europe's external policies from those of either Russia or the USA – or China, for that matter – it is that Europe has already made its definitive choice between multilateralism and unilateralism. We are not trying to re-create at the beginning of this century the kind of balance of power realpolitik we practiced, ultimately so

unsuccessfully, at the beginning of the last. We are trying to bolster the rules of international law through organizations such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court; we are trying to encourage the spread of democracy and respect for human rights through multinational organizations as disparate as the United Nations (UN) the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and the Commonwealth; we are working to counter threats to international peace and security by strengthening the UN and regional organizations which work with it; we are seeking to reverse the trend towards environmental degradation by implementing the commitments entered into at Kyoto, and probably strengthening them; we are planning a further liberalization of world trade through negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO) which must take fuller account than in the past of the interests of developing countries and which must demonstrate cogently why the arguments of those who demonstrated at Seattle are misguided. However, it will not be enough for an entity of the size and significance in world affairs of the EU just to proclaim these objectives and then sit back and wait for them to happen. We will be waiting for a long time if we do. Europe has to convince both by example and by advocacy those less sure that a multilateral course is the right one to take; and it has to reform and equip the multilateral institutions, through which it wants to work, with the tools they need to do the job, tools which they all too obviously lack at the moment.

How well in fact is CFSP equipped to tackle these parts of this huge and demanding agenda which fall to it to address? The honest answer is 'not very'. An organization accustomed to writing declarations and communiques is only very gradually facing up to the need to put its money (and its men) where its mouth is. Clearly the highest priority this year has to go into following through the initiative launched by the British and French governments at Saint-Malo and bringing it to the point of decisions at the Nice European Council in December. It is going to be a major challenge to reach decisions which ensure that NATO is strengthened not weakened, that the European capacity to act does not lead to any decoupling from the USA whose role in Europe's overall security remains as crucial as ever, and that non-EU members of NATO are assured a proper role in shaping, if not taking, the necessary decisions and a full part in implementing them if they decide to participate. It is equally going to be a major challenge to build the capacity to put a substantial military force of 60,000 men into the field when so required at a time when all the trends in defence spending go the other way. Without the second prong of the policy the first will have all the impact of a wet noodle. However, if Nice does succeed in reaching decisions, then the EU will, for the first time, be approaching a point where it can draw all the threads of a foreign policy together if it has the will to do so.

There are plenty of other, less high profile, lacunae which need attention.

If one looks at any of the main policy areas where CFSP is likely to be active – enlargement excepted – at policy towards Russia, in the Balkans, in the Middle East, in Africa, one sees that to be effective and to avoid friction the EU is going to need to work closely with the USA. It is not that we will never have differences with the Americans; it is simply that it will be against our interests to externalize these differences, to turn them into sources of public dispute, to allow others to play us off against each other. If that is so, then close cooperation with the USA is going to be the answer. However, there is no organic link with them, no systematic exchange of information and intelligence so that we are at least working off a common data base, even if we disagree on the prescriptions for action. Europe is surely going to need some such link before too long, one that avoids falling into the trap of cutting the USA formally into EU decision-making but which allows each to influence the other at a formative stage in policy-making.

Ever since its inception in 1970 CFSP, then of course called Political Cooperation, has been a Presidency-driven system. The Presidency of the day runs all the committees and working groups, manages the COREU communications network, provides the overseas representation where it can. However, there are plenty of indications that, as the system becomes more elaborate and sophisticated, this model becomes less and less satisfactory. For one thing the global reach and influence of Presidencies is so disparate. Large country Presidencies tend to make too much input into policy formulation, small country Presidencies too little. The rotating Presidency confuses and often misleads third countries, less well schooled than member states in the way the EU actually works. In a Union of nearly 30 members the Presidency will come round about once a generation. Ironically, these failings of the Presidency system are more marked in what is called Pillar 2 business – CFSP – than in the conduct of Pillar 1 business – the Community proper – where the systematized competition endemic in the system is still producing good results. The appointment of a High Representative would seem to be the ideal moment to begin to move away from a purely Presidency-led system. This will have to be done tactfully and with skill.

CFSP's great under-utilized resource is the world-wide diplomatic network of its Member States. As yet very little has been done to harness this network to EU tasks and objectives; and some of what has been done is of little value. Political reports composed by committees of ambassadors are of little practical use; employing a well-informed journalist would probably be more cost effective. Of course there are great sensitivities and not a few great egos. Commercial work remains fiercely competitive, as much between Member States as with the EU's main rivals, although it must be getting more and more difficult to know what is and what is not a British or Dutch or a French or a German company for which one is meant to be lobbying. However, clearly

some degree of differentiation in overseas representation will remain essential. What needs to be being asked with greater insistence and imagination is what more can usefully be done in common or in cooperation. If the Foreign Ministers of the Union were to commission a fundamental review of this that might give some real impetus to a hitherto neglected subject.

For all the success so far of the Solana/Patten duo, the welcome truce in the traditional turf-fighting between the Commission and the Council still rests on the fragile basis of two outstanding individuals determined to repress the natural tendencies of their officials. Moreover, it has masked the fact that there are still too many cooks in the EU's foreign policy kitchen. The Union has not yet managed to answer Henry Kissinger's not entirely well-intentioned question 'Whom do I telephone?'. There is the Presidency, and the High Representative, and the President of the Commission, and the Commissioners for External Relations, for Trade Policy, for Development and for Enlargement. Enlargement is in any case going to require some rationalization in the Commission; external relations is surely an area crying out for some slimming down or else some hierarchical structure, however reluctant the Commission may be to move down that road. Of course Kissinger's question did not only relate to the number of office holders in Brussels. He was also referring to the tendency, particularly marked among the larger member states, to keep their own direct lines open to Washington and to prefer them to more cumbersome procedures. Only a very naïve observer could suppose that the appointment of a High Representative has simply resolved that problem. What is essential is to find some way for the larger member states to feel a greater degree of responsibility for the Union's foreign policy and thus to be less tempted towards back channels.

If the EU as a whole is suffering from a lack of connection between its institutions and its electorates, then one can be sure that this problem is especially acute in the field of foreign policy. After all, even nation states have plenty of difficulty explaining and mustering public and parliamentary support for their foreign policy actions. How much more difficult and challenging is it for the EU. However, little so far is being done about it. The European Parliament (EP) has a modest role to play but it is clear that the governments are not prepared to give it a real say in a field that remains purely inter-governmental. So, if progress is to be made towards increasing the democratic legitimacy of CFSP, some imaginative thinking is going to be required. One possibility might be to constitute a Foreign Relations Committee of the Union, drawing its members both from the EP and from national parliaments.

Of course all these changes are not going to occur overnight; and one must hope that all the challenges which have been identified will not do so either. The development of a genuine foreign and security policy for a hybrid body

like the EU is always going to be a slow, incremental process, often a question of two steps forward one back. Nor is the success rate in dealing with external events ever going to be close to 100 per cent. What nation state, however powerful and however skilfully ruled has ever achieved that? Year I has been a good, if undramatic and reasonably undemanding start. Year II looks as if it might be quite interesting; and a good deal more demanding.