

# Commitments made at the hearing of

## **JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES**

### High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President-designate of the European Commission



The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President-designate of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, appeared before the European Parliament on 7 October 2019 to answer MEPs' questions. During the hearing, he made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to his portfolio, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to him by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission.

Please note that the quotes included in this document only make reference to oral commitments made during the [hearing](#). The [verbatim report](#) of the public hearing is available on the [Commissioners-designate hearings website](#). The Commissioner-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which he provided [written answers](#).



## A more strategic, more assertive and more united Europe in the world

'We should pool our national sovereignties together to multiply the power of individual Member States [...]'. [...] we need a truly integrated foreign policy that combines the power of Member States, acting together in the Council, with all the policies managed by the Commission and the democratic legitimacy of this House.

'If I am confirmed, the heart of my work, as Vice-President and High Representative, will be to bridge the foreign policy of the Member States with the external action of the Commission.'

'[...] to be geopolitically relevant we need unity, much more than what we have. I will work with all Member States, big and small, to achieve this unity'.

'[...] the EU system has to be more fit for purpose, to avoid duplication and bureaucratic routine, producing a stronger and deeper strategic analysis. I think we don't do that enough. We have to regain a sense of initiative and action. You can ask, you can wait, you can hope to get something from me, and it is just that – to regain a sense of initiative and action.'

### Taking decisions in a faster and more efficient way

'We should remember that the Foreign Affairs Council is a decision-making body that has to bring out orientation debate, yes, but it would be much better to arrive at concrete outcomes and common actions. I am a member of the European Council. It is my duty to go to the European Council and put there the most important issues of foreign policy. It is an extraordinary privilege to be able to do that and I am willing to do so.'

'[...] the role of the High Representative is to act not only as a mediator, [...] but to have a proactive attitude to iron out the differences that inevitably exist between us. [...] Therefore, I will go beyond the lowest common denominator. [...]

'I will take the risk that the Council will not accept my proposals. I will take the risk of being in a minority in front of my colleagues. I will try, for instance, that in some cases we use the provisions of the Treaty itself so as not to always have to agree one hundred percent. On sanctions, human rights and CSDP missions, we might not need unanimity because the Treaty [...] allows us this. [...]

'[...] Let's start by using qualified majority on sanctions, in the case of Russia, to avoid the need for unanimity, on human rights, and on peace missions. Then we can go, if we are able to build this strategic common culture, to agree on such sovereignty-related issues. [...] So we have to go step by step, but the final purpose is to get

decisions taken by qualified majority when the time comes.'

### Ensuring we better link the internal and external aspects of our policies

'[...] we need coherence between internal and external policies and we have the instruments to play power politics. Our challenge is to put them together at the service of one strategy.'

'I believe that one of the major problems of the European foreign policy is its separation into silos, which derives from its own institutional structure: the Commission has some functions, the Council has others... However, in the world in which we live [...] we need to bring together all our capacities'.

'Article 18 of the Treaty expressly gives me the task to coordinate the external action of the Commission. The external policies (fully external) are one thing and another are the internal policies that have an external dimension. And on those I will naturally have to collaborate with the President.'

### On the EEAS

'[...] Gender equality is one of the cornerstones of European policies. [...] Gender equality in foreign policy doesn't only mean equality between men and women in high posts. We have to achieve that. [...] To be frank, I think that it is going to be impossible to reach 50 % [by 2024]. [...] A good target, the one we have to fight for, is about 40 %. Remember that one third of the External Action Service posts are provided by the national diplomatic corps, and they also have to fulfil requirements on the number of women, so today there is a kind of conflict for the scarce resource that is highly qualified women in the diplomatic corps.

'We have to introduce gender as a value in diplomatic and military activities.'

'The institutional system of the External Action Service and the Commission is, to my understanding — and it is not a criticism of anyone — policy-light and process-heavy. I think we must develop the provision of real added-value to whatever Member States need and want.'

### On relations with Member States

'Foreign ministers could help the High Representative a lot. I don't have the capacity of being everywhere but there are 28 – well, maybe soon 27 – Foreign Affairs Ministers who can help, who can be tasked to ask and to work and to talk and to travel as Chefs de File on particular issues that their countries know much better than others. This innovation could enhance Member States' ownership of the European Foreign Policy.'

## On cooperation with the European Parliament

'Parliament has a very important role to play [...] You are a policy shaper. You shape the Union's foreign policy, the more you are heard and the better you are understood. [...] I must commit myself here to continue the positive dynamic following the declaration on political accountability from 2010, and this implies consulting the Parliament, in plenary, in the committee and in the special committee, to explain to you the most sensitive elements of the foreign, security and defence policy.'

'I also commit to explain to the Members all levels of the negotiations of international agreements, because this is a requirement of the Treaty of the Union; to hold at least five times a year the joint consultation meeting on the execution of the CFSP budget; to resume the negotiations, which were at a standstill, on the exchange of information about international agreements, in line with Article 40 of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making from 2016.'

'I will be happy to work in close collaboration with the European Parliament, because I am convinced of the potential of parliamentary diplomacy, because I am well aware that your resolutions, mediation, election observation missions have a fundamental role in defining a credible European foreign policy.'

## Security and defence

'Our strength lies in our ability to link diplomacy, mediation, crisis management and the internal and external aspects of security [...].'

Defence is part of our security and sometimes threats start far away from our borders. We have recently put in place instruments to develop more usable defence capabilities. We have to go further.'

'[...] we lack a common strategic culture. We have made progress in this direction, at the political level with Permanent Structured Cooperation (PECSO), at the industrial level with the European Defence Fund and at the operational level with the missions. We have made progress in these three areas. This is not enough.'

'[...] NATO is and will remain the cornerstone of our collective alliance, of our collective defence. By developing European defence, we will reinforce the Atlantic Alliance, and by carrying more weight in NATO we will contribute to a more balanced transatlantic relationship.'

'[...] Article [42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty] needs to be made operational [...] This article, as well as the other article — I think it's 212 — that deals with a common response to terrorist attacks, terrorist or natural disasters [...] should both be protocolised. It is necessary to specify how they should be implemented and, of course, as I said before,

you [the EP] are 'shapers' of foreign policy [...] We should have clear guidelines.'

'Member States are deploying 35 000 women and men worldwide in different types of international missions. That is impressive, but we have to do more.'

'Our military spending is roughly half the GDP of Belgium. More than China. Much more than Russia. Second only to the United States. [...] but our capacity is much less because of fragmentation and duplication. We have to spend together.'

'We have to be more operational on the ground. We have to deploy forces, starting with our neighbourhood.'

'[...] we have agreed on a capability development plan, which identifies 11 defence priorities. These include [...] cyber-responsive operations, air-to-air refuelling, and ballistic missile defence. [...] '... these capabilities, we need them for our operational engagement, and we have to take into account also their compatibility and complementarity with the NATO priorities.'

'The lack of cooperation between Member States in the field of security and defence costs us about EUR 30 000 million a year. We need to develop PESCO and the European Defence Fund.'

'Also we have to pay attention to the civil management which is for me equally as important as military missions, and for that we need another, different kind of capacity: policemen, judges, public prosecutors, and other experts.'

'[...] the [...] battle groups [...] remain the primary tool for our military rapid response, and they are the only military forces on standby in the European Union for deployment at short notice. I think we have to increase the common funding, which is currently under discussion in the context of the European Peace Facility [...] to provide an incentive for future deployments [...].'

## Non-proliferation and arms exports control

'[...] we are entering an era of nuclear instability because all the agreements that had built a safety net against the proliferation and the possible use of these weapons have fallen away, one after the other. In this respect, we in the EU, must continue to play our part to extend the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We support it through its three pillars: non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy.'

'With regard to the export of arms, not only do I believe that we need to keep the 2008 [Common Position], I believe that we need to give it a large update. Because 2008 is now long ago. And this common norm of European countries for the control of arms exports needs to be revised.'

'What we have to do is to renegotiate the 2008 agreement in order first to exchange information. We

should know what every country is doing, what are the exports that every country is making, to whom, how, and make, as some countries do, a follow-up on the use of these arms.'

### Threats

'We have hybrid threats, including disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks that jeopardise our democracy. I am conscious of the gravity of these threats and I will advance on going on.'

'Obviously, terrorism is a major, tremendous threat. [...] What can the EU [...] do to tackle it? We have a whole range of instruments including diplomacy, the relations with those countries that in the past have been the origin of this tremendous threat against us, but which we will not be able to solve alone...'

'[...] there is a process of disinformation which is seriously affecting the democratic health of our countries. And disinformation will be [...] one of the biggest problems we are going to face with artificial intelligence. [...] We have three strands, one of them dedicated to Eastern Europe. We have the rapid reaction cell against disinformation. We have a reduced intervention capacity. We should have much more, because the problem will get worse...'

### Human rights

'[...] The European Union is a guiding light in defending human rights, more than anyone else in the world. And they must be an integral part of our policies. The promotion of human rights should not only be an issue of external policy that you relegate to a corner, it must be at the centre.'

'[...] the countries benefiting from trade preferences must comply with the conventions on human rights and labour rights.'

'[...] I assure you: for me, human rights are not just the cherry on the top of a trade agreement. It is an integral part of it, not only during the drafting of the agreement but also when it comes to monitoring its implementation.' [...] I will see that a human rights clause be included in all bilateral trade agreements [...].'

'We have an action plan [on human rights] for the period 2020 to 2024. [...] Now, we have to see how we can implement these plans in concrete terms. And I ask Parliament to work with me to ensure that it does and that the EU remains an example for the defence of human rights in the world.'

### Priorities and challenges

#### Neighbourhood and enlargement

'Let me stress from the beginning my intention to engage on the reforms and integration processes in the Western Balkans, to support democracy and territorial integrity of Ukraine, address the challenges in our Southern neighbourhood [...], develop a new comprehensive strategy towards Africa, working out a politically rounded strategy in and with Asia, stepping up our cooperation with Latin America, and 'resetting' Transatlantic relations'.

'I really believe that the Balkans and Europe's Eastern border are the main priorities of our foreign policy. We cannot say we are geopolitical if we cannot solve the problems in our immediate neighbourhood. [...] We are perhaps not aware of the huge threat that a destabilised Northern Africa would represent.'

'[...] the first thing we should do in the Balkans is to open borders [...].'

'One thing is clear: Kosovo and Serbia have to reach an agreement. [...] I will do my utmost in order to fulfil this priority. In fact, my first visit will be to Pristina.'

#### Migration and climate change

'European citizens say that the two biggest challenges they face are climate change and migration. Both are geopolitical challenges because we cannot solve them alone. [...] Climate change [...] is the driver of instability and migratory pressures that we will have face both at home and abroad. That's why they are geopolitical issues.'

Migration and asylum have profound geopolitical implications [...] Migration has to be fully embedded in the foreign policy.'

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