The New Architecture of the Treaty of Lisbon: Implications for Euro-Mediterranean Relations

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The changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon are particularly significant on the institutional level. The entire system has, in effect, been restructured and new balances and inter-institutional relations are emerging with the effective implementation of the treaty provisions and the establishment of such structures as the European External Action Service (EEAS). These changes naturally affect Euro-Mediterranean relations on the whole and on different levels. Below we will examine the main changes affecting Euro-Mediterranean relations. We will limit ourselves to the main political institutions, but clearly, with regard to the Court of Justice of the European Union, for instance, the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon will be significant, if only because the Court’s jurisdiction on visas, asylum and immigration have been broadly extended. The modifications of the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee are likewise considerable.

The European Council: A Full-Fledged Institution with a New President

From the Single European Act in 1986 to the Treaty of Nice, the European Council has always been an institution that was somewhat set apart in the successive treaties. In the framework of the Treaty of Nice, it did not appear under Article 7, instituting the European Community and enumerating the Community’s institutions; it was the object of a specific article of the Treaty on the European Union (Article 4).

The European Council has Become a Full-Fledged Institution

In the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Council is included in Article 13 § 1 alongside the other EU institutions. It thenceforth consists of “the Heads of State or Government of the Member States, together with its President and the President of the Commission,” whereas “the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy shall take part in its work.”

The European Council provides the European Union (EU) “with the necessary impetus for its development and shall define the general political directions and priorities thereof.” Moreover, it is explicitly stated that the European Council “shall not exercise legislative functions.” The European Council must identify “the strategic interests and objectives of the Union.” It can thus make “decisions [...] on the strategic interests and objectives of the Union” which “shall relate to the common foreign and security policy and to other areas of the external action of the Union.” The problem is that the general rule that the European Council “shall act unanimously on a recommendation from the Council” remains valid.

The European Council has regularly lent impetus to Euro-Mediterranean relations. Recall, for instance, the 1972 Summit of Heads of State in Paris, which

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1 Article 15 § 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) / Title III: Provisions on the Institutions.  
2 Article 15 § 1 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) / Title III: Provisions on the Institutions.  
launched the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP), the European Councils of Essen (December 1994) and Cannes (June 1995), which marked the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and therefore the Barcelona Process, or the Copenhagen European Council of December 2002, which launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Its inclusion alongside the other EU institutions means that what can be called “the supreme political authority of the EU” will become more visible and this will be strengthened by the presence of a President that does not change every six months. Both on the internal and external levels, the prestige, visibility and thus political weight of the European Council is clearly strengthened.

The obstacle resides in the consensus regulation, which may limit the initial ambitions. In the face of crises such as the ones in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, the sluggishness of reactions is partially due to the absence of consensus. Consider the interests of Malta and Italy with regard to the proximity of the Libyan crisis, or those of France in Tunisia. The main challenge to lend renewed “impetus” to Euro-Mediterranean relations and make the Mediterranean Region one of the EU’s policy “priorities” as well as one of its “strategic objectives” is the consensus regulation. Indeed, we will often have to settle for the lowest common denominator. A great deal thus depends on the President of the European Council, who must play the role of facilitator in negotiations.

A “Permanent” European Council President

Elected by the European Council “for a term of two and a half years, renewable once,” the President of the European Council plays a key role, as he or she must “endeavour to facilitate cohesion and consensus within the European Council.” The President likewise benefits from specific competences “at his [or her] level” (that is, on the level of Heads of State and Government) and “in that capacity,” ensures the external representation of the EU on issues concerning its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), “without prejudice to the powers of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.”

Mr. Van Rompuy participates in summits, both on the internal and external levels, whether they be the G20, the G8, the EU-United States Summit or the EU-Morocco Summit, the latter held on 7 March 2010, to give but a few examples. It must be noted that, with the negotiation of new advanced statuses, other Mediterranean Partner Countries will be concerned in the future.

The President of the European Council must also play a role at the level of multilateral Euro-Mediterranean summits, but the sine die postponement of the second EU Summit for the Mediterranean has not allowed Mr. Von Rompuy to exercise in this forum. Since the onset of the recent crises in the Mediterranean Region, he has been involved through a series of statements, but it is certainly within the European Council itself where the President can play the most important role, that of “consensus facilitator.”

The Council of Ministers: Configurations, Rotating Presidencies and the High Representative

The Council of Ministers is likewise the object of numerous new provisions in the Treaty of Lisbon.

A Restructuring of Configurations within the Council

First of all, we should recall that the former General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) was split into two different councils:

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5 According to Article 15 § 6 of the TEU, the President of the European Council “shall chair it and drive forward its work; shall ensure the preparation and continuity of the work of the European Council in cooperation with the President of the Commission, and on the basis of the work of the General Affairs Council; [...]”

6 Article 15 § 6 of the TEU.

7 See the remarks by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, at the EU-Morocco Summit in Granada on 7 March 2010, PCE 47/10, www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/fr/ec/113201.pdf


• the General Affairs Council, which shall “ensure consistency in the work of the different Council configurations” and “prepare and ensure the follow-up to meetings of the European Council, in liaison with the President of the European Council and the Commission”; and

• the Foreign Affairs Council, which shall “elaborate the Union’s external action on the basis of strategic guidelines laid down by the European Council and ensure that the Union’s action is consistent.”

10 The latter is chaired by the High Representative.

The New Rotating Presidency of the Council of Ministers

The matter of the new presidencies is important for Euro-Mediterranean issues. The Spanish and Belgian presidencies found themselves in the difficult situation of transition from one system to another. The Belgian Presidency, however, despite the absence of a new federal government, was able to rely on a European Council President fully aware of the Belgian institutions.

The major difference between this and the preceding system is that the country in charge of the rotating presidency of the Council gives way to the presidency of Ms. Ashton insofar as the foreign affairs configuration. The system of equal rotation “by pre-established groups of three Member States for a period of 18 months” remains valid for other institutions, whereas the presidency of the European Council shall be filled by its new “permanent” president.

The impact on the level of intergovernmental meetings dealing with Euro-Mediterranean matters is significant. In fact, the great majority of conclusions adopted on the Mediterranean Region are done so within the framework of the Foreign Affairs Council, under the leadership of Catherine Ashton. The High Representative thus convened an informal meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council for 10 March 2011 to discuss the issue of the Libyan crisis and the EU’s neighbours to the south.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

The function of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy actually combines a number of former functions, namely, those of the former High Representative, Javier Solana (with the exception of the position of Secretary General of the Council), and those held formerly by Benita Ferrero-Waldner as European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). There is still currently a commissioner in charge of the ENP and Enlargement: Stefan Füle. The High Representative is likewise the Vice-President of the European Commission, whence the title of “High Representative/Vice-President” (HR/VP), and coordinates foreign relations aspects in the Commission. She is thus called to work with the commissioners in charge of external matters. In addition, Ms. Ashton takes over the role of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the former rotating presidencies and chairs the Foreign Affairs formation of the Council. Thus, there is no denying the position’s complexity and the breadth of the tasks to be carried out.

According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the High Representative conducts the CFSP, contributes by her “proposals to the development of that policy,” and must “ensure the consistency of the Union’s external action.”

Within the European Commission, Ms. Ashton has responsibilities on the “external relations” level in general and on the level of “coordinating other aspects of the Union’s external action” in particular. This coordination function is certainly essential and

14 Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, convened an informal extraordinary session of the Foreign Affairs Council in the form of a working breakfast to be held on Thursday, 10 March, European Union, Brussels, 3 March 2011, A 083/11.
15 Article 18 § 4 of the Treaty on the European Union.
16 Articles 18 § 3 and 27 § 1 of the Treaty on European Union / Titles III & V.
17 Articles 18 § 2 and 27 § 1 of the Treaty on European Union / Titles III & V.
18 Article 18 § 2 and § 4 of the Treaty on European Union / Title III.
corresponds to the goal of greater consistency of the EU’s external action on the whole.

The High Representative thus has a preponderant role to play in Euro-Mediterranean relations. In charge of external relations in general and of the CFSP in particular, the High Representative is thus at the convergence of the EU’s different external policies.

In the intergovernmental sphere, the High Representative represents the European Union on issues arising from the CFSP, conducts “political dialogue with third parties on the Union’s behalf” and “shall express the Union’s position in international organisations and at international conferences.” The importance of political dialogue in the Middle East conflicts, an aspect that was the object of a speech by the High Representative, should also be emphasized, along with the High Representative’s role insofar as the Quartet. The High Representative thus has a preponderant role to play in Euro-Mediterranean relations. In charge of external relations in general and of the CFSP in particular, the High Representative is thus at the convergence of the EU’s different external policies. The beginning of 2011 was marked by an increased presence of the High Representative on the Mediterranean stage. Ms. Ashton travelled namely to Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia from 14 to 22 February 2011. Of course, a great deal will depend on the effectiveness of the new European External Action Service (EEAS), a truly hybrid institution at the heart of the new EU external relations system.

The European External Action Service

The European External Action Service is comprised by “officials from relevant departments of the General Secretariat of the Council and of the Commission as well as staff seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States personnel.” It was the Council Decision of 26 July 2010 that established the organisation and functioning of this new European body. Specifically, the EEAS is “a functionally autonomous body of the European Union.” It has “the legal capacity necessary to perform its tasks and attain its objectives.” Under the authority of the High Representative, the EEAS is “made up of a central administration and of the Union Delegations to third countries and to international organisations.” In reality, the EEAS assists the High Representative in conducting the CFSP and the Common Security

19 Article 27 § 2 of the Treaty on European Union / Title V.
27 Article 27 § 3 of the Treaty on European Union / Title V.
and Defence Policy (CSDP), in the Foreign Affairs Council and with relation to her responsibilities as Vice-President of the European Commission in the sphere of external relations.\(^{32}\)

The EEAS has a central administration organized into Directorates-General (DGs).\(^{33}\) At the head of the administration is Ms. Ashton, who is assisted by an Executive Secretary-General, a Chief Operating Officer and two Secretaries-General.

A Directorate that includes North Africa, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq particularly interests the Mediterranean Region. Various geographic bureaus cover the following regions, with a quite classical breakdown:

i. The Middle East;

ii. The Arabian Peninsula, Iran and Iraq;

iii. Regional Euromed and Union for the Mediterranean policies;

iv. The Maghreb.

Thematic bureaus specializing in ENP coordination connect this Directorate with the one covering the Eastern partnership and the European Union’s eastern neighbours, including Russia, which enjoys the benefits of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) but which is not part of the ENP as such (cf. the organization chart in Chart 1 above).

Finally, it must be kept in mind that the European Commission delegations, now “Union delegations” (UDs) since the entry into effect of the Treaty of Lisbon, are an integral part of the EEAS. In other words, all Mediterranean delegations, which are

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\(^{32}\) See Article 2 § 1 and following of Council Decision 2010/427.

\(^{33}\) See Article 4 and following of Council Decision 2010/427.

\(^{34}\) “The EEAS shall be made up of a central administration and of the Union Delegations to third countries and to international organisations” (Article 1 § 4 of Council Decision 2010/427). The “Commission and the EEAS will agree on detailed arrangements relating to the issuing of instructions from the Commission to delegations. These should provide in particular that when the Commission will issue instructions to delegations, it will simultaneously provide a copy thereof to the Head of Delegation and to the EEAS central administration” (Preamble, Point 13 of Council Decision 2010/427).
playing an increasingly important role, are henceforth part of the EEAS, from which they may receive instructions.34

The European Commission: Restructuring of Portfolios and Reorganization of the “RELEX Family”

With regard to the European Commission, the changes on the level of external relations are very significant due to the creation of the EEAS, which comprises part of the former officers of the European Commission’s “external relations family.” In addition, recall that Ms. Ashton is also Vice-President of the European Commission.

Restructuring of Portfolios, Enlargement and ENP

One of the fundamental elements with regard to Euro-Mediterranean relations is the regrouping of the former “enlargement” portfolio and part of Ms. Ferrero-Waldner’s portfolio, i.e., the ENP portfolio. Commissioner Stefan Füle is thenceforth in charge of both enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. It is still too early to make an appraisal but it will be interesting to examine the impact of this change in the future. In any case, it is clear that it will be relatively subtle, Ms. Ashton being in regular contact with Commissioner Füle on matters relating to neighbourhood policy. It is thus rather the overall reorganization that should be considered.

The European Commission and Reorganization of the “RELEX Family”

One of the problems is that the Commission, with the exception of the CFSP and certain other cases, is to “ensure the Union’s external representation.”35 This is not so simple when considered from the external perspective. Indeed, it is difficult for certain EU partners to find themselves between the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council and the High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission. The European Commission must in any case foster the general interest of the European Union and take the initiative, since this is its part of its mandate.36 The creation of the EEAS does not mean that all competences of the EC on external affairs are transferred to it. The so-called “RELEX family,” which designates the Directorates-General and services of the Commission in charge of external relations for the European Commission, is being restructured. It currently comprises the following DGs and services: Development, Enlargement-ENP, Trade, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, and Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DEVCO). These DGs and services continue to be in charge of the different actions pertaining to them under the leadership of the respective commissioner, but it must be kept in mind that the High Representative coordinates aspects of the EU’s external action as a whole.

With regard to international agreements, it is either the EC or the High Representative (“where the agreement envisaged relates exclusively or principally to the common foreign and security policy”) who “shall submit recommendations to the Council, which shall adopt a decision authorising the opening of negotiations and [...] nominating the Union negotiator or the head of the Union’s negotiating team.”37 At this level as well, coordination will be essential. Naturally, common policies such as the Common Trade Policy and Common Agricultural Policy, which are of capital importance for Euro-Mediterranean relations, shall continue to be handled by the EC, and it is up to the latter, in conjunction with the Council and the High Representative, to “ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies.”38

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35 Article 17 § 1 of the Treaty on European Union / Title III.
36 Article 17 § 1 of the Treaty on European Union / Title III.
37 Article 218 § 3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.
38 Article 21 § 3 of the Treaty on European Union / Title V.
The European Parliament: Stepped Up Legislative and Budgetary Prerogatives

The European Parliament (EP) is considered one of the major beneficiaries of the Treaty of Lisbon, as its legislative and budgetary prerogatives have been largely strengthened. With regard to new financial perspectives and the revision of the ENP, its budgetary powers should be taken into account. However, the lack of progress regarding the Parliament’s role insofar as CFSP is regrettable.

Legislative Powers

On the legislative level, the Treaty of Lisbon replaces the procedure of co-decision by ordinary legislative procedure, which becomes the main legislative procedure, within the framework of which the EP is considered a true co-legislator, along with the Council of Ministers.

The new procedure extends to some forty new areas, including areas relating to migratory issues or judicial cooperation. The EP’s approval procedure, a true veto power, likewise extends to new areas, as does the consultation procedure. The role of the European Parliament is thus clearly strengthened within the legislative framework. This implies the institution’s increased importance in the adoption of legislation regarding Euro-Mediterranean issues.

Budgetary Powers

The forthcoming financial perspective is an important period for the EP, which has seen its powers stepped up in the budgetary sphere. Hence, there is no longer a distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditure, which allows it to better counterbalance the powers of the Council in this area. It must be emphasized that the EP also has rights as discharge authority with the EEAS, which does not, however, resolve the CFSP’s democratic deficit.

External Relations Powers

With regard to issues relating to the former first pillar (European Communities) of the Treaty of Nice, the powers of the EP are strengthened thanks to the extension of powers and prerogatives of the Parliamentary Assembly in the above-stated legislative and budgetary areas.

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With regard to the CFSP and the CSDP, however, the EP’s powers remain very limited. Indeed, the Treaty of Lisbon establishes that the High Representative “shall regularly consult the European Parliament on the main aspects and the basic choices of the common foreign and security policy and the common security and defence policy and inform it of how those policies evolve.” Although the EP can “ask questions of the Council or make recommendations to it and to the High Representative” and, twice a year, holds “a debate on progress in implementing the [CFSP],” there is no denying that the EU still has a significant democratic deficit in specific areas of security and defence. This is all the more problematic since the Court of Justice has no competence in these matters, with a few, scant exceptions.

Conclusions

Understanding the new institutional system is not easy, all the more so because we are still in a learning stage. When the EEAS is launched, things should move faster and one can expect the establishment of a new dynamic in the medium term. Generally speaking, it can be considered that the Treaty of Lisbon is strongly marked by intergovern-
mentalism. Indeed, either new, mixed structures with a great intergovernmental predominance such as EEAS have been created, or intergovernmental institutions have been strengthened, as in the case of the European Council. There are a slew of other examples, as, for instance, the strengthened Petersberg Tasks, the European Defence Agency or structured cooperation.

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It must be emphasized that, though the pillar structure of the European Union was abolished, a sort of hidden pillar remains. Indeed, Chapter 2 of the Treaty on European Union’s Title V is entitled “Specific Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy Dispositions.” The Treaty clearly stipulates that the CFSP is subject to “specific rules and procedures” and that it is subject to the general rule of unanimity. Moreover, “the adoption of legislative acts shall be excluded” and “the common foreign and security policy shall be put into effect by the High Representative […]”\(^1\) In other words, there has been no communitarisation of the CFSP – far from it, in fact. Though the European Commission keeps significant prerogatives in external relations, the creation of a hybrid EEAS, that is, one composed of different types of officials, radically changes the situation. On the supranational level, it is clearly the European Parliament that enjoys the greatest progress; but only a priori, since the Parliamentary Assembly must yet provide itself with the means for its ambitions.

Insofar as Mediterranean affairs, it is clear that these changes will have a significant impact. The actors are multiplied, and this, unfortunately, is not a sign of efficiency. Many things will depend on the efficiency of the new EEAS. Inter-institutional and personal relations between the High Representative, the Presidents of the Commission and the European Council and Commissioner Füle are crucial for the Mediterranean facet of the EU’s external relations.

Today, with the challenges of the political transitions underway and the crises in the Mediterranean Region, the European Union under the Treaty of Lisbon has new tools that it should use with the greatest consistency possible, and this is one of tasks of the High Representative. A consensus must above all be reached between the 27 Member States within the European Council under the impetus of its president, and the EU must be capable of quickly mobilizing funds for emergency humanitarian aid while investing in the long term in transition processes that could radically change the order in the Mediterranean Region.

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\(^2\) Article 24 § 1 of the Treaty on European Union / Title V.