Responding to Foreign Affairs and Security Challenges in the EU’s Neighbourhood

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Quentin Peel

Well, thank you very much. That was a great overview that covered all the key issues and I am sure that there are lots of questions here from a very crowded hall. I am going to abuse my position to ask you just one and then I will open it up for debate because we have got 35 minutes to talk.

In his most recent interview, Vladimir Putin appears to have said that war between Russia and Ukraine was unlikely and he went on that such an apocalyptic scenario was hardly possible. I was in Kiev in November and everybody I talked to said, ‘We are at war. This is not something that is threatening us; it is happening. This is not the Cold War coming back; this is a very nasty little hot war.’

Aren’t we rather fooling ourselves in Europe that it isn’t a war because we daren’t contemplate military intervention?

Federica Mogherini

I think I said to the BBC this morning that Putin is wrong when he says that war is unlikely because conflict is already going on. So I can quote you next time I talk to the BBC.

It is a conflict. It is a conflict and it’s not a cold war; it’s a hot conflict. People are dying and we have more than 1.5 million people displaced internally and externally so it is conflict, a real conflict. The fact that we did not mobilize military assets to fight it doesn’t mean it is not a conflict. It is a special kind of conflict, that’s for sure. We talk about the hybrid warfare, which has a very strong component of traditional warfare as well, as I mentioned.

Still, I believe that there is no possible way of winning this kind of conflict militarily and this is probably something new compared to the past. Even if you look back to the Cold War, it was won by soft power much more than by military means. But in this case, the point of how the international community reacts and makes sure that the crisis gets to an end is clearly not going to be through military means, not from the Ukrainian side that is reaffirming time and again that they need a political solution to the crisis, nor by the international community that, I guess, sees very clearly the danger of a major scale conflict touching on power that some refer to as a regional power and some refer to as a global power.

Still, it is a power. And after some decades of building a sense of cooperation around the eastern border of Europe, I think no one wants to get into a kind of post Cold War hot war with Russia.

Quentin Peel

Now, let’s open it up to the floor. Put your hands up clearly, say who you are and keep it nice and short and brief.
Question 1

James Nixey, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House. And just to extend Quentin’s question, perhaps, you say you’re trying to help Ukraine become a fully functional state, High Representative. And, perhaps, Vladimir Putin would beg to differ with you that, there is a military solution. I think he is trying for a military solution. So my question to you would be, whilst I understand the need for diplomacy, then what happens when your exhausting and exhaustive diplomacy is exhausted, what next, because he seems to think there is a military solution to this conflict, unlike you?

Federica Mogherini

The Minsk Agreement, let’s say the package agreed at Minsk last time, it’s 10 days old, more or less and I would wait a little bit more than 10 days to define it as exhausted. It is exhausting, for sure and exhaustive hopefully but not exhausted yet. And the fact that the four foreign ministers just finished their meeting in Paris a couple of hours ago, restating together some steps for expanding the mandate of the OSCE mission and making it possible to monitor the withdrawal of heavy weapons gives me some hope – I’m an optimist by nature, otherwise I don’t do this job – but gives me some hope that still we can move forward in this direction.

I think that diplomacy as well as sanctions and, I guess, there would be a question about sanctions later, has to have its time to get to maturity. Sanctions, once they’re decided, bring results over a certain time and the time, actually, multiplies the effect.

But diplomacy is slightly different because if you don’t have the implementation starting, it’s difficult to deploy all the diplomatic tools that you have. But you need a little bit of patience, which doesn’t mean closing your eyes but it means insisting, if you’re convinced that that way is the right one. And if that way is the right one for the Ukrainians and for the rest of the international community and if the UN Security Council just voted to support that agreement, you don’t throw that away after 10 days; you insist on that.

Question 2

Kirsty Hughes. Thank you for your talk; it was very comprehensive. One country, however, you didn’t mention, I think, is Turkey and it used of course to be said that the most powerful foreign policy tool that the EU had was enlargement. But, of course, talks with Turkey are frozen. Turkey is slithering towards a nasty form of more authoritarianism than democracy so one question is how would you see the EU being able to reassert its soft power influence over Turkey to the benefit of Turkish democracy?

And if I can slip in a second question before the chairman stops me, you started and ended your speech talking about the UK. I would say it’s hard to see a point in the last 20, if not 30 years, where the UK has had a weaker or almost more absent foreign policy, something Lord Tugendhat’s report on the Russia-Ukraine policy mentioned last week, how hard is it for you to create common foreign and security policy in Europe in the absence of a strong UK foreign policy and a strong UK contribution to that foreign policy?
Quentin Peel

Two nice easy questions.

Federica Mogherini

Very nice. I have to say that I work very well with the UK when it comes to foreign policy and also security policy and defence policy. I understand the internal political debate; that’s natural when you have an electoral campaign, especially in times like these with the debate about the European dimension as well. But when it comes to shaping a common position, I know that I can always count on an active and supportive attitude from the UK around the table.

On Turkey, it’s true, I didn’t mention it and there are a couple of other things that I didn’t mention and I hope they will come up in the questions, starting from the Balkans. So please... but actually, I thank you for your question that relates to enlargement and not necessarily to Syria because in the last months, I only receive questions on Turkey related to Syria, while we are forgetting that Turkey is, first of all, a country that has chosen to be in the European Union’s path and we in Europe have decided to follow that path together with Turkey.

I was in Turkey... that was one of the visits we did in a strange format, being myself plus two commissioners and that was a very powerful message to Turkey, not only to the leadership but also to the people, mainly to the people of a strong new engagement, new commitment from the European Union side on the Turkish European Union path. And I was – I wouldn’t say surprised – but pleased by listening from all interlocutors there that the reason why it was important for them to have them, I was there, was that the European Union path was in the interest of the people of Turkey. And I would start from here; you mentioned that.

Now we have one tiny detail, which is that we have to have unanimity to move forward. We have to have commitment on the Turkish side to move forward and in the meantime, Turkey is a major player at regional level, at least at the regional level and as we are talking about the EU path of Turkey, we do not have a special partnership on foreign policy because it’s a different category. We talk about ourselves; we don’t talk necessarily about foreign policy. So we risk being, somehow, in a gap, in a vacuum. In the meantime, we develop the conditions for moving forward on the European Union path.

I believe that Turkey now more than ever, needs a European perspective. Its leadership needs to be encouraged; its people most of all. I don’t see any other point of reference for Turkey in the region at the moment. If you think about that a couple of years ago, three years ago, four years ago, it was about zero problems with neighbours and being the model for the Arab countries. Now the situation is rather different.

So I think that Turkey has a chance to, let’s say, revive its European ambitions and it will find in Brussels always a committed partner to work on this. I think there is a need to bridge the gap between the choices of the leadership and the feelings of the people.
**Question 3**

Dominic Dudley; I’m a freelance journalist and a member of Chatham House. Two-part question, really; further to Turkey, could you say a bit about how you see the EU and Turkey are working together on Syria? Do you think it’s a constructive relationship, that the two can play together at this stage?

And also on Iran; obviously, that’s involved in Syria as well but in terms of the nuclear negotiations, would you characterize yourself as optimistic that a deal will be done or could you say a little bit more about what your expectations are?

**Federica Mogherini**

On Turkey, the cooperation on Turkey, on Syria, let me start by saying something that we tend to forget, which is that Turkey is hosting an incredible number of refugees from Syria and in any of our member-states, this would be a major, major challenge to do. And I would start from here because we have to understand our partners’, our friends’ or our interlocutors’ difficulties when it comes to internal domestic policies and regional context.

When I was visiting, I was not only in Ankara but also in Gaziantep, at the border, visiting refugee camps and for sure, there is more that can be done at that border but for sure, a lot has been done and is being done on the Turkish side to create conditions for Syrian refugees to live in decent conditions. And I think the Europeans will never, never thank enough not only the Turkish but also the authorities and the local communities but also the Jordanians and the Lebanese for what they’re doing.

**Quentin Peel**

Are we doing enough?

**Federica Mogherini**

We are doing more than we were doing before.

**Quentin Peel**

It’s not a lot.

**Federica Mogherini**

It’s now €1.5 billion, decided again last month and it was difficult to negotiate because we have plenty of priorities and the strange phenomenon we are living is that prices are multiplying, resources are always the same, if not less and we tend to concentrate our resources on the new crisis and move them away from the old crisis, as if a crisis doesn’t develop into something worse with time.

But I have to say we are doing a lot... it’s never enough. When you see the children, it’s never enough, let me say. From a human point of view, it’s never enough, but we’re doing a lot on the humanitarian, we are doing a lot on development. We are doing a lot on assistance to... in particular, this has less to do with Turkey and has more to do with Iraq,
in support of the Iraqi government and the Kurdish regional authority. We are doing what we can in support of the political process because – in Italian we have a saying, I think it’s only in Italian but we have to say it like this – is when you try to empty the sea with a spoon; it doesn’t work. It will never be enough because I mean, you can have that spoon but, I mean, it doesn’t work.

And the way of emptying the sea in this case is trying to stop the Syrian crisis and the only way we have to do it is to rebuild on the first Geneva communiqué of the Syrian led transition. And I think that all the efforts that Staffan is doing in this moment are the only things that can take us, somehow, close to it.

The second question?

Quentin Peel

Iran.

Federica Mogherini

Iran. I’m an optimist. I’m an optimist but...

Quentin Peel

But you’re a patient optimist.

Federica Mogherini

I’m a very patient optimist. I’m only three-and-a-half months in office. I still have four years and six months and something so I have to be patient and an optimist and take a lot of vitamins I understand.

But, you know what, the deal is at hand. I mean, technically, it can be reached and I think it’s in the interest of everybody to reach it. We have a series of internal domestic political dynamics we have to handle with care in some countries, for sure in Iran, where I am one hundred per cent sure there is goodwill and political will to get the deal and I would say the same for President Rouhani. But, obviously he has, they have an internal domestic dynamic to be aware of.

In Washington, we have tensions in the Congress and the role that we play and I personally have to play, because my role as a facilitator of the talks, as it is spelled out in the UN Security Council Resolution is that of facilitating not only the talks but also the result of the talks to be acceptable for everybody. It’s also to guarantee to our American friends that we will not have a deal if it is not a good deal and we have a certain number of regional dimensions to be considered; the Israeli electoral campaign and the Sunni-Shia tensions around the Gulf, different elements of the dynamic.

But I think that after such an intensive and long negotiation and with such an amount of political will from all sides and being so close to a deal, I would say that we cannot miss
this opportunity and first of all, the parties cannot miss the opportunity. So I would jump
in and yes, I am quite an optimist.

**Question 4**

Thank you. I’d like to go back to your point on resources because, again, you have a vision
for Europe, which is a vision, I believe, that is shared by many people in this room. But
then, when it comes down to implementation of this vision, there is a big constraint,
which is represented by the resources available and it is increasingly difficult for
countries, for member-states to put more resources against this vision.

In addition, Europe is a region which is gripped by let’s call it an economic malaise and,
certainly, in the southern part of the region and particularly countries on the border of the
Mediterranean, where we have either a lost decade or a sequestered nation where growth
is flat or non-existent or very, very low and there is high unemployment.

So, again, my question to you, how can you reconcile this vision with this constraint on
resources and how do you see Europe leading by example, when it actually is deeply
divided on, say, resolving its own economic crisis?

**Federica Mogherini**

This story of Europe divided, I don’t buy it. I know it’s a tempting narrative but what I see
– again, I always see the glass half full – but what I see is that Europe manages to be
united when it comes to the most difficult times. Maybe when we have the luxury of being
divided, we take the luxury of being divided but it is not these hard times.

And I think – I don’t have the latest news about the meetings today – but I think that be it
on the economic decisions, be it on foreign policy, we are going to keep our unity because
we know that our strength is there and at the end of the day, I think we also know that the
rest of the world – I see it; yes, you see it as well, nice map, world map – and all around
the world... I mean, seeing Europe from the inside, you see all the minuses, the divisions,
the lack of resources. Seeing Europe from the Far East, Far West, Far North – Far North
is the North Pole, little chance for observers there – but you see a model, still see a model,
be it in Latin America or in far east Asia or in Africa, you see, still, European Union as a
model for regional integration and success, I have to say.

When it comes to resources, there are two things. One is that we do have resources. We
have to have a strategy, a real common strategy to use our resources better. This would be
my first argument and this is why I decided to play my second hat as vice president of the
Commission at full because a lot of the resources are in the hands of the Commission and
also when it comes to instruments that are useful for foreign policy, be it humanitarian
aid or development or others and we have to make sure that we use them towards our
strategic political goals and not fermenting the resources we have too much.

Second, if we put together – and this is an interesting exercise; I don’t know if Chatham
House is doing that – the resources that we have, be it human or financial resources, on
the different instruments of foreign policy, of the European Union as such, plus the 28
member-states, it’s huge. It’s huge. It’s normally the first player in the world and again,
here we tend to see European Union on one side and single member-states on the other side. The European Union is also its member-states and so a little bit of a pooling and sharing approach would be useful.

And then also, we have to, I think, pass a message to our public opinion – if we still have one – that foreign policy is an investment and here we need to develop a narrative. I don’t need to explain that to Chatham House but connecting the dots of the fact that... be they challenges or opportunities, you cannot really live with the illusion of closing the door and you’re quiet and safe at home. But whatever investment you do in your foreign or external action, it’s something that is coming back for good or for bad in terms of economic growth, migration, pandemics, wars, conflicts, whatever. So it is, in an interconnected world the major investment we can do, be it on economic prosperity or be it on security.

So I think we have to develop this narrative because that could make it more possible for our decision makers, national parliaments, governments, European parliaments to allocate more money but first we have to spend the money we have better, in a more strategic way.

**Quentin Peel**

I am going to start taking two or three questions together.

**Question 5**

Amjad from BASIC, British American Security Information Council. I will go back to your questions about Libya and the Palestinian Authority. I mean, you mentioned that you personally committed to help the Palestinians and the Israelis to reach an agreement. What’s your plan for that? Do you have any plan in the future for the peace process?

You mentioned Libya. I mean let’s assume the Libyans do not succeed in reaching an agreement between themselves what are your options? Are you going to have a military intervention in Libya or a peacekeeping mission in there? Thank you.

**Quentin Peel**

Okay, well, that was two questions. I’ll try and keep you to one each. I once said this in front of Angela Merkel, I said, ‘No, no, you can’t ask two questions; just ask one.’ And she interrupted me and said, ‘Go on, you ask two, just one inside the other one.’

**Federica Mogherini**

I always say to journalists, ‘If you ask two questions, I choose which one I answer.’

**Quentin Peel**

That’s clever too, yes.
Question 6

John Lough, Russia and Eurasia programme here at Chatham House. I only have one question. I want to come back to the Minsk agreements. Chancellor Merkel, President Hollande and President Putin said they support the idea of negotiations between Russia, the EU and Ukraine over the DCFTA and, in particular, the question of finding a practical solution, as they put it, to the issues concerning Russia about the implementation of the DCFTA.

Can I ask you if you think those negotiations will take place and if they do, could this possibly lead to further delay in the implementation of the agreement?

Question 7

Andrew Wood, Russia Eurasia programme.

Quentin Peel

And former ambassador to Moscow.

Question 7

I wanted to ask a procedural question. When the Chancellor and the President went to talk at Minsk, did they have any direct mandate at all from the EU and if so, why did they conclude such an open-ended and unimplementable agreement as they did?

Quentin Peel

Which would you like to start with, the Middle East or Russia?

Federica Mogherini

All easy ones. I will start with Russia. I will start with Russia with this last question, which is not procedural; it’s very political, as is often the case.

They had on one side a general political mandate, which was the mandate of finding ways of implementing the first Minsk agreement and this is even formally, somehow, if you want the procedural aspect, mentioned in the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions that we have adopted at 28, one week before the meeting took place, where we stated clearly that more diplomatic efforts in all possible formats had to be done. Now, I don’t quote by heart but the meaning was that in order to facilitate implementation of the Minsk agreement, as a follow up of the Minsk agreement. So they had a general mandate and referring also, as it was done in previous Council conclusions, to the Normandy format as one of the means of holding the talks.

So they had this general political mandate of first using the format that was recognized by the European Union as such, as a good format in which to invest and secondly, they had a large mandate of working on the line of implementing Minsk One. I will not refer to Minsk One and Minsk Two because we only have one agreement in Minsk. The second passage is about the implementation of the first measures.
Obviously, they didn’t have the – not on the European side but, I guess, also nationally – the mandate on the tiny details but that was very much left to the negotiation between Kiev and Moscow. And I – this is a personal comment I make – we always have to remember that when we talk about the sovereignty of Ukraine, we also have to take that in mind and respect the sovereignty of Ukraine in its own decisions, whether they want to lead or how far they want to accept a deal concerning their own future.

And the other thing they had was a constant contact with me, for sure, over the night of the negotiations themselves. I was sometimes very hardly criticized for not sitting at the table but I can tell you, I think, that the way in which Germany and France led the negotiations with a very European way of sharing and of representing European positions at that table was excellent.

Quentin Peel

David Cameron was very criticized for not trying to be there as well.

Federica Mogherini

I am not David Cameron. You know, I’ve seen one of those meetings because one of the Normandy format meetings took place in Milan, when I was still a minister at the margins of the ASEM summit and on that occasion, we had a Normandy format traditional way, the four of them and we had an enlarged one, with UK and the European Union sitting at the table. And we also had, in my office actually, at the time in Milan, a meeting between the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine on the implementation of some of the Minsk agreements. So it reminds me very much of what is going on these days.

But I can tell you that the way in which I’ve seen the Normandy format working on that occasion is something that is worth investing in from the European perspective. As I tried to say in my address, I think that it would be good in the coming years not to have a crisis where it’s better to have some member-states in a format, rather than the European Union as such.

But this crisis has developed in a different way, in a time when, actually, I was still a member of parliament, not even a minister and the way in which the crisis has developed from the very beginning, I think makes it politically wise to use the format that has led so far to some result, even if limited but the only result we’ve had is through two different channels, the Normandy format on one side and the OSCE Trilateral Contact Group on the other side and the combination of these two, I think, will have to be continued to bring it somewhere.

The DCFTA implementation, yes, it’s one of the two points on which the European Union is mentioned specifically with a role in the package of measures for implementing it. One is gas and we are working in these hours with Vice-President Šefčovič to reconvene talks and the same will be on the DCFTA. We are starting that process and it is not for me now to foresee the outcome of the talks. What is important is that we play that kind of role and I think that it is interesting that in that to do list, the European Union is mentioned explicitly on the two trilateral dialogues, on things that have a broader perspective,
somehow, trade and energy and I think there might be some others that we might explore, not now, but at a later stage in a dialogue with Ukraine and with Russia.

On the Middle East peace process, my concrete plans. For the moment, the concrete plan is to prepare an international framework through the involvement of the key players, that to me are still the ones in the quartet, Russia – and it’s useful to involve Russia in other scenarios apart from Ukraine – Russia, UN, EU and the US, for sure. The US I take for granted. I even have a US Department of State pen, so I should change it. But, prepare that framework... the quartet was not meeting last year and I think that now we have to rebuild the sort of international framework for the negotiations to start again.

And the additional part of the concrete plan is to use the quartet to reach out to key Arab countries. I would mention three, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to try to revive the Arab peace initiative as a common framework for not only tackling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but also the Arab-Israeli conflict because I think that out of this crisis in the wider Middle East, we could have an opportunity to reshape common interests that are there among different actors. This is the concrete plan on the procedural point of view.

On the content, I think that we will have to look at the parameters but we will have to do that after the Israeli elections, not now.

Last but not least, Libya. I refuse to get into the Plan B because I think we have to make Plan A work. I don’t think there is any possible way in which one part can hope or dream or have the nightmare of ruling over the entire Libya alone, against the others. So we need to have some sort of, call it national government, call it consensus, call it dialogue. In any case, we cannot have the idea of one part of Libya either splitting because, in this case, we would have one other part that will go in a completely different direction or one part of Libya fighting the other one and thinking that through fighting they will have control over the whole country.

So we need to have an internal starting point. From that internal starting point, as I said, I think that the international community and European Union, together with the international community, can give all possible assistance to this starting point internally in Libya.

We discussed that in Washington last week with the US, with the UN and with Egypt, in a very constructive way but we need this first click inside the country, not to have a division, a split of the territory. The country is too complex to be ruled only by one part.

Quentin Peel

And at least... I mean, an awful thing from a terrible crisis but the crisis of the whole flow of migrants across the Mediterranean may galvanize Europe to know that it’s got to be a top priority, will it?

Federica Mogherini

Yes, I hope so.
Quentin Peel

I’m not very impressed by my own country’s contribution but I will leave that. I’m sorry, I can’t take any more questions, I do apologize to lots of people but I think our time is up. Thank you very much for your frankness, for your openness. I just want to say one last thing, let’s hope that there’s no bug in the State Department.

Federica Mogherini

We are not on the Chatham House rules.

Quentin Peel

Not here. Thank you very much indeed and thanks for coming.