

# The post-Lisbon High Representatives: An Introduction

By Maria Giulia Amadio Viceré, Giulia Tercovich and Caterina Carta

## Introduction

On 1 December 2019 the Lisbon Treaty (LT) celebrated its 10th anniversary. The 2009 legal text was an attempt to enhance the unity, consistency and effectiveness of the European Union's action in an increasingly volatile world. Nonetheless, the post-Lisbon time period has been characterized by multiple crises coming from the West, the East, the South, and even from within the European Union (EU) (Kearns 2018, Fabbrini 2015, Hyde-Price 2018, Lefkofridi and Schmitter 2014). The Libyan and Syrian civil wars (Bremberg 2016), the Ukrainian conflict (Cross and Karolewski 2016, Menon and MacFarlane 2014), escalating emergencies caused by migration and terrorism (Caporaso 2018, Kaunert and Leonard 2018), not to mention popular discontent – epitomised by BREXIT - (Chopin and Lequesne 2016) and the recent Covid-19 pandemic (Amadio Viceré and Tercovich, 2020), all underscored the challenges that the EU had to confront in the post-Lisbon era. In addition to this, US President Donald Trump's mixed signals towards EU and NATO engagement in Europe have made a coherent and effective EU foreign and security policy even more necessary (Koops 2012, Howorth 2017, Kaufman 2017, Stoke 2018).

Against this backdrop, our Special Issue (SI) aims to conduct a systematic assessment of EU foreign policy and of its evolution over the last decade. It does so by focusing on the role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP). Assessing the post-Lisbon HR/VPs provides important insights on EU foreign policy processes for a variety of reasons. In the first place, the reform of the HR/VP's post and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) were generally regarded as the most crucial strategic innovations the LT introduced in EU foreign policy (Carta 2011, Smith *et al.* 2015, Spence and Båtora 2015). Because of its qualifying institutional characteristics, the post-Lisbon HR/VP's post is located at the crossroad

between intergovernmental and supranational domains of the EU's external action. Therefore, focusing on how the HR/VP performs his/her role can cast light on the functioning of EU foreign policy post-Lisbon without restricting the analysis to either the intergovernmental or the supranational aspects of this policy sector (Amadio Viceré 2018).

Furthermore, the end of the mandate of the second post-Lisbon HR/VP Federica Mogherini provides the opportunity to examine the role conceptions, activities and performance of the first two post-Lisbon HR/VPs in a comparative perspective. Since personality-related factors may shape the incumbents' activities, tacking stock of the mandate of the two post-holders provides important insights on how this role is performed in practice. Lastly, focusing on this institutional post and on the activities of two incumbents also allows us to conduct a thorough study of the informal institutional practices that characterise member states' action in the post-Lisbon era (see Aggestam and Bicchi 2019; Bickerton *et al* 2015; Delreux and Keukeleire 2017). In this context, three specific questions guide our collection of articles: 1) Does the Lisbon Treaty's institutional construction enable or constrain the role of HR/VP? 2) From the point of view of agency, how have the two post-holders shaped the institutional role of the HR/VP in relation to the EU member states, other EU institutions and third actors? 3) What are the implications of the post-Lisbon HR/VP for the EU foreign policy governance?

To address these questions, we examine the role of HR/VP throughout international and domestic developments that characterised the post-Lisbon era. By adopting a comparative approach, we assess the two post-Lisbon HR/VPs from three main perspectives. Through an institutional perspective, we examine the HR/VP's role in the institutionalization of EU crisis management (Koops and Tercovich 2020) and in devising EU public diplomacy via social media (Aggestam and Hedling 2020). Through a geographical perspective, we then investigate the HR/VP's role in the nuclear negotiations with Iran (Bassiri Tabrizi and Kienzle 2020), in EU foreign policy towards Kosovo and Ukraine (Amadio Viceré 2020), and in EU's relations in the Southern Mediterranean (Bremberg 2020). Lastly, through a policy

focused perspective, we analyse the HR/VP's role in the development of the EU common security and defence policy (Calcara 2020).

Our SI makes a twofold contribution. On a theoretical level, it moves research beyond the state-of-the-art by engaging with the issue of conceptualising the role of the HR/VP, as well as of explaining his/her influence on EU foreign policy's governance and outcomes. While doing so, we shed light on the plethora of factors that may determine the HR/VP's role and its implications on EU foreign policy, particularly in times of international and domestic challenges.

In particular, we move beyond the debate between traditional EU scholarship, which argues that institutional leadership is generated by supranational entrepreneurship (Haas 1958, Moravcsik 1999, Pollack 2003), and the new intergovernmentalism that claims a limited and operational role for the HR/VP given the predominance of European Council deliberations (Bickerton *et al.* 2015). The possible occurrence of institutional leadership, not only within, but also across EU supranational and intergovernmental policies, has been largely neglected so far. Furthermore, we link this institutional leadership – or lack thereof – to foreign policy outcomes. This aspect is of crucial importance. In fact, while scholars investigated extensively the LT's modifications in the foreign policy sector, existing studies generally limit their analyses to institutional dynamics.

Relatedly, the post-Lisbon HR/VPs' agency remains a largely uncharted territory. Since the mandate of the second post-holder ended only very recently, this does not come as a surprise. Our contributors, on the contrary, do assess the question of agency, particularly the personality of the two incumbents, in the EU foreign policy's cases under consideration. While doing so, they also devote special attention to the implications of the LT's institutional modifications and of the two incumbents' agency on EU foreign policy governance.

On an empirical level, our SI offers a set of cross-case analyses that explore the role of the HR/VP in a variety of institutional settings and policy sectors. We examine a range of case studies that analyse not only the HR/VPs' mandates, but also EU foreign policies in the post-Lisbon era. By doing so, this

SI advances our understanding of the institutional dynamics on which EU foreign policy relies, on the EU approach to different geographical areas, and on recent developments in a highly relevant policy sector. The great differences among these cases, and the mixed methods adopted by our contributors, will serve to ensure the external validity of our SI's findings. In the last section of this introduction, we discuss our theoretical and empirical findings more in detail.

The remainder of this introduction is structured as follows. First, we dedicate a section to each of the research questions raised in this SI. In these individual sections, we highlight the puzzle pertaining to the issue considered, provide an overview of how previous studies addressed the research question raised – or relevant aspects related to it -, and point towards existing research gaps. Second, we review the individual contributions to this SI, while discussing our main findings and establishing avenues for future research.

## **The Institutions**

With the LT, the High Representative became both the vice-president of the Commission in charge of coordinating EU external relations' portfolios (TEU, Art. 17.4; 17.5) and the chair of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) (TEU, Art. 27.1), the intergovernmental forum composed of member states' foreign ministers. By carrying out her/his activities within and across supranational and intergovernmental foreign policy regimes, the HR/VP may create synergies and remove inconsistencies between these domains. The post-Lisbon HR/VP is also in charge of directing the broader EU's diplomatic set up (see Hill, Smith and Vanhoonacker 2017, Telò and Ponjaert 2016, Vanhoonacker and Pomorska 2016, Jørgensen and Laatikainen 2012). Indeed, diplomatic representation is still not fully unified at the EU level. While the Commission maintains some prerogatives in matters of external representation, the President of the European Council also maintains bilateral diplomatic relations with third countries on issues concerning EU common foreign and security policy (see Jørgensen and Wessel 2011, Carta 2013). Nonetheless, as 'head' of the EU's

network of delegations, the HR/VP may guarantee a coherent and united diplomatic representation in both bilateral diplomacy and in multilateral settings (TEU, Art. 27.2). While doing so, the HR/VP could increase the coherence of the EU's action (as per TEU, Art. 21.3), and therefore the effectiveness of EU activities in international politics (Gauttier 2004).

One may argue that, in light of this, the LT granted a powerful role for institutional leadership to the HR/VP. Yet, under the current provisions, it is not clear whether the HR/VP is an autonomous political actor or an implementor of the European Council's and the Council of the EU's decisions. In principle, European integration theories could provide important insights on the institutional functioning of EU foreign policy (see Bergman and Niemann 2015), and hence on whether the LT's institutional context enabled or constrained the HR/VP's role. However, under the implicit assumption that cooperation in this policy sector would remain intergovernmental, this scholarship generally disregarded EU foreign policy's institutional functioning (Menon 2010). Theories of European integration, in fact, usually entangle the debate on institutional leadership in the supranational-intergovernmental divide. By positing that institutional leadership is only generated by supranational entrepreneurship, they run the risk of neglecting relevant aspects of EU foreign policy processes post-Lisbon, including the institutional role that the post-Lisbon HR/VP may play.

Neo-functionalism is a good case in point (Haas 1958, Pollack 2003). For a long time, the scholarly community believed that this theoretical framework would be incompatible with examinations of EU foreign policy, a regime mostly working according to an intergovernmental logic (see Krotz and Maher 2011). Still, because of the LT's institutional design, the HR/VP's post challenges the supranational – intergovernmental divide. As a matter of fact, the HR/VP's role in EU foreign policy is partially supranational (see TEU, Title V; TFEU, Part V). In her/his capacity as VP of the European Commission, the HR/VP should guarantee the consistency of EU activities within the supranational side of EU foreign policy (TEU, Art. 18.4). In particular, s/he may do so by directing and coordinating the work of the Commissioners' Group on External Action (Blockmans and Russack 2015).

Nonetheless, the HR/VP's ability to guarantee consistency within the supranational foreign policy regime cannot be taken for granted. Previous studies showed, for example, that the first post-Lisbon HR/VP and the EEAS faced a series of difficulties in cooperating not only with the European Council and the rotating Presidency, but also with the Commission and the European Parliament (EP) (Sus 2014). Along similar lines, empirical evidence shows that institutional competition between the Commission and the HR/VP severely hindered the role of the first post-Lisbon HR/VP, Catherine Ashton (Helwig 2017).

Furthermore, the HR/VP may foster supranational governance in EU foreign and security policy broadly defined (see Kaunert and Léonard 2018). While doing so, s/he may generate spill-overs (Schmitter 1969; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008) not only in intergovernmental policy sectors, but also in those sectors that have both intergovernmental and supranational features (e.g. Justice and Home Affairs; see Monar 2011). To foster such development, the HR/VP, or the HR/VP with the Commission's support, may undertake policy initiatives by referring to "any question relating to common foreign and security policy to the Council" and by submitting to it "initiatives or proposals" (TEU, Art. 30.1), including jointly with the Commission (TEU, Art. 22.2). The HR/VP could also enhance the role of the EP in EU foreign policy broadly defined,<sup>i</sup> by offering it valuable insights in intergovernmental matters and following its recommendations on the EU foreign policy's implementation (TEU, Art. 36).

Liberal intergovernmentalism assumes that institutional leadership is generated by supranational mediation, rather than leadership. In this account, EU intergovernmental negotiations consist in hard bargaining among member states about the distribution of the gains deriving from interstate agreements (Moravcsik 1999). Indeed, according to the LT, the HR/VP may play the role of a consensus-builder within the FAC (see TEU, Art. 31.2). In parallel, through her/his role of chair of the FAC, the HR/VP may promote consensus among the Heads of State and Government in the framework of the European Council's meetings (TEU, Art. 15.2). However, s/he may be unable to do so in

distributional conflicts originating from exogenous shocks, where resources to be allocated are scarce (Walton and McKersie 1965). On these occasions, in fact, national governments would attempt to pursue their goals despite conflicting interests among the member states, and delegate to other member states the costs of policy solutions. Since EU institutions rarely own information or expertise unavailable to states, the HR/VP could not play a fundamental role in generating cooperation. At best, s/he could play a mediating role (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2018). Thus, by vetoing decisions and exerting threats of exit, the most powerful member states would be able to determine EU foreign policy general direction.

Contrary to traditional theories of European integration, the proponents of the new intergovernmentalist approach (Bickerton *et al.*, 2015; Puetter, 2012) claim that deeper integration without greater supranationalisation is frequently taking place in EU governance post-Maastricht (c.f. Dehousse, 2011). This distinctive form of integration generally occurs in areas corresponding to traditional core state powers (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2014), such as foreign and security policy. In the post-Lisbon era, especially, the pre-eminence of the European Council points towards this development in EU foreign policy governance (Fabbrini 2015). To be sure, it is based on the guidelines provided by the European Council that the HR/VP contributes to “the development” of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in her/his capacity as chair of the FAC (TEU, Art. 15). The HR/VP’s role as chair of the FAC can only be exerted within the limits established by the Heads of State and Governments in EU external action as well. In fact, the FAC “elaborate[s] the Union’s external action on the basis of strategic guidelines laid down by the European Council” (TEU, Art. 16.6). In addition to this, if the HR/VP fails in the mediation envisaged by TEU, Art. 31.2, the Council may request to refer the matter to the European Council for a decision. As for EU foreign policy’s implementation, in her/his capacity as FAC chair, the HR/VP shall guarantee “the implementation of the decisions adopted by the European Council” (TEU, Art. 27.1). Lastly, when the heads of state and government do not reach consensus on a specific

issue within the European Council, the HR/VP is not allowed to express positions on that issue (Thym 2011).

Indeed, the proponents of new intergovernmentalism speculated about the institutional context structuring EU foreign and security policy post-Lisbon - including the reshape of the HR/VP's post - (See Menon, 2011; Mérand and Angers, 2013; Smith *et al.* 2015; Weiss, 2013). More specifically, existing studies show how the predominance of the European Council's deliberations relegates the HR/VP to a limited and operational role (Amadio Viceré 2016; Amadio Viceré and Fabbrini 2017). Still, the wider scholarly community largely disagrees about the key drivers behind institutional practices occurring in EU intergovernmental sectors (See Bickerton *et al.*, 2015; Schimmelfenning, 2015). Despite its differences with traditional European integration theories, new intergovernmentalism does not overcome the supranational-intergovernmental divide either. Added to this, with only few exceptions (see Caporaso 2018; Fabbrini 2014, 2015; Menon 2011), both traditional and more recent streams of literature have not investigated the influence of the LT's institutional structure on foreign policy outcome in-depth yet.

In our SI, we move beyond these dichotomic analytical categories. Hence, we do consider the possibility of the HR/VP's institutional leadership to occur, not only within, but also across EU supranational and intergovernmental policies. While doing so, we devote specific consideration to the foreign policy outcomes that the LT's institutional construction generated over the past decade.

## **The Agency**

Existing literature on the post-Lisbon EU foreign policy pays scant attention to the agency of the HR/VPs. Certainly, this may be because, until recently, it was too early to make a comprehensive assessment of the two post-Lisbon HR/VPs' mandates. Nonetheless, the incumbents' use of the autonomy and the discretionary power granted to them by the LT is an important element to take into consideration when assessing the HR/VP's role (see Hawkins and Jacoby 2006). The EU is a complex



system characterised by multiple separations of power, in which competencies and responsibilities are often blurred (Fabbrini 2015). In this context, the HR/VP has to juggle to find the common denominator between member states' interests and EU institutions' preferences. Still, the HR/VP may have - within the constraints of her/his institutional mandate - the possibility to make discretionary choices that influence EU foreign policy.

The personal characteristics of the office-holder might significantly influence EU foreign policy's outcomes. Nonetheless, the first stream of literature on the post-Lisbon institutional framework largely neglected the role of the HR/VP as an agent (Pollack 2002, p. 207; Huber and Shipan 2002). Preliminary analyses on the first post-Lisbon HR/VP mainly focused on the situational factors (Tömmel 2013) characterizing her nomination (Barber 2010, Howorth 2011). Member states' nomination as first post-Lisbon HR/VP of a Briton lacking "any experience of international leadership and indeed in political stature" (Howorth 2011, p. 5) raised concerns about whether such decision could jeopardise the LT's objective to strengthen EU foreign policy. Novak (2014), especially, questioned the assumption that a single representative for the EU foreign policy would allow the EU to speak with a single voice. Making reference to the disappointment that followed Ashton and Van Rompuy's nominations and their 'incompetence or lack of charisma' (p.71), she argues against an excessive personalization of EU's representation.

It was the volume edited by Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Rüger (2011) that, against this backdrop, marked a change in the study of the HR/VP's agency. These scholars expressively identified individual agency among the key factors that, given the LT's institutional constraints, could explain the HR/VP's performance. Their book consists mainly of an examination of Javier Solana's activities as High Representative. Still, it also offers a reflection on the performance of the new HR/VP Catherine Ashton during the first months of her mandate. In particular, these scholars claim that Ashton's initial performance was "not too bad", especially if one considers that holding the HR/VP's institutional post had been likened to a "mission impossible" when the LT entered into force (Rüger 2011, p. 220).

Towards the end of Ashton's mandate, the HR/VP's agency came under the spotlight. Helwig (2013), for instance, reflected on the performance of the first HR/VP in filling the capability-expectations gap (Hill 1993). Similarly, Howorth (2014) provided a first assessment of HR/VP Ashton's performance during her mandate, including the launch of the EEAS and her involvement in a series of policy dossiers - i.e. the Middle East Peace Process, the Arab Spring's unfolding, the Western Balkans and Iran, and Ukraine -. Overall, by the end of the first post-Lisbon HR/VP's mandate, scholars largely agreed on the fact that too many expectations were placed on Catherine Ashton as first post-holder (Helwig and R uger 2014, Howorth 2014, Helwig 2015). Since then, the academic debate on the post-Lisbon HR/VP's agency evolved in two opposite directions.

First, some scholars criticised the logic underpinning the post-Lisbon institutional structure, arguing that it creates too many constraints on the HR/VP's agency. Helwig and R uger (2014) claimed that, as the first post holder and thanks to the margin of manoeuvre member states granted to her, Ashton had the opportunity to leave "a bigger stamp" on the interpretation of the HR/VP's role. Nonetheless, she was too busy in finding compromises between diverging expectations and interests inside the EU. Similarly, Helwig (2017) stressed that the HR/VP's discretion as an agent performing her role was particularly limited by her interaction with the European Commission and the EP.

Second, other scholars argued that precisely because the description of the HR/VP's institutional post enshrined in the LT is marred by a certain degree of institutional complexity, if not ambiguity, the personal characteristics of the post-holder could significantly shape this institutional role in EU foreign policy governance (Amadio Vicer  2015). Howorth (2014), for example, stressed that the HR/VP's individual knowledge and personality could significantly shape such role, concluding that "the job description itself remained largely to be written by the incumbent". (p.19).

This tension in the scholarly debate was not solved at the end of HR/VP Ashton's mandate. In fact, the impossibility to make a comparison with another incumbent with different personal characteristics

undermined generalizable conclusions. In a nutshell, the opportunity – or lack thereof - for the HR/VP to play her role as agent with certain degrees of autonomy and amount of discretion within the post-Lisbon institutional framework remained open to question.

It is within this context that our contributors consider the factors related to the personality of the two post-Lisbon HR/VPs. While doing so, they assess the question of agency and its implications on different case-studies and on EU foreign policy governance more in general.

### **The Governance**

With the appointment of Federica Mogherini as new HR/VP in 2014, a comparative analysis between the two post-holders was finally possible. Amadio Viceré's book (2018) was the first comparative study examining the mandates of two different post-Lisbon HR/VPs. By doing so, she could draw some conclusions on the institutional role of the post-Lisbon HR/VP beyond speculations on the incumbents' personalities. As the time went by, thanks to the possibility to compare the two post-holders, an additional stream of literature emerged. In fact, scholars finally began to assess the role of two HR/VPs within the EU foreign policy governance and their capacity to shape it.

Indeed, EU foreign policy governance seemed to be evolving in directions that differed from those envisaged in the LT. Beyond the traditional vertical dimension of Europeanization, horizontal and informal dynamics between EU foreign policy actors had emerged (see Aggestam and Bicchi 2019; Youngs 2020). In the post-Lisbon era, member states frequently engaged in cooperation and coordination rather than in law-making processes. As these practices blurred the distinction between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism (Howorth 2012), scholars began to speak about new intergovernmentalism (Puetter 2004, Puetter 2012, Bickerton *et al.* 2015, Morillas 2019). Added to this, through forms of cross-loading, member states often influenced each other outside the treaty framework while remaining anchored to it (see Aggestam and Bicchi 2019; Delreux and Keukeleire 2017). These new practices in EU foreign policy governance also included how leadership was exerted

and the potential consequences for the HR/VP. For example, Aggestam and Johansson (2017) suggest that the LT's institutional framework provided fertile ground for a "leadership paradox". This paradox refers especially to the role of the HR/VP and the EEAS, which are confronted with informal leadership practices of EU member states (Helwig 2017). Scholars devoted particular attention to the role of informal groups in influencing EU foreign policy. In this regard, Alcaro (2018) offered some preliminary considerations of the institutional role of the HR/VP in informal groups during the international negotiations with Iran. Similarly, Amadio Viceré (2018) pointed towards the emergence of these distinctive patterns of cooperation among member states in EU foreign policy post-Lisbon. Against this backdrop, scholars also started looking at the HR/VP's role in determining foreign policy outcomes across different policy dossiers (e.g. Amadio Viceré 2015, Amadio Viceré and Fabbrini 2017).

Overall, these analyses point towards the need to go beyond the traditional understanding of the EU policy's formation as the result of uploading and downloading member states' preferences. Moreover, they also suggest a new scenario with new groups of actors, with whom the HR/VP will need to interact, and possibly coordinate.

Certainly, the end of the second HR/VP mandate offered the opportunity for scholars to further reflect on the role of the HR/VP (Tonra 2019) as one of the LT's innovations that should have fostered a more coherent EU foreign policy (Helwig and Rüger 2014). Yet the number of studies that compare the two HR/VPs are still limited. Such comparative analyses would contribute to shedding light on the role played by the HR/VP in implementing the LT's institutional changes (Spence and Batora 2015), on how the tasks of the HR/VP's post are developing (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014), and on the challenges and opportunities for the HR/VP in EU foreign policy governance post-Lisbon. The contributions to this SI constitute an effort to fill this gap. The next section will discuss them in detail.

## **The Contribution and Structure of the Special Issue**

All contributions to this special issue reflect on the way in which the role of HR/VP has evolved alongside challenging international and domestic developments. More specifically, the contributions address the three questions that guide our SI: they look at the LT's institutional construction and reflect on the elements that may enable or constrain the HR/VP's role; they examine the agency of the first two post-Lisbon HR/VPs and draw conclusions on how the two different personalities made use of the degrees of autonomy and discretion allowed by the post-Lisbon institutional framework; and they provide analyses and empirical evidence about the implications on the post-Lisbon HR/VP for the EU foreign policy governance.

The first two contributions focus on the HR/VPs 'political leadership'. They assess respectively the institutionalisation of the EEAS and its crisis management structures (Koops and Tercovich 2020) and the public diplomacy performance of the HR/VP in the social media (Aggestam and Hedling 2020). More specifically, contribution 1 (Koops and Tercovich 2020) assesses how the two HR/VPs and their advisors sought to shape the EEAS and its crisis management institutions. By combining the literature on European political leadership, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and political psychology, the authors examine how the leadership approaches of Catherine Ashton and Federica Mogherini were influenced by the institutional setting, situational factors and their personal qualities (Tömmel 2013; 2017). Through an institutional perspective, Koops and Tercovich (2020) recognize that the LT offered new opportunities for the HR/VP. However, they stress that the new HR/VP's post is challenged by significant institutional constraints. Koops and Tercovich contend that the relevance of institutional constraints and opportunities depend on the actions and approaches of the postholders. Their thorough analytical framework, thus, contributes to the special issue's goals by systematically analysing the interconnected effect of institutional, situational and personal factors in generating the political leadership capacity and style of the post-holders.

Contribution 2 (Aggestam and Hedling 2020) assesses the leadership potential and capacity of the HR/VP by specifically looking at public diplomatic performance of the HR/VP Federica Mogherini in

the social media during the elaboration of the EU Global Strategy (Tocci 2017). Drawing on Goffmann's role theory and on the concept of "leaderization" – e.g. the way in which the mediatization of politics influences both leadership styles and the interaction with followers – Aggestam and Hedling underline an ambivalent datum. On the one hand, exercising leadership in an intergovernmental field such as foreign policy still proves to be difficult. On the other, a "bolstered leadership mandate combined with the changing media context of foreign policy have opened up new space and opportunities for the HR/VP to perform leadership in EU foreign policy" (Aggestam and Hedling 2020, p.2). Their dramaturgical approach allows them to follow the way in which leadership is performed through a series of 'performative acts', staged and negotiated in a dynamic process of interaction with a given audience. Their research contributes to the analysis of the HR/VP's agency by highlighting how the post-Lisbon set up has prompted a far more visible platform to perform leadership, despite the endurance of intergovernmental constraints.

The special issue then proposes three case studies with a geographical focus. These articles deal respectively with the EU's relations with Iran (contribution 3, Bassiri Tabrizi and Kienzle 2020), the Ukrainian crisis and the increasingly strained enlargement policy in the Western Balkans (contribution 4, Amadio Viceré 2020), and the political transition in the Middle East and Northern Africa (contribution 5, Bremberg 2020). Contribution 3 (Bassiri Tabrizi and Kienzle 2020) traces the evolution of Solana's, Ashton's and Mogherini's participation in the nuclear negotiations with Iran, from the first contacts with the E3 to the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015. Their approach focuses on both the personal and organizational factors that contribute to the HR/VPs' capacity to establish their influence in the context of informal negotiations. The analysis underlines that the LT's reforms had only a minor impact on the HR/VP's capacity to exert influence. Personal qualities, in terms of problem-solving and trust-building, contributed instead to the strengthening of different HR/VPs' political capital. Their agency allowed them to establish themselves as bridge-builders within the *directoires* and between the *directoires* and other actors. Hence, the article

contributes to our SI by revealing the centrality of personal factors and the influence of the different post-holders on the functioning of EU foreign and security policy's institutional framework.

Drawing upon a broad conceptualization of foreign and security policy and adopting a new intergovernmentalist approach, contribution 4 (Amadio Viceré 2020) examines the role of the HR/VP as chair of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and in her capacity as Vice President of the European Commission in two potentially highly divisive policy dossiers: Kosovo and Ukraine. She shows the pre-eminence of the European Council over the HR/VP in EU decision-making processes. However, she also demonstrates that when member states agree on the necessity of a collective EU action and are willing to engage in consensus-seeking practices, the HR/VP may be able to significantly influence EU foreign policy. When consensus is not an option or is fragmented, member states may seek consensus outside the treaty framework and form *ad hoc* coalitions in coordination with EU institutions, including the HR/VP. By doing so, they generate a kind of informal differentiated integration in EU foreign policy governance, despite the centralization prompted by the LT. Amadio Viceré, thus, contributes to the SI's goals by highlighting three important elements. In terms of institutional constraints, she demonstrates that, notwithstanding the European Council's ability to exert control over the HR/VP activities, the two HR/VPs Ashton and Mogherini managed to play a role as consensus-seekers and contribute to the achievement of specific outcomes in the FAC. In terms of agency, she stresses the relevance of personal factors for explaining the role and leadership style of the two post-holders. She contends that in both cases, the HR/VPs' brokering role and consensus-seeking attitude managed to add a European perspective to the post-Lisbon foreign policy intergovernmental setting. Finally, and relatedly, in terms of foreign policy governance, Amadio Viceré demonstrates that if there is consensus within the European Council, the new post of HR/VP can help foster EU foreign policy's consistency and effectiveness.

Contribution 5 (Bremberg 2020) looks at the role of the HR/VPs in shaping EU's foreign and security policy towards the Southern Neighbourhood (i.e. North Africa and the Middle East). Drawing upon

insights from practice theory in international relations and EU studies, it retraces the discursive practices of the HR/VPs in the EU's relations with the Southern Mediterranean, by analysing the way in which the region is discursively framed in key strategic documents. While the region has been at the epicentre of political and geopolitical upheavals, and notwithstanding the region's great strategic importance for both the EU and its member states, Bremberg (2020) shows a high degree of continuity in the EU's foreign policy practices. In fact, substantial changes occurred at the rhetorical, rather than at the practical level. Bremberg (2020) contributes to the SI by analysing the way in which the LT enabled the role of the HR/VP and the kind of agency that the HR/VP exercised *vis-à-vis* the EU member states, EU institutions and third actors. Concerning the first research question, he contends that the LT's reforms did not change dramatically the HR/VP's ability to shape EU's foreign policy towards the Southern Mediterranean partners. This remains largely defined by highly complex domestic contexts and disagreements among the member states. Hence, despite the formal strengthening of the HR/VP's role, the EU's discourse and practices towards the Southern Mediterranean partners are still characterised by a substantial degree of continuity. With regard to the second research question, Bremberg posits that, compared to Solana, Mogherini faced significant constraints in the drafting of the 2016 EU Global Strategy. Therefore, personal skills, practical know-how, and informal abilities prove to be central requisites to exercise of political agency.

Finally, these three geographical case studies are followed by a policy-focused article that covers the role that the HR/VP has played in a strategic sector of EU's foreign policy integration: Permanent Structured Cooperation and defence cooperation, in the framework of the European Defence Agency (EDA, Contribution 6; Calcara 2020). Contribution 6 (Calcara 2020) looks at the ways in which the HR/VP managed to navigate strategic cooperation in the intergovernmental security and defence matters. The author examines how the HR/VP has tried to steer the implementation of a number of new defence initiatives, notably a new Permanent Structured Cooperation on security and defence (PESCO) and a European Defence Fund. Calcara (2020) examines how these new initiatives are likely



to affect both the role of the HR/VP in the coming future and the relations with the United States. This article contributes to our understanding of the HR/VP's agency in security and defence by highlighting the impact of personal characteristics and role conceptions, as well as the centrality of windows of opportunity provided by the member states and the European Commission. In terms of agency, Federica Mogherini proved to be far more active than Ashton in enhancing her role in security and defence matters. In this regard – *mutatis mutandi* – Mogherini's approach resembled the one of Solana, but was supported by the LT's innovations, which offered her a platform to navigate both intergovernmental and supranational settings. In terms of institutional constraints, during Ashton's mandate the member states and the Commission's absence of interest in this regard, explains both the lack of advancements in cooperation on security and defence and the lack of progress in the defence-industrial field. By contrast, Mogherini's mandate was characterised by both an enhanced willingness to cooperate of the member states and by a proactiveness of the Commission in matters of defence-industrial policy. Hence, as Calcara concludes, "personality-related factors, institutional constraints and windows of opportunity are equally critical in assessing the different approaches of the two HR/VPs in security and defence".

This brief overview aimed to provide insights into the conceptual and empirical endeavours of the following contributions, while certainly not paying adequate tribute to their analytical complexity. In the following pages, an attentive reader will find an insightful and eclectic assessment of the HR/VP's performances in EU foreign policy.

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<sup>i</sup> Although the EP is a co-legislator with the Council in supranational decision-making processes (TFEU, Art. 294), this institution is essentially excluded from intergovernmental decision-making processes.