

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

The High Representative is charged with coordinating and carrying out the EU's foreign and security policy – known as the 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' (CFSP) and the 'Common Security and Defence Policy' (CSDP).

How is the High Representative appointed?

The European Council, which comprises the heads of state or government of all EU Member States, appoints the High Representative through a 'qualified majority' vote – a system whereby countries have a certain number of votes depending on their population size; a certain threshold must be met for agreement. The President of the Commission must be in agreement with the decision.

The High Representative has also the role of Vice-President of the European Commission which is as a body voted on by the European Parliament before taking office.

The High Representative is appointed for a five-year term, which coincides with the five-year mandate of the European Commission.

What does he or she do?

The High Representative's role is wide-ranging. It involves:

- steering foreign policy on behalf of the EU;
- coordinating the EU's foreign policy tools – development assistance, trade, humanitarian aid and crisis response - as the Vice-President of the European Commission;
- building consensus between the 28 EU countries and their respective priorities – including through monthly meetings between EU foreign ministers, which she chairs;
- attending regular meetings between leaders of EU countries in the European Council;

- representing the EU at international fora, such as the United Nations;
- heading the European Defence Agency and the EU Institute for Security Studies.

History

The role of 'High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy' was created by the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999. A decade later, the Treaty of Lisbon expanded the role, adding significant new responsibilities. Called from that point onwards the 'High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy', the post was also extended to include the role of Vice-President of the Commission.

On the same day that the Treaty of Lisbon took effect – 1 December 2009 – the expanded position of High Representative/Vice-President was officially inaugurated and the first person to hold the position – Catherine Ashton – started her mandate.

Former High Representatives

Catherine Ashton

2009-2014: High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission

The role was created under the Lisbon Treaty. Ashton was appointed by the European Council – the heads of state were entitled to use qualified majority voting, but the decision was consensual. The appointment was made in agreement with the then President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso.

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Javier Solana

1999-2009: High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Secretary General of the Council of the European Union.

The role was created under the Treaty of Amsterdam. Solana was appointed by the European Council.