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Reforming the European External Action Service

Ashton needs to tackle shortcomings in the EU's diplomatic service

Today the European Parliament adopted its recommendations for reforming the European External Action Service. When the service was founded in December 2010, EU High Representative and foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton was tasked to review the functioning of the service within three years' time. She is expected to release a report to that effect in the coming weeks. With its critical and constructive recommendations, the European Parliament is contributing to the ongoing debate. After today's votes, **Franziska Brantner**, Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs of the Greens/EFA group, said:

"Although nobody should expect miracles after only three years, some important structural short-comings have emerged in the External Action Service's operation. Catherine Ashton should quickly address these issues. The service is marred by three key problems: It is too top-heavy, too inflexible, and its structures are not conducive to forging a comprehensive policy approach.

"The External Action Service's leadership level is inflated and there are too many layers of hierarchy, unnecessary institutional duplication and, at times, unclear lines of command. As a result, the External Action Service wastes money on high salaries and responds far too slowly to changing circumstances.

"Reforms are also needed to enable the EU to become more coherent in its external relations and address conflict situations in a comprehensive manner. For this to happen, Ms Ashton needs finally to put in place functioning links between the External Action Service and the European Commission, and fully to assume her leadership and coordination role as Vice-president of the Commission. Moreover, in the field of conflict prevention and crisis response, Ms Ashton needs to integrate the different structures currently scattered across her service and strengthen their civilian component. Only through an integrated and comprehensive approach can conflicts be resolved in a lasting manner.

"I also believe that Ms Ashton's successor will need to be supported by Deputy High Representatives. It has become clear that no one person alone can assume all the tasks and responsibility assigned to Ms Ashton's office. Finally, EU embassies should be empowered, and be allocated the necessary resources, to provide consular services, thereby creating immediate added-value for EU citizens who find themselves in emergency situations abroad."

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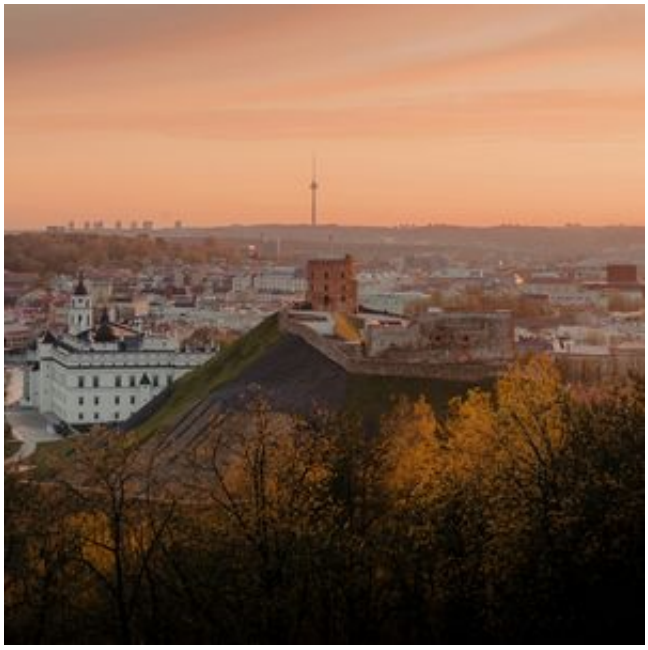
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