

# *Arrivederci Mogherini*

The empty legacy of Frederica Mogherini is definite but her successor, Josep Borrell, should not gripe

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Author: Dr. Dren Doli\*

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Group for Legal and Political Studies  
“Rexhep Luci” str. 16/I  
Prishtina 10 000, Kosovo  
Website: [www.legalpoliticalstudies.org](http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org)  
E-mail: [office@legalpoliticalstudies.org](mailto:office@legalpoliticalstudies.org)  
Tel/fax.: +381 38 234 456

*\*(Dr. Dren Doli is a Lecturer of Public International Law and International Organizations at the Faculty of Law of the University of Prishtina, and is a co-founder and Senior Research Fellow at the Group for Legal and Political Studies, independent think tank based in Prishtina, Kosovo.)*

## **ARRIVEDERCI MOGHERINI. THE EMPTY LEGACY OF FEDERICA MOGHERINI IS DEFINITE BUT HER SUCCESSOR, JOSEP BORRELL, SHOULD NOT GRIPE**

It is a fiction that guided Mogherini's preferences and beliefs that Kosovo-Serbia dialogue can result in something tangible. The fiction is meant to simplify the divide that makes Kosovo and Serbia be apart, and further minimize the impact that individual agendas and orientations can have in the dialogue.

An enthusiast of birdcage philosophy that saw relations between Kosovo and Serbia with ease, a trifling item in her agenda - Federica Mogherini - the EU's foreign policy chief, was exceptionally futile and ended her mandate with close to a zero impact on helping Kosovo and Serbia agreeing to a comprehensive peace pact. But is this fiction the main reason that affected Mogherini's inability to succeed? Contemplating the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia as insignificant and facile embodies the best of Mogherini's zero-sum politics. While relations between Kosovo and Serbia are manageable, irrespective of sporadic and artificial tensions, their essence is far more troubling and hard to address. There was no reason for Mogherini to consider the dialogue a part-time enterprise which flips and flops with indeterminate frequency and intensity. Addressing a historical divide between Kosovo and Serbia and reframing their narrative about the past and the future requires preparedness, delicacy, coordination and effort. Mogherini was not inclined to agree. Likewise, in her attempt to fail every tangible chance to make peace happen, Mogherini was about to end her mandate with an appalling mistake - facilitating a treaty that had as a bent the idea of territorial exchange between Kosovo and Serbia, as her recipe to establish 'the long-awaited peace'.

Yet, regardless of Mogherini's talent, the likelihood for any (EU) high ranked diplomat to succeed a deal between Kosovo and Serbia was, and still is, compared to any other 'global' issue, visible and it ought not to be precluded. However, misplaced this viewpoint might be it has its reasons. Western Balkans rests as a fundamental point of the EU's enlargement plan, and an exclusive region of its influence. On the other hand, Kosovo and Serbia, with few variations, uttered their ambition to join the European Union. While the EU remained open to the idea of enlargement, it made clear to Kosovo and Serbia that they need to agree on to a long-term solution. The exchange was straightforward: their accession to the EU was interlinked while the long-lasting peace agreement between them remains the condition sine qua non.

Isolation from member states and opaqueness of the dialogue is yet an added layer of Mogherini's slip. EU member states apprehensive attention to Kosovo-Serbia dialogue process and its outcome were coherent, since, either the failure or its success will inevitably prompt unparalleled consequences. Throughout her mandate, however, no principle and position about the dialogue was agreed. While not every country shares the same weight and potential to impact for good, the U.S., Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain have the knack to influence the impasse in the dialogue but also refine the final agreement. Isolated and running an agenda, merely sketched by parties - Thaci and Vucic -, her (and the EU) 'would-be' success remained nothing but plain. On the other hand, the reluctance of Germany's Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron towards Mogherini became unavoidable. Discouraged

and angered with her (and EU's) failure to maintain the dialogue in a normal course and agree on a deal, Merkel and Macron launched a separate initiative and vowed to give it some meaning and bring it to another level. So far, they are still trying. Consequences of an opaque and unprincipled dialogue process which offered parties the luxury to feel unconstrained on preferences and choices were and remain more than perceptible.

Third, by recycling Ashton's incremental and bottom-up approach, Mogherini was prevented to recognize that her predecessor's approach was not devised to address the stalemate between Kosovo and Serbia, let alone achieve a historic peace agreement. Overlooking Mogherini's profile, and notwithstanding inaudible misgivings, no one doubted her instinct. All she had to do, however, was reset the dialogue and follow an agenda that straightforwardly rejects intermediary and wicked solutions. Promoting altogether, democracy, free market, cooperation, cohabitation and multiculturalism as main elements of the peace process between Kosovo and Serbia was, and remained, indispensable. Above all, that was just one reminder of the values she represented as the EU's foreign policy chief and vice-president of the European Commission.

The fourth and final point relates to the false hope that Thaci and Vucic, alone, are able to reach a peace deal. In countries where political structure is integrated in a power vertical axis and in which all political power is concentrated in the hands of the few, it is hardly imaginable that a peace agreement

would be a result of the profound affection for democracy and amity. Well, in the Balkans it is not. Thaci and Vucic aggressive attitude towards each other and the dialogue is not only driven by a fear of regime change but also by the belief that this agreement is not a win-win solution. From many that live in the past, including Vucic, history of Kosovo has not been written. The dialogue is perceived as the process to narrate it again. On the other hand, Kosovo is still muddling between democracy and clanships. Its current leadership has started to forget the promise they delivered to their own people and the west, to transform Kosovo into a nascent democracy. This not only is impacting Kosovo's developments but is hindering its ability to be perceived as a reliable partner in the dialogue process. Regardless of perpetual threats to the democracy (in Kosovo and Serbia), populist discourse, nationalistic and hatred debates, and the misuses of the dialogue, Mogherini was a bystander. Helping to overcome the long-standing mistrust between parties and implementing an agenda that addresses peace, reconciliation, and simultaneously, democratization was existential. Her passive and daydreaming approach only prolonged (and failed as a result) the prospects to secure a peace deal between Kosovo and Serbia, and minimized the likelihood for a fast track recovery of the entire region.

But legacy is not chanceful. It needs to be projected, prioritized and built. Hopes are, nonetheless, that her successor, Josep Borrell, sees this setback as opportunity, and although unfair, takes advantage of Mogherini's misfortune. In the second chapter of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, democracy must prevail.

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