

- Es gilt das gesprochene Wort -

**Laudatio von Jean Asselborn,
Außen- und Europaminister von Luxemburg,
zur Gelegenheit der Verleihung des Preises 2023
der Deutschen Initiative für den Nahen Osten (DINO)**

**an Federica Mogherini,
der Rektorin des Europakollegs in Brügge,**

Münster, am 24. August 2023

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

Es ist mir eine grosse Freude, heute gemeinsam mit Ihnen eine aussergewöhnliche Frau zu ehren, die grosse Verdienste um die europäische Aussenpolitik im Allgemeinen, und um den Nahen Osten im Besonderen hat, Federica Mogherini.

Dear Federica,

It is sad that you are not able to be physically present with us here in Münster today, but technology makes it possible to be together in a digital way. We have known each other for almost ten years now. During this time, our paths have crossed in various places and capacities. As you certainly recall, we first worked together in 2014 as colleagues, when you were Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy. Since then, a close friendship has developed between us that continues to this very day. It is therefore a great privilege for me to deliver this speech in your honor and to participate in today's Ceremony of the awarding of the 2023 *Prize of the German Initiative for the Middle East* (colloquially called "DINO") to you.

It is an award that is both timely and well-deserved, and a recognition of your achievements in particular as former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This tribute to your long-time commitment holds especially true for your diplomatic engagement with the Middle East, a neighboring region whose fate has always been closely intertwined with Europe and the European Union.

Federica, you were born and raised in Rome, and you developed already at a young age a strong passion for politics and international affairs, as well as for the cause of the common people.

As a student, you attended the well-known *Sapienza University* of Rome, where you earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science. Your special interest in the Middle East already became clear back then, when you decided to write your final thesis on *Islam and politics*, while on your Erasmus programme at *Sciences Po* in Aix-en-Provence. As you yourself once said: "*My passion was reading newspapers - and I became curious, in particular, about Islam and the Arab world.*" This proved to be a special interest that would accompany you throughout your career so far.

You undertook your first political steps at a very young age and became active in student politics from the end of the 1980s. You served on the board of the European Youth Forum and you were vice-president of the Organisation of the young European socialists. Your thematic focus was, from the beginning, on human rights and international affairs.

Your rise in Italian politics however began in the late 1990s, when you joined the "*Partito democratico della sinistra*", the Italian Democratic Party of the Left. Not least because of your talent and commitment, you were appointed as a member of the Lazio Regional Council in 2003.

Your further rise through party ranks was swift and in 2008, you were elected to the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament, representing the Veneto constituency. During your tenure, you actively

engaged in various committees, focusing on foreign affairs, defense, and European integration. Your expertise in these domains earned you respect and admiration, and ultimately positioned you as a prominent voice on the national stage. Among your most notable engagements in your parliamentary capacity featured your commitment to nuclear disarmament, which you promoted in the Italian parliament through a resolution supporting the visions for nuclear disarmament of US President Obama and U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

You were re-elected in 2013 and served in the Committee on Defense, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs. You were also elected Chair of the Italian Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and coordinated the Inter-Parliamentary Group on Development Cooperation. In early 2014, your voice was decisive in the Democratic Party becoming a full member of the pan-European Social Democratic Party of Europe.

In February of that year, your political path took a significant turn when you became Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. A position that you would assume from February to October 2014, before being called to even higher office. It is worth recalling that you were the youngest Foreign Minister in Italy's republican history, and only the third woman to hold this position. An aspect that brought you some headwinds in the media at the time, but which you were quickly able to dissipate through your hard work and tenacity.

During your time in office as Italy's foreign Minister, you put a strong emphasis on multilateralism and the search for solutions to global conflicts. During the July 2014 Gaza War, with Israeli forces pitted against Hamas, you were engaged at the forefront, often visiting Cairo, to enable a peaceful agreement which ended the bombing of the Gaza Strip.

In August of the same year, you sought to support the Kurdish population grappling with the advance of the ISIS terrorist threat. The cruel massacre of the Kurdish Yazidi people on Mount Sinjar was a horrific wake-up call across the world. At your insistence, and in close cooperation with the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the EU Foreign Affairs Council decided to support the Iraqi Kurdish people in their struggle for self-defense. Furthermore, under your direction, the Italian Foreign Ministry worked tirelessly for the release of Mariam Ibrahim, a young Sudanese who had been sentenced to death in her country for marrying a Christian, and who was finally permitted to fly to Italy on an Italian government plane.

It was, as I said earlier, during your term as Foreign Minister that we first met. Upon your invitation, I had the pleasure of paying a working visit to Rome on June 30, 2014, to coordinate our priorities for our then upcoming respective EU Council Presidencies : Italy's in the second half of 2014, Luxembourg's in the first half of 2015.

In November 2014, you were appointed to the defining position that would make you widely known on the global stage: the position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,

and Vice-President of the European Commission under President Jean-Claude Juncker. As such, you became the EU's top diplomat and its face abroad, representing the Union on the international stage.

In the Hearing with the members of the European Parliament before your appointment, you underlined that we needed to build our common European vision on foreign and security policy together. This is what you set out to do with the European Union Global Strategy which you initiated and which was adopted in 2016, replacing the 2003 European Security Strategy. As you stated at the time: *"The EU needs a strategy that marries a shared vision to common action. (..) None of the EU's member states, acting alone, has the strength to address the threats that Europe faces"*. Through this strategy, you advocated a more substantial external role for the EU, notably in the Near and Middle East - in Europe's immediate neighborhood.

This was particularly relevant at a time when the EU Council and the European External Action Service had to navigate quite literally through difficult waters, namely those of the Mediterranean during the migration crisis of 2015, right at the outset of your mandate. Back then, you and I both advocated a common responsibility-sharing mechanism for migration and asylum in the European Union, which, however, failed due to the opposition of some EU countries. Today, the EU faces ongoing challenges when it comes to a comprehensive European approach to migration. Your migration pacts with a number of countries of origin have paved the way for stronger engagement in this regard. The migration and asylum package that is currently on the table and on which it seems that

we have political agreement will hopefully allow us to progress further on this ever-important issue for the Union – but discussions on the details continue to be difficult. It is a fact that ten years after the migration crisis we have no common EU migration policy in Europe. Until now, we have failed here when it comes to solidarity and responsibility. This is not the strong EU that we want and that we need.

During your initial hearing with the European Parliament, you also stressed how important it is for EU Member States and the EU institutions to work together and coordinate all measures and policies that have an external impact.

Our close cooperation during the 12th Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second semester of 2015 reflected this vision. At the time, we worked together on emergency measures to help handle the refugee crisis, and on developing a coherent strategy to address the root causes of migration. Following the attacks in Paris, we identified well-defined priority actions such as strengthening external borders, improving exchange of information, more systematic use of databases and combating radicalization.

It was not only our political agreement on many issues, but also your approach that earned my deep respect. As a media-savvy, multilingual diplomat with G7 ministerial experience, you brought boundless energy to the job. With your tenure, you brought a renewed sense of purpose to the role, prioritizing dialogue and cooperation in your approach to international relations. There was clearly no need for anyone to ask what

phone number to call for the EU's foreign policy chief! You played a pivotal role in mediating between conflicting parties, particularly in the Middle East. Your diplomatic finesse and ability to bring stakeholders together were instrumental in promoting dialogue and seeking resolutions to complex issues.

As such, you were deeply involved in the Middle East, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This became evident right at the beginning, when your first visit outside the European Union took you to Israel and Palestine, including Gaza. This early visit showed your determination to play a key role in the stabilization, reconstruction and revival of the peace process, following the failure of previous US mediation. Throughout your tenure, you worked to promote dialogue and remained committed to a two-state solution as a lasting and just resolution to the Middle East conflict. The EU's engagement in the Middle East Quartet, together with the United States, Russia and the United Nations, provided a glimmer of hope at the time. With the Quartet report of July 2016, the international community set out what needed to be done to restore conditions for meaningful final status negotiations. Despite pressure, you managed to maintain EU unity on the two-state solution and to advocate for a stronger implication by the Arab States. During this time, the EU also appointed a new special representative for the Middle East Peace Process, Fernando Gentilini, who for the first time was permanently resident in Jerusalem.

Today, the idea of two states is being challenged as never before. People are dying on a daily basis, on both sides. Yet the two-state solution

remains the only realistic chance for peace and security in the Holy Places and in the Middle East at large.

One of your most notable achievements as the EU High Representative was your pivotal role in negotiating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal. As a representative of 28 EU member states at the time, this was a particularly daunting task, requiring tough negotiation as well attentive listening and understanding on the other hand. You and your negotiating team were instrumental in forging an agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. The JCPOA was widely regarded as a significant milestone in global diplomacy, and the agreement did at the time deliver on its main goal : making it impossible for Iran to pursue its nuclear weapons program and to develop its own nuclear bomb in the medium term. The US withdrawal from the agreement by President Trump in 2018 was a very wrong decision and has de facto led to a collapse of the JCPOA, which had been endorsed by the UN Security Council. After the Trump decision, and the reinstating of US sanctions, Iran neglected its own obligations, making the risk of an Iran bomb bigger again.

As President Biden said that the United States would return to the deal if Iran itself came back into compliance, negotiations have been ongoing for months now to try and revive the original agreement, but unfortunately, have not succeeded yet. However, this takes nothing away from the big success that the diplomatic breakthrough represented in 2015, after 12 years of negotiations, that you and your team, Federica, were able to

bring to a good end. The JCPOA is a stark reminder of what patient and skillful diplomacy - not force - can achieve.

In the context of the JCPOA where the EU worked closely with the P5, but also on many other issues, the Russian Foreign Minister Serguey Lavrov was a frequent – and I dare say, not an easy – interlocutor for you, Federica. You started your mandate not long after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and managed our EU reaction to this first invasion by Russia of Ukrainian territory. This was a time when we still thought, collectively, in the European Union, that it could be possible to work with Russia, despite Russia's aggressive policy in its own region. We had no choice but to work with Russia on many situations, such as the Middle East Peace Process where they were a partner in the Quad, or the efforts to end the war in Syria. Today, of course, we all know that the plans for a war of aggression against its neighbour were already beginning to take shape in Putin's head after his Crimea plan had succeeded. I am sure that you, like me, have often thought back to this period wondering what we should have done differently. At the same time, I am not sure whether anything could have stopped Putin in his mad quest for a new Russian Empire.

Dear Federica,

Perhaps one of your greatest legacies today is the increased institutionalized dialogue between the EU and the wider Arab world: Reflecting your personal interest in the region, you successfully advocated for the first summit between the EU and the Arab League. This first

summit took place in Sharm El-Sheikh in February 2019 and addressed wide-ranging issues such as multilateralism, trade and economic cooperation, technology, migration, climate change, security, and of course the situation in the region.

Dear Federica, your diplomatic work in all fields has always been accompanied by your constant advocacy for human rights and gender equality. You championed the rights of women and marginalized communities, pushing for their inclusion and representation in decision-making processes. A commitment that my own country, Luxembourg, attaches great value to and implements through our feminist foreign policy. As you once said: *“A relatively young woman is perceived as younger than a relatively young man”*. Aware of the continuing difficulties faced by women in politics in a world still largely dominated by men, you promoted gender mainstreaming in EU policies and advocated for equal representation and opportunities for all.

Dear Federica,

Throughout your tenure, you always knew how to stand your ground and perform under pressure. And there were many occasions when there was pressure. The position of High Representative, along with those of Vice President of the Commission and head of the European Defence Agency, is challenging, to say the least, and basically calls for a superhuman who does not sleep and spends half of his life in a plane. Without an official deputy, you were forced to travel almost continuously and prioritize your engagements. Moreover, your term of office came at a time when the EU

was facing major challenges in a difficult international environment: the reversal of democratic gains in Arab countries, the migration crisis, the EU's difficult relations with the Trump administration and, finally, Brexit, have put your tenure to the test.

Having served for nearly twenty years as Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg, I have witnessed first hand the risks and difficulties that come along with such responsibility in the EU arena. Managing this balancing act between 27 and, at the time, 28 member states is not a given and requires skill.

An achievement that did not go unnoticed and earned you much recognition around the world. From being named one of the “*100 Most Powerful Women in the World*” by Forbes to receiving prestigious awards such as the *Carnegie-Wateler Peace Prize*, your work has resonated far beyond the borders of Europe.

In 2019, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres appointed you as co-chair of the High Level-Panel on Internal Displacement, alongside Donald Kaberuka. In this capacity, you led the panel in finding concrete long-term solutions and raising global awareness on the issue of internal displacement so that Member States and the United Nations can improve their efforts to assist all those affected, including displaced persons and their host communities.

Since September 2020, you have been the Rector of the College of Europe and more recently, since 2022 the Director of the Pilot Programme of the

European Diplomatic Academy, implemented by the College of Europe. At your invitation, I had the pleasure of visiting and giving a speech to diplomacy students at the College in Bruges, last fall. As you continue your work, your political journey inspires young students of diplomacy to strive for a world marked by peace, cooperation, and respect for all, reminding us of the transformative power of diplomacy and the importance of championing equality.

Dear Federica,

Your manyfold contributions, from negotiating the Iran nuclear deal to improving relations between the EU and Arab states, and advocating for marginalized populations, have left their mark on the world, and particularly on the Middle East. You have gained respect and recognition both in Europe and abroad and have actively shaped the office of High Representative in its quest for EU unity and sovereignty in relations with the rest of the world.

I look forward to many more years of your continued commitment to peace and diplomacy, here and in the Middle East. The Middle East remains at the heart of what you do also in your current workplace, where you have the noble task of imparting your insights and knowledge to the leaders and practitioners of European diplomacy of tomorrow, so that peace, diplomacy and EU unity remain a means of the future. In your words: *“Each new generation needs to commit again to the foundations of our peaceful coexistence. A peaceful and diverse Europe needs constant care, and it is everyone’s interest, and responsibility.”*

It is my great honor to congratulate you on your well-deserved award. Or to say it in the language of our host: *Meine herzlichen Glückwünsche, liebe Federica! Ich freue mich auf die weitere Zusammenarbeit.*