Our common approach to better decision-making in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

The Union's external action faces a fundamentally changed landscape, shaped by strategic competition, growing instability and attempts to undermine the rules-based international order. In this environment, the Union's ability to defend its values and interests hinges on whether it can mobilize its collective political, economic and diplomatic weight quickly and effectively.

This requires a CFSP that is able to deliver and to take fast decisions when speed, resolve and political weight are needed most. In this, the Union's culture of consensus is an important source of its legitimacy. Therefore, we continue to strive for consensus wherever possible. But we must also ensure that this culture of consensus fosters common action rather than preventing it – otherwise we will have legitimacy but no strength.

We therefore want to seek solutions that command the widest possible support among Member States, irrespective of the applicable voting rules, while exploring the options for better decision-making already provided by the EU Treaties. The following five principles shall guide us in our endeavor to make the EU's CSPF more effective:

1. Spirit of sincere cooperation

In line with the Treaties, we are committed to conducting ourselves in a spirit of sincere cooperation and mutual solidarity to reach common positions in all CFSP matters. We acknowledge that these principles are legally binding and apply to decision-making in the Council. This spirit and principle of sincere cooperation is the background of all decision-making and implementation within the Union.

2. Use of constructive abstentions

We will increasingly use constructive abstentions in accordance with the Treaties, whenever a Member State is unable to support a CFSP decision, so as not to prevent the Union from acting.

3. No linkage to unrelated matters

We will refrain from obstructively linking a CFSP decision to matters that are substantially unrelated and will raise concerns only on the CFSP merits of that proposal. Furthermore, we will raise our concerns regarding CFSP proposals at the earliest possible stage to allow sufficient time for consultation, clarification and the identification of possible solutions.

4. Encourage the High Representative to explore the use of options in the Treaties

We encourage the High Representative to explore Treaty-based options available to improve CFSP decision-making. This may include a proposal by the High Representative, in line with the Treaties.

5. Substantiated vital reasons of national policy

We acknowledge that if there is a CFSP decision to be taken by qualified majority, every Member State can oppose this "for vital and stated reasons of national policy", as foreseen in the treaties. In line with the treaties we also commit ourselves to setting out those reasons in a substantive manner, so as to enable meaningful consultation and efforts to identify an acceptable solution for all Member States.