

The New EU

The European bloc strives for balance in its new leadership amid challenges By Li Weiwei

With Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk elected as president of the European Council and Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini appointed the EU's foreign affairs chief at the European Council special meeting on August 30, the new leadership of the EU has finally taken shape. Taking into account that former Prime Minister of Luxembourg Jean-Claude Juncker was elected president of the European Commission in July, the three top EU positions are all in place as the union's governance also turns over a new leaf.

Tusk's mandate as European Council president will begin on December 1; the new European Commission will take office on November 1.

Challenges for EU governance

As a special actor falling somewhere between nation state and super state, the EU is different from both international organizations and

federal states. It has formed a unique structure and pattern of governance featuring multi-polar and multi-level characteristics. While its features originate from Europe's political and historical tradition, EU governance actually took shape based on European economic and political integration after the two world wars in the last century. EU governance is seen by European scholars as a kind of post-modern, network governance, as well as an innovation of governance pattern.

However, imbalanced economic and political development in the bloc has been on the rise since its predecessor, the European Economic Community, was created in 1957, continuing today as it has developed into a large union with 28 member states. Problems relating to its legitimacy and identity have plagued the EU constantly, affecting the in-depth development of its governance. Meanwhile, outside of the EU,



emerging economies are surging forward energetically as globalization develops in depth. The central position of Europe within the global capitalist structure is once again being threatened. The changing external situation has further minimized the available resources that Europe can employ to deal with the harsh and turbulent environment and constituted more complicated challenges for EU governance.

The imbalanced regional economy not only is one of the most important causes of the European sovereign debt crisis but also accounts for the EU's internal division. Hit simultaneously by the U.S. subprime crisis and sovereign debt crisis, the EU has continually been divided between creditor nations and debtor nations, rising countries and declining countries, pro-EU countries and Eurosceptic countries, forming new constraints for the development of EU governance. Moreover, the "identity crisis" caused by imbalanced development has also accelerated the estrangement between the people of the union's sovereign member countries.

Promoted by pro-independence nationalist parties, separatist movements in Spain's Catalonia, the United Kingdom's Scotland and Belgium's Flanders continue to flourish. In recent years, opinion polls in Catalonia have shown that nearly half of the people in the region wish to be independent from Spain; Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, who is also leader of the Scottish National Party, has called for the establishment of an independent country and to become a

Top EU Posts

The European Council, which consists of the heads of state or government of the EU member states, together with its president and president of the European Commission, defines the general political direction and priorities of the EU. Its current President Herman Van Rompuy's tenure will expire on November 30.

The European Commission represents the interests of the EU as a whole. It proposes new legislation to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, and it ensures that EU law is correctly applied by member coun-

tries. The current commission, headed by José Manuel Barroso, will end its five-year term on October 31.

The EU foreign affairs chief (High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), with a term of five years, is responsible for coordinating the bloc's common foreign and security policy and contributes to the development of that policy. Catherine Ashton, who currently holds the post, will step down on October 31 as her tenure expires.

(Sources: www.europa.eu, www.xinhuanet.com)



FRESH FACES: The European Council's newly elected president Donald Tusk (left) poses for a photograph along with current President Herman Van Rompuy (center) and new foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini at the EU headquarters in Brussels on August 30

member of the EU. Scotland held a referendum for independence on September 18.

To contain these trends, the EU has taken corresponding measures in the recent leadership transition, such as endowing the European Parliament with greater power on personnel management, including the appointment of the president of the EU Commission. The new European commissioners are from all 28 EU member states, an arrangement apparently made to display their sense of belonging to the EU.

Relations with Russia

Most scholars in Eastern Europe believe that the most effective way for the EU to exert a bigger influence on countries outside the bloc is through enlargement. And the EU's neighborhood policy through negotiations on the Association Agreement (AA) has played an important role in its process of eastward expansion.

In recent years, the EU has sped up negotiations on the AA and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with Ukraine and other eastern neighbors. It has also promised economic integration for these countries in exchange for guiding their political transition process via an EU standard in order for them to fully integrate into EU governance.

To achieve that goal, the EU Commission has proposed the EU's Eastern Partnership to the European Parliament and the European Council. The initiative

was officially launched in 2009. As part of the EU's regional policy, the initiative mainly aims to sign the AA and DCFTA with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Owing to their geopolitical and economic links with the above countries, EU member states such as Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania have served as their bridge to the EU. The three summits of the EU's Eastern Partnership were held in the three countries in 2009, 2011 and 2013, respectively.

However, on account of its unique history and special economic and political ties with Russia, Ukraine has been under pressure from Russia and shown a two-faced attitude toward the EU, which led to the delay of AA negotiations between the EU and Ukraine. The negotiations were in a stalemate for the entirety of 2012. On November 20, 2013, then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich announced the postponement of signing the AA with the EU in a display of dissatisfaction. Soon after, Ukraine's pro-EU political forces organized massive protests against the Yanukovich government.

With the support of the EU, the protests quickly spread in Ukraine, resulting in the downfall of the Yanukovich government in February. The following developments in Ukraine, including the secession of the Crimean Peninsula and armed conflicts between government troops and independence-seeking militia in eastern regions, which are deeply tied to Russia, since March

have brought the EU-Russian relationship to a low point.

The EU's eastward expansion via a variety of policy instruments has clashed with Russia's efforts to hold its traditional sphere of influence, forcing the two sides into a dilemma. In other words, due to their close economic and energy links, the current EU sanctions against Russia have hurt the economy of both sides. Thus, despite each side blaming the other, the two sides have not abandoned efforts to find a political solution.

Under the circumstances, the installment of the new EU leadership has managed to reach a balance.

Juncker, who represents countries including Germany and France that are more cautious toward Russia, will coordinate and guide the economic and political direction of the EU in the future as president of the European Commission.

On the other hand, Tusk, as former Prime Minister of Poland, is expected to take into full account the security concerns of EU member states in Eastern Europe when heading the European Council.

In the meantime, choosing Mogherini, a political figure who takes a similar stance to the United States and Britain in foreign affairs, as the EU's top diplomat, shows that the EU will give full consideration of coordination and cooperation with the United States and NATO in its foreign policies.

In short, the new EU leadership has taken all factors into consideration, demonstrating the unique features of EU governance. ■

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