

Go Cathy Go!

Most of you can probably remember **Henry Kissinger's** classic question: "European foreign policy sounds nice, but whom should I call when I want to talk to Europe?" Well, Henry, now we have a number, one that **Hillary Clinton** knows too.

Here's the story. Clinton tells President **Barack Obama** that she finally got hold of a single phone number for the European Union: she had called the EU's new Foreign Minister **Catherine Ashton**.

"Great, what did she say?" asked Obama.

"Well", Clinton responded, "I had forgotten about the time change so I got an answering machine."

And what did the answering machine say? "Hi, you've called Catherine Ashton, the Foreign Minister of the EU. Unfortunately I cannot take your call right now, but if you would like to hear the French view, press one. If you want the British view, press two. If you want the German view, press three..."

The story gets a good laugh from any crowd – partly because there is an element of truth in it, partly because we all hate answering machines...

Catherine Ashton has one of the world's toughest jobs. It's not easy to coordinate the foreign policy of 27 sovereign states, but that's exactly what Ashton has to do. She's under immense pressure from the member states and from EU institutions.

In a way, she's a bit like the player-manager of a football team. She has to deal with 27 (wannabe) football stars...and our egos. All of us want to shine on the pitch, but if we want to win, we have to play as a team.

Those who own her team – the European Commission and the Council of Member States – are demanding. They want their share of the glory. Her fans – the European Parliament – are equally

demanding and will not hesitate to shout out a loud "boo" if she doesn't deliver.

Ashton's schedule is outright impossible. If she were to attend all of her scheduled meetings, she would spend 500 days in meetings every year. She will be criticized for being in one place and not another at a given time.

As if this was not enough, Ashton will face four huge challenges in building an EU foreign policy. First, she will have to set up the EU's new diplomatic service: the Union will have over 130 embassies around the world. Second, she will have to define the EU's relationship with emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, Japan and others.

Third, she will have to orchestrate the EU's role among its neighbours – the Arctic, the Western Balkans, the Mediterranean and all of its Eastern Partners. Finally, the EU is often trying to help sort out crises from Afghanistan to the Middle East, from Iran to Sudan.

Many were quick to criticize the nomination of Catherine Ashton. I have seen her in action in the past, and am convinced that she will prove her critics wrong. Watch out: in a few years time the EU will have a true foreign policy, and Cathy Ashton's phone number will be so popular that one answering machine will not be enough. ■■

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Pekka Mustonen