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How effective are the EU Special Representatives in the Western Balkans in promoting the EU's policies and interests?

**An analysis of their actions and contributions to
the Common Foreign and Security Policy
regarding their missions.**

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Année académique 2023 – 2024
Master en sciences politiques, orientation relations

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Nicolas Fiessinger

02/06/2024

Acknowledgement

To my parents, brother and sisters, and my family in Belgium,

To my friends,

Thank you.

Introduction

Scholars in international affairs have widely described and studied the European Union (EU). One dimension of this study encompasses the EU's external action, which includes the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). At stake, the CFSP aims to “contribute to the EU’s objectives of preserving peace, strengthening international security, promoting international cooperation and developing and consolidating democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (European Commission, n.d.).

Since the Maastricht treaty (1993) and its second pillar (Title V) replacing the European Political Community (EPC), the CFSP received more attention throughout the years and its progressive and gradual institutionalisation through subsequent treaties. The most prominent changes in EU Foreign Policy since the Maastricht Treaty occurred with the Lisbon Treaty (2009), which created the position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (ex-high Representative of the CFSP) and also Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) and the European External Actions Services (EEAS).

Launched in 2010 and considered the Diplomatic Service of the EU, the EEAS is ruled by the HR/VP and aims to increase “Europe’s global influence through more coherence and coordination in EU foreign policy” (EEAS, 2021). Through a network of over 140 Delegations and Offices, the EEAS is one of the most extensive diplomatic services around the world. Briefly, the EEAS serves the HR/VP to fulfil his CFSP representative mandate and carries out the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), through which the EU has proper capacities in the fields of defence and crisis management (cf. Section 2, Chapter 2 of the Title V of the Treaty of Lisbon).

The EU Special Representatives (EUSRs), generally understood and presented as a tool (an “expression”) of the EU foreign policy, are born from the CFSP and a provision of the Maastricht treaty. Considered one of the oldest tools of the CFSP (the first EUSR position -then Special Envoy- was set in 1996, three years before the nomination of a High Representative for the CFSP), EUSRs progressively grew into

an “extensive autonomous instrument” at the service of the Union’s foreign policy (Fouéré, 2016).

Designed for conflict management, EUSRs are senior European diplomats sent to countries, regions, or themes of importance to the EU to demonstrate its engagement, interests, and visibility. In doing so, EUSRs have several missions that can be divided into two categories: the policy objectives and the functions of their mandate. While the policy objectives of their mandate are tailored to the specific needs of their mandated areas (e.g. strengthening the Rule of Law in Kosovo to enhancing the EU’s coherence in Bosnia and Herzegovina), their function is common and linked to the EU (e.g. providing information to the EEAS and the member states on the situation in the mandated). Considering these, it is thus not rare that EUSRs act in the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), through which member states cooperate on crisis management, in coordination with civilian missions such as EULEX Kosovo in Kosovo or EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). For all these reasons, EUSRs play a unique role in the EU Foreign Policy architecture and are often portrayed as the voice, face, eyes and ears of the EU (Grevi, 2007).

More globally, since the first EUSR appointment in 1996 for the Great Lake Region, up to sixty EUSRs have been nominated, and more than twenty positions have been opened. Ten positions are currently open, out of three are currently working in the Western Balkans. These three EUSRs in the Western Balkans are, respectively, the EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Ambassador Johan Sattler, the EU Special Representative for Kosovo, Mr Ambassador Tomas Szunyog, and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, Mr Ambassador Miroslav Lajčák.

This case study on the EUSRs contrasts the EU's historical “failure” of the Western Balkans and its “impotence” when facing the civil war in former Yugoslavia (Grevi, 2007). At the time, the lack of consensus between member states, adding to the financial and procedural lack of coordination, led to limited diplomatic and political influence in the region.

Starting in the late 1990s, the Western Balkans were progressively seen by the EU through a logic of stabilisation, which materialised through the creation of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). The latter granted Western Balkans countries a “European perspective” with official applications to join the EU, as stated at the Thessaloniki Summit (2003) and, more recently, the Tirana Declaration (2022). Hitherto, as the EU has committed to the region both for historical reasons and through institutional means, the latter occupies a crucial place in the EU's foreign policy agenda (Mutluer & Tsarouhas, 2018). Bechev (2004) summarised this by saying that the EU is present in the Western Balkans as “both a foreign policy actor and a quasi-enlargement actor”, with EUSRs having a dual role in stabilising their country but also helping them on their path to the EU. EUSRs’ missions, both in general and in the Western Balkans, thus cover a wide range of subjects, and their “effectiveness” in fulfilling the policy objectives of their mandate is not often assessed in the scientific literature¹.

Hence, derived from this, the research question of this work is:

How effective are the EU Special Representatives in the Western Balkans in promoting the EU's Policies and Interests?

Through an analysis of their actions and contributions to the Common Foreign and Security Policy regarding their missions, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of EUSRs in the Western Balkans. The first part provides an overview of the EUSRs in the EU Foreign Policy, going through the historical context of the position and the EUSRs’ characteristics. The second part provides insight into the EUSRs' institutional and legal framework before presenting the conceptualisation of “effectiveness” and the methodology used for the study in the third part. The fourth part details the three selected case studies, going through their specific mandates before the fifth part analyses the findings.

¹ Recent evaluations of the role of EUSRs generally assess them as a positive addition to EU foreign policy (Costa Reis et al., 2019; Fouéré, 2016; Tolksdorf, 2015; 2013). Such a comparative study on the Western Balkans aims to contribute to the general literature related to the EUSRs.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I. EUSRS AND THE EU FOREIGN POLICY: HISTORICAL CONTEXT	10
HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	10
<i>The emergence of EUSRs</i>	10
<i>A normalisation alongside the institutionalisation</i>	15
EUSRS' CHARACTERISTICS	17
<i>The EUSRs in the Western Balkans, who are they?</i>	17
CHAPTER II. EUSRS AND THE EU FOREIGN POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWOK.....	23
THE EUSRS AND THE EU EXTERNAL RELATION: INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT	23
<i>The CFSP, EUSRs framework of acting</i>	23
<i>The EUSRs and the CSDP</i>	28
<i>The EUSRs and the EU Delegations/Office</i>	29
THE EUSRS – INSTITUTIONAL GENERALITIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK	32
<i>Appointment</i>	32
<i>Budget</i>	33
<i>Policy Objectives and Functions</i>	37
CHAPTER III. OBJECTIVES, THEORY AND METHODOLOGY.....	40
CONCEPTUALISATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	40
METHODOLOGY.....	45
CHAPTER IV. CASE STUDY: THE EUSRS AND THE WESTERN BALKANS.....	48
EU RELATIONS WITH THE WESTERN BALKANS: HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH	48
<i>The EU and the Western Balkans, an institutional approach</i>	48
THE EUSR IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA.....	53
<i>Policy objectives</i>	53
<i>The double-hatted specificity</i>	55
<i>The EUSR, the High Representative (HR) for BIH and the Bonn Power</i>	56
THE EUSR IN KOSOVO.....	58
<i>Policy objectives</i>	58
<i>The double-hatted specificity</i>	60
THE EUSR FOR THE BELGRADE-PRISTINA AND OTHER WESTERN BALKANS ISSUES	62
<i>Policy objectives</i>	62
<i>The Dialogue</i>	64
CHAPTER V. RESULTS.....	68
CONCLUSION	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88
ANNEXES	97

List of abbreviations:

AFET: European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs

BiH: Bosnia and Herzegovina

CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy

COREU: Communication network of the EU for the communication of the Council of the EU

CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CSDP: Common Security and Defense Policy

ECMM: European Community Monitoring Mission

EEAS: European External Action Service

ENP: European Neighbourhood Policy

ESDP: European Security and Defense Policy

EU: European

EUC: European Commission

EUD: EU Delegations

EUFOR: European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina

EULEX Kosovo: European Rule of law mission in Kosovo

EUP: European Parliament

EUSR: EU Special Representative

FAC: Foreign Affairs Council

FPI: Service for Foreign Policy Instrument

FYROM: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

HR/VP: High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

HR: High Representative

OHR: Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina

PSC: Political and Security Committee

QMV: Qualified Majority Voting

SAP: Stabilisation and Association Process

SPSEE: Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe

TEU: Treaty on European Union

TEU: Treaty on the European Union

TFEU: Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UNMBIH: United Nations Mission in BiH

UNMIK: United Nations Missions in Kosovo

Chapter I. EUSRs and the EU Foreign Policy: historical context.

The first chapter aims to introduce the context in which EUSRs emerged since the nomination of the first “EU Special Envoy” in 1996. It also introduces how they consolidated over the years, growing into an autonomous instrument at the service of the CFSP.

A) Historical context

1) The emergence of EUSRs

2024 marked the 28th anniversary of the nomination of the first EU Special Representative, Aldo Ajello, a former UN Special Representative for Mozambique, appointed as EU Special Envoy for the African Great Lakes Region in March 1996. This nomination came at a time when the EU foreign and security mechanisms were “thin in the ground” (Fouéré, 2016), only three years after the implementation of the Maastricht treaty that initiated the CFSP. Also preceding three years after the creation of the post of the Secretary-General of the Council Secretariat and High Representative for the CFSP (SG/HR), the predecessor of the current HR/VP, EUSRs are thus considered one of the oldest tools of the CFSP.

In the first year of their nomination, the EU Special Envoys² were primarily sent to Eastern Africa and the Middle East to engage in conflict resolution (Grevi, 2007). Following the appointment of Aldo Ajello, Miguel Ángel Moratinos was appointed in November 1996 as EU Special Envoy for the Middle-East Peace Process, a position that still runs today.

However, the geographical scope of their nomination gradually widened. As EUSRs aim to contribute to conflict resolution efforts “in regions of strategic interest to the EU” (Tolksdorf, 2013), the Balkans implosion has given rise to concerns related to close neighbourhood stability. In 1998, two positions of EU Special Representative - and no longer Envoys- were thus created, respectively, for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Kosovo. In early 2000, new positions were created covering Southern and Eastern Europe (EUSR for Macedonia, Moldova, South Caucasus,

² The nomination of « Envoy » changed to « Representative » in 1997, and the change was introduced in the Amsterdam Treaty.

etc.), the Western Balkans (EUSR for Bosnian and Herzegovina, etc.), and Africa (EUSR for the Horn of Africa). Only a few years after the nomination of the first EU Special Envoy, EUSRs turned into autonomous instruments of the CFSP (Fouéré, 2016), covering three continents and a range of issues that were not solely related to conflict management.

Since 1996, more than 60 Special Representatives have been appointed to more than twenty positions (Annexes 1 & 2), covering single countries, regions, and thematic issues. Out of these 60 EUSRs, over twenty different EU nationalities are represented.

The most represented nationality when appointing EU Special Representatives is Germany (7 EUSRs since 1996), closely followed by Italy and France (6 EUSRs since 1996), Spain and the Netherlands (5 EUSRs since 1996), Austria, Slovakia, Sweden and Denmark (4 EUSRs since 1996), Greece, Great Britain, Belgium and Finland (3 EUSRs since 1996), Ireland (2 EUSRs since 1996) and finally Lithuania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Estonia (1 EUSR since 1996) (Annexes 1 & 2). This impressive variety of nationalities in the choice of EUSRs is explained by the particularities of the position and the selection process involving the twenty-seven member states.

In 2024, ten positions are run by senior diplomats (Table 1), a decrease compared to the previous three decades. The particular status of EUSR within the structure of the CFSP can explain this diminution, as their role is not unanimously supported by the various HR/VPs.

From 1999 to 2009, Javier Solana, then High Representative for the CFSP, gradually expanded the team, considering EUSRs as “the visible expression of the EU’s growing engagement in some of the world’s most troubled countries and regions³”. During his ten years in Office, Solana made EUSRs pioneered the CFSP, contributing to the enhancement of the Union’s profile both to global partners and local interlocutors (Grevi, 2007) by ensuring a “high-level” presence in covering the

³ Opening remarks by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP, Seminar with EU Special Representatives, S239/05.
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/discours/85510.pdf

issues that could affect the European Union. By mentioning EUSR's importance in accompanying the countries on their path to EU membership⁴, Solana made of EUSRs not only crisis management actors but also enlargement actors.

Catherine Ashton, succeeding to Solana in 2009 as the first High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and -starting in 2010- Vice-President of the Commission, took a different direction (Tolksdorf, 2015). Arguing that EUSRs were tools that member states used through the Political and Security Committee (PSC) to influence the EU's foreign policy, she ended two positions (EUSR for the Great Lakes Region and the EUSR for Moldova), trying to hand over their role and missions to the EU Delegations and different EEAS staff members (Fouéré, 2013). Ashton's main argument was that EUSRs were not fully accountable to the newly created EEAS due to their particular legal and institutional framework, which undermined her authority and that of the EEAS in foreign affairs. However, Ashton's position was not unanimously supported, and a bureaucratic struggle -a "trial of strength"- over the EUSRs' role broke out among the HR/VP and different member states (West, 2016). Foreign ministers from these member states (Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Slovakia) wanted the EUSRs to continue their mandate (Tolksdorf, 2015), as no other bodies could act the way they were doing. As a result of this opposition, instead of removing it, Ashton merged two positions (EUSR for the South Caucasus and the EUSR for the crisis in Georgia).

The situation later changed, with both Frederica Mogherini (Ashton's successor, in the office of HR/VP from 2014 to 2019) and Josepp Borrel (Mogherini's successor, in the position of HR/VP since 2019) acknowledging the EUSR's importance in foreign affairs and accepting their image of free-electrons. Both of them opened new positions and pledged to mandate extensions when needed.

When it comes to their mandates, despite common patterns, each EU Special Representative has a unique mandate related to a specific policy issue (Grevi, 2007). Since 1996, the EUSR's mandate has had two dimensions: the policy objectives

⁴ In an interview with the Bosnian media *Oslobodjenje*, Solana mentioned that the EUSR in BiH shall promote the "*EU's overall policy in BiH*" and cooperate closely with the newly launched EUFOR which aims to "*promote the EU's long-term commitment to BiH and its accession to the EU*". <https://www.ohr.int/interview-eu-high-representative-for-common-foreign-and-security-policy-javier-solana-republika-srpska-must-arrest-karadzic/?print=pdf>

(specific to the policy issue) and the function (specific to the EU) of their mandate (the latter are explained in Chapter II). To fulfil these two dimensions, EUSRs are usually appointed on a yearly basis. The mandate can be renewed for a substantial amount of time depending on a “Joint Action” of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). It is thus not rare for EU Special Representatives to stay in position for years, sometimes even decades. While Aldo Ajello ran its position for the Great Lake Region for eleven years, from 1996 to 2007, Wolfgang Petritsch stayed in position as Special Envoy to Kosovo for less than a year (Annexes 1 & 2).

When it comes to the length of the mandate, there is thus nothing “uniform”, and everything depends on whether or not the Council of the European Union decide to extend it (Annexes 1 & 2). Of the ten current positions, Toivo Klaar, the current EU Special Representative to the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia, has been in the position for the longest amount of time (since 2017). Olof Skoog, appointed as EU Special Representative for Human Rights, is the last one appointed as of March 1, 2024. His initial mandate is supposed to last three years, until March 2026. Regarding the three studied EUSRs, Mr Ambassador Lajčák⁵, Szunyog⁶ and Sattler⁷ have been extended twice in office.

Apart from the EUSRs to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, which are “double-hatted⁸”, EU Special Representatives have to be distinguished from the Ambassadors of the European Union, also known as Heads of EU Delegation (EUD). Part of the EEAS, born from a provision of the Lisbon Treaty and referring to the HR/VP, the latter are nominated for a single country and evolve in a different institutional and legal framework than EUSRs. The EUSRs that are “double-hatted” thus live in the country related to their mandate, while the others are based in the EEAS headquarters in Brussels. The differences between EUSRs and EU Envoys will be explained in detail in Chapters II and IV.

⁵ Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1240 of 18 July 2022 amending decision 2020/489 appointing the EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues.

⁶ Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1527 of 20 July 2023, extending the mandate of the EUSR in Kosovo.

⁷ Council Decision (CFSP), 2023/1516 of 20 July 2023, extending the mandate of the EUSR in BiH and amending Decision (CFSP) 2019/1340.

⁸ The double-hatted specificity will be explained in Chapters II (generalities) and IV (specific to BiH and Kosovo).

Table 1: Overview of the current EUSRs in Position as of March 2024

<i>EUSR</i>	<i>Mandate</i>									
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo	Middle East Peace Process	Human Rights	Belgrade Pristina dialogue and other WB regional issues	Central Asia	Horn of Africa	Sahel	South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia	Gulf Region
<i>Officeholder</i>	Johann Sattler	Tomas Szunyog	Sven Koopmans	Olof Skoog	Miroslav Lajčák	Terhi Hakala	Annette Weber	Emmanuela Claudia Del Re	Toivo Klaar	Luigi Di Maio
<i>Nationality</i>	Austrian	Czech	Dutch	Swedish	Slovakian	Finnish	German	Italian	Estonian	Italian
<i>Mandate length</i>	01/09/2019 to 31/08/2024	01/09/2020 to 31/08/2024	01/04/2021 to 28/02/2025	01/03/2024 to 01/03/2026	02/04/2020 to 31/08/2024	01/07/2021 to 28/02/2025	01/07/2021 to 31/08/2024	01/07/2021 to 31/08/2024	13/11/2017 to 31/08/2024	15/05/2023 to 15/02/2025
<i>Focus</i>	Country	Country	Thematic	Thematic	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region	Region
<i>Location</i>	Sarajevo, BiH, and other local offices	Pristina, Kosovo and other local offices	EEAS, Brussels	EEAS, Brussels	Brussels, Belgrade (Serbia), and Pristina (Kosovo)	EEAS, Brussels	EEAS, Brussels	EEAS, Brussels	EEAS, Brussels	EEAS, Brussels
<i>Double Hatted Head of EU Delegation</i>	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

2) A normalisation alongside the institutionalisation

Since 1996, EUSRs have been a unique actor in crisis management, representing the EU's political approach in troubled regions before there was anything like a common policy in the book (Adebahr, 2009). Over time, their emergence and institutionalisation can be seen as correlated with the consolidation of the CFSP through different key momentum and treaties, namely the Maastricht Treaty (1993), the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the Nice Treaty (2001) and the Lisbon Treaty (2009).

As stated, Aldo Ajello was the first EU Special Envoy to be appointed three years after the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. His appointment was made according to Article J.8.5 of the Treaty on the European Union, stating that:

“Without prejudice to Article 151 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, a Political Committee consisting of Political Directors shall monitor the international situation in the areas covered by common foreign and security policy and contribute to the definition of policies by delivering opinions to the Council at the request of the Council or on its own initiative.”

According to Article J.3, Ajello's nomination was announced through a “Joint Action” decided by the Council of the EU, which has been the case since then as it serves as the legal basis for the appointment, extension, and termination of an EUSR mandate (Tolksdorf, 2013). Article J.3 states that:

“The Council shall decide, on the basis of general guidelines from the European Council, that a matter should be the subject of joint action. Whenever the Council decides on the principle of joint action, it shall lay down the specific scope, the Union's general and specific objectives in carrying out such action, if necessary its duration, and the means, procedures and conditions for its implementation”.

The first literal codification related to their appointment came in the consolidated version of the Maastricht Treaty, as modified by the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. Aware of the valuable assets EUSRs represent in ensuring a high-level diplomatic presence, member states agreed in Article J.8.5 that:

“The Council may, whenever it deems it necessary, appoint a special representative with a mandate in relation to particular policy issues”.

Thus, the Amsterdam Treaty introduced a few changes: the Special Envoys officially became Special Representatives one year after their creation, and the post of High Representative for CFSP was created, with Javier Solana appointed in October 1999 (Article J.8.3).

Two years later, the Nice Treaty (2001) created the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which is responsible for “ensuring political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations” (Council of the EU, n.d.) at the ambassadorial level. The EUSRs fell into this spectrum as they primarily work on crisis management, making the extension of their mandate relatable to the PSC and thus accountable to the twenty-seven member states. As of today, EUSRs still maintain a close link with the PSC, a privileged relationship that was heavily criticised by Catherine Ashton in 2009 when becoming HR/VP.

Amsterdam and Nice Treaty thus cut off the “relative freedom” of the two first Special Envoys, establishing clear rules of hierarchy between the HR for the CFSP and the Special Representatives, codifying the procedure of their appointment, and adding details on their accountability (Adebahr, 2009). Their flexibility, nevertheless, remains their primary asset.

EUSRs’ institutionalisation and codification remained unchanged until the Lisbon Treaty, which brought the CFSP a step closer to the mainstream of the Union’s external action (Koutrakos, 2017). The Lisbon Treaty reconfigured the CFSP’s position within the global EU architecture and introduced many novelties that make it today’s framework of manifestation. It introduced the EEAS (and the EU Delegations), the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), and the role of HR/VP, all being related to the EU Special Representatives.

Tasked with implementing and developing the CFSP assisted by the EEAS, the HR/VP has the competency to propose the appointment of a new EUSR and also block a nomination (Tolksdorf, 2013). The FAC, which is a configuration of the Council of the EU, appoints EUSRs following a qualified majority vote.

Over time, the EUSR's relationship also strengthened with the other EU institutions: the European Parliament (EP) and the EU Commission. First, the European Parliament has the Western Balkans in the scope of its mandate and has gained control since the Lisbon Treaty over the EEAS budget. Through its Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the EP contributes to the definition of the CFSP, aiming to “ensure that democracy, the rule of law and human rights are guaranteed in agreements between the EU and non-EU countries⁹” (European Parliament, 2019). In its 2019 recommendation, the institution acknowledged that EUSRs “have proven to be a valuable and flexible instrument for EU diplomacy, as they can personalise and represent the EU in crucial places and situations, with the backing of all member states” (Vautmans, 2019). Adding these, the AFET Committee can receive political briefs from the EUSRs if requested to do so, as Article 21 of the Lisbon Treaty states that

“Special representatives may be involved in briefing the European Parliament”.

The relationship with the European Commission is detailed in the 2013 “Guidelines on Appointment, Mandate, and Financing of EU Special Representatives,” issued by the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. On the EUSRs' side, missions are tasked with maintaining close liaison with the Commission and cooperating/coordinating with the EU Delegations. On the Commission's side, the engagements are more about support in case of a particular need and are linked to the budget/financing part of the EUSRs. What is clear is that the EC has no control over the EUSR activities despite being contracted as CFSP advisors and considering that “the management of the expenditure is subject to a contract between the EUSR and the Commission” (European Commission, 2013).

B) EUSRs' characteristics

1) The EUSRs in the Western Balkans: who are they?

Due to the uniqueness of their position as direct representatives of the HR/VP and personified “agents of multilateralism” (Grevi, 2007), EU Special Representatives are senior diplomats from member states who previously served in high positions in

⁹ These three topics (democracy, the rule of law, and human rights) are at the heart of each of the three EUSRs in the Western Balkans mandate, as they act as a quasi-enlargement actor.

their respective countries, usually at a minister-level in foreign affairs and international organisations and EU institutions. Their profile and expertise are usually considered criteria for their legitimacy and a real asset in fulfilling the policy objectives and functions of their mandate. The candidates are selected through a process that emphasises their expertise related to the mandate they are appointed to in order to maximise their legitimacy and impact once in position. Many factors are considered when choosing a candidate: expertise, past related positions, personal characteristics (e.g., languages), and primary networks, such as the ability to engage and connect with other EU/non-EU bodies and local/international actors on the ground is essential.

Costa Reis & al. (2019) explain how the personality and the legitimacy EUSR have due to their background offers them “privileged formal and informal access to governmental actors as well as dissident voices”. It is also possible (and not that rare) that one person served in two distinct positions as EU Special Representative. The European Parliament recommendations summarise these personal profile requirements, stating that it’s needed “to appoint as EUSRs persons with extensive diplomatic and political expertise and an appropriate profile, ensuring in particular that they have the political clout needed to establish links and mutual trust with high-level interlocutors; to profit in this regard from the existing pool of persons with political and diplomatic experience across the EU (...)” (Vautmans, 2019).

To highlight how crucial these factors are in their nomination, the related positions held by the current EU Special Representatives in the Western Balkans and their predecessor will be quickly presented.

Mr Ambassador Johann Sattler.

The current EUSR to Bosnia and Herzegovina is Johann Sattler¹⁰, a former Austrian diplomat. His first mission related to the Western Balkans lasted from 1997 to 1998 when he was a Political Officer in Sarajevo and Tirana for the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM). Like Mr Ambassador Lajčák, Johann Sattler held the

¹⁰ *Mr Ambassador Sattler CV.* (n.d). EEAS.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/40475/curriculum-vitae-johann-sattler.pdf>

past position of EU Special Representative. He served as EU Special Representative for South Eastern Europe from 1999 to 2002. He was later appointed as the First Councillor for Political Affairs at the Austrian Embassy in Washington D.C. until 2006, prior to receiving a PhD in Political Science from the University of Vienna two years later (2008). He then worked in Moscow, Russia, as the Chief Executive Officer of the WAZ Media Group. Back in Austria, he joined the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Head of the Western Balkans Unit from 2013 to 2016. He later joined the EEAS and was appointed by Frederica Mogherini, then HR/VP, as EU Special Representative and Head of the EU Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Johann Sattler has held the position since 2019 and has been renewed twice in office in 2021 and 2023.

According to Josepp Borrell's decision on April 16, 2024, Ambassador Sattler will not be renewed for a third term in office and will become the new EU Ambassador to Montenegro at the end of his current mandate (EEAS, 2024). He will be replaced by Luigi Soreca, who previously served as EU Ambassador to Albania and EU Special Envoy for the external dimension of migration.

Table 1: Overview of the EUSRs in BiH since 2002

	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Mandate duration</i>	<i>Former position</i>	
Paddy Ashdown	British	2002 - 2006	Former personal Representative of the SG/HR to facilitate the Montenegrin dialogue	
Christian Schwarz - Schilling	German	2006 - 2007	Mediator during the Washington Agreement	
Miroslav Lajčák	Slovak	2007 - 2009	Former UN Special Envoy	
Valentin Inzko	Austrian	2009 - 2011	Former member of the OSCE mission in Serbia and diplomat	
Peter Sorensen	Danish	2011 - 2015	Former Deputy Head and Director of the European Office of UNMIK	
Lars Wigemark	Swedish	2015 – 2019	Former Head of EULEX Kosovo mission	Double-hatting of the Head of EU Delegation since 2011.

Johann Sattler	Austrian	2019 – 2024	/
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Mr Ambassador Tomas Szunyog.

The current EU Special Representative to Kosovo is Tomas Szunyog¹¹, a Czech diplomat. During his career, he held two positions as Ambassador of the Czech Republic respectively, to the Republic of Slovenia (2001-2005) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2009-2014). He also held different positions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic as Director of the Department of South and South Eastern Europe (2005-2009) and Director of the Department of Security Policy. Before being appointed as EU Special Representative and High Representative to Kosovo (2020-2024), he was the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the PSC. Tomas Szunyog has held the position since 2020 and has been renewed twice in office in 2021 and 2023.

According to Josepp Borrell's decision on April 16, 2024, Ambassador Szunyog will not be renewed for a third term in office (EEAS, 2024). Aivo Orav, former EU Ambassador to Montenegro and North Macedonia, will replace him. His new position has yet to be announced.

Table 2: Overview of the EUSRs in Kosovo since 2008

	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Mandate duration</i>	<i>Former position</i>
Peter Feith	Dutch	2008 – 2011	Former Political Adviser to Commander IFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Former Civilian Operations Commander for all civilian ESDP Crisis Management Operations
Fernando Gentilini	Italian	2011- 2012	Former Director for Western Europe, Western Balkans and Turkey at EEAS. Former EUSR for the Middle East Peace Process

¹¹ Mr Ambassador Szunyog CV. (n.d). EEAS. <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/cv-hod-kosovo.pdf>

Samuel Žbogar	Slovenian	2012 – 2016	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia	Double-hatting of the Head of EU Delegation since 2012.
Nataliya Apostolova	Bulgarian	2016 – 2020	Former Head of EU Delegation in Libya and Deputy Head of EU Delegation in Egypt	
Tomas Szunyog	Czechian	2020 – 2024	/	

Mr Ambassador Miroslav Lajčák.

The current EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues is Miroslav Lajčák¹², a trained diplomat and expert on the different Balkans crises. Out of the three studied EUSRs, he is probably the one with the most experience and knowledge of the Western Balkans, having been a figure in the post-conflict crises of the region. He first held the position of Cabinet Director of Czech Republic Prime Minister Jozef Moravčík (1993-1994). In 1999, he held the position of Executive Assistant to the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Balkans, Eduard Kukan, until 2001. This was his first crisis management position. He later served as Slovakia's Ambassador to Serbia and Montenegro between 2001 and 2005 and supervised the 2006 Montenegrin independence referendum on behalf of Javier Solana. Solana appointed him one year later to serve as the double-hatted EU Special Representative/High Representative for BiH¹³, a tenure during which BiH signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. Before being appointed Slovakia's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs from 2012 to 2020, he joined the EEAS (2010-2012) as Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia. More recently, he served as President of the United Nations General Assembly for the 72nd session from 2017 to 2018 and as Chairperson-in-office of the OSCE.

During his career, he received many state honours and honorary doctorates from Western Balkans countries and institutions, acknowledging his work and success in the regions.

¹² *Mr Ambassador Lajčák CV.* (n.d). Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia.

<https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/146045/>

¹³ The High Representative in BiH is responsible for the implementation of the Dayton Agreement (see Chapter IV).

One EEAS Counsellor and two HR/VPs are mentioned as predecessors of Mr Ambassador Lajčák, as they were tasked to facilitate the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The position of EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues was created in 2020 following the will of the HR/VP Josepp Borrell, and Mr Ambassador Lajčák is the first incumbent in Office. He has been renewed one time in 2022.

According to a decision of Josepp Borrell made on April 16, 2024, Ambassador Lajčák has been nominated as the new EU Ambassador to Switzerland (EEAS, 2024). He will not be renewed for a second term in office at the end of his current mandate. He will be replaced by Borut Pahor, former President of Slovenia from 2012 to 2022.

Table 3: Overview of the EUSRs for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues

	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Past related position</i>	<i>Former positions</i>
Robert Cooper	British	2011 - 2012	Then European External Action Service Counsellor
Catherine Ashton	British	2012 - 2014	Then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission
Federica Mogherini	Italian	2014 - 2019	Then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission
Miroslav Lajčák	Czechian	2020 - 2024	/

Chapter II. EUSRs and the EU Foreign Policy: Institutional and Legal framework.

Chapter II aims to provide an overview of the institutional and legal framework in which EUSRs evolve. It starts with an introduction to the CFSP, the CSDP and the EU Delegations. Then, the nomination process, the budget, the policy objectives and the function of EUSRs are explained.

A) The EUSRs and the EU External Relation: Institutional context.

1) The CFSP, EUSRs framework of acting

EUSRs evolve within a complex policy-making framework that has been taking shape over the years, making them confronted with new interlocutors and frameworks of action as well as a distinctive crisis management culture (Grevi, 2007). EU Special Representatives are part of a broad institutional and legal framework, the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The CFSP is defined as contributing “to the EU’s objectives of preserving peace, strengthening international security, promoting international cooperation and developing and consolidating democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (European Commission, n.d.).

The CFSP was established in 1993 with the Maastricht Treaty, aiming to help the EU play a role on the international scene. The Treaty introduced the pillar system, with the CFSP being the second one related to foreign policy matters characterised by special intergovernmental procedures (Telo, 2013). Subsequent changes occurred later to increase the CFSP visibility (Amsterdam Treaty with the role of HR) and make the procedure evolve (Nice treaty with the QMV in the Council) (Telo, 2013). The Lisbon Treaty, which is today’s framework of action, was seen as a promise for a new impetus in the CFSP consolidation process by creating a more coherent, effective and visible foreign policy (Howorth, 2013). The de-pillarization introduced by the Lisbon Treaty established a unified system of external Policies (Koutrakos, 2017), marking the outcome of years of constitutional debates and ending the cross-pillar incoherence (Schmid, 2012).

At stake, the CFSP is the diplomatic and security part of the EU foreign policy, complementing other components of the EU’s External Action as described in

Articles 205 to 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Within the TEU, the legal basis for the CFSP is set in Title V, Articles 21 to 46, establishing the “General Provisions on the Union’s External Action and Specific Provisions on the CFSP”. Title VI, Article 47 of the TEU, endowed the EU with legal personality, making it a single and unitary structure (Koutrakos, 2017).

Thus, the CFSP differs from TFEU policies. Eckes (2015) identifies three main differences between the two: First, EU institutions in which the “national executive is represented”, such as the Council of the EU, outweigh the others, such as the European Parliament. Second, CFSP competencies are parallel to those of member states, and there is nothing to say about levels of compliance as a CFSP action does not prevent member states from acting. Third, CFSP acts and decisions do not enter member states' legal order, as the primary aim of the CFSP is to coordinate individual foreign policies rather than impose a uniform one.

Regarding the decision-making system, the CFSP is generally characterised by unanimity. However, Article 31.1 of the TEU states that CFSP decisions *“shall be taken by the European Council and the Council acting unanimously, except where this Chapter provides otherwise. The adoption of legislative acts shall be excluded”*.

Practically, it means that even though unanimity is the rule, constructive abstention remains a possibility for member states to express their disagreement (Pomorska & Wessel, 2021). Adding this, Article 31.2 of the TEU provides that the Council *“shall act by qualified majority’ in four situations”*: (1) when adopting a decision defining a Union action or position on the basis of a decision of the European Council; (2) when adopting a decision defining a Union action or position on a proposal of the HR following a specific request from the European Council; (3) when adopting any decision implementing a decision defining a Union action or position; and (4) when appointing a Special Representative. Finally, Article 46 of the TEU also mentions the QMV for specific decisions related to PESCO.

Along with the CFSP consolidation with the Lisbon Treaty, new institutional bodies, formations and a system of permanent chairs of key committees appeared (Maurer &

Wright, 2021). Four of them (the HR/VP, the EEAS, the Foreign Affairs Council, and the Political and Security Committee) are part of the EUSRs' institutional and legal framework of action. This development aims to introduce them as CFSP actors in their relationship with the EU Special Representatives.

The HR/VP:

The cornerstone of the Lisbon Treaty regarding the EU's conduct of foreign policy is the creation of the position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security and Vice President of the European Commission (Erkelens & Blockmans, 2012). This position is the result of a merger between the previous positions of High Representative for CFSP and the post of European Commissioner for External Affairs, bridging the gap induced by the previous pillar structure inherited from Maastricht. In the constitutional changes of the Lisbon Treaty, the HR/VP also receives the positions of Chair of the FAC and Head of the EEAS. According to Article 18 of the TEU, the HR/VP is tasked with *“conducting and implementing the EU's CFSP and CSDP”* while *“ensuring the consistency of the Union's external action”*. His role as Chair of the FAC is also explicitly mentioned.

Vanhoonacker & Reslow (2010) summarised the HR/VP's multiple hats, saying that he *“fulfils a bridging function between both these EU institutions and the different dimensions of EU external relations”*. In his missions and due to its multiple responsibilities, the HR/VP exercises authority over the EUSRs, even though the latter are not formally part of the EEAS. Adding this, the HR/VP has a bigger impact on the nomination process of EUSRs than the previous HR for the CFSP, having the sole competency to propose an EUSR appointment as well as blocking a nomination (Tolksdorf, 2013).

The EEAS:

At stake, the EEAS is the diplomatic service of the EU, being tasked to assist the HR/VP in fulfilling his mandate as CFSP representative. Its legal basis is rather

concise and open-ended (Erkelens & Blockmans, 2012); Article 27.3 of the TEU states that

“In fulfilling his mandate, the High Representative shall be assisted by a European External Action Service. This service shall work in cooperation with the diplomatic services of the Member States and shall comprise officials from relevant departments of the General Secretariat of the Council and of the Commission as well as staff seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States. The organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service shall be established by a decision of the Council. The Council shall act on a proposal from the High Representative after consulting the European Parliament and after obtaining the consent of the Commission”.

The EEAS can be seen as a bureaucratic agent. It is—on paper—one of the world’s largest and most relevant diplomatic services (Howorth, 2013), representing the Union’s interests worldwide through a network of over 140 delegations. EUSRs are embedded in the EEAS structure, fulfilling their mandate under the authority of the HR/VP.

However, their status remains rather tricky: even though one of EUSRs’ functions is to “support the work of the HR/VP in the regions concerned” (EEAS, 2023), they are not part of the formal hierarchy of the EEAS and thus remain a *de facto* Council instrument (Tolksdorf, 2013). Finally, another specificity linked to the budget highlights the particular place of EUSRs. While the EEAS funding comes from the EU general budget administered by the EC and controlled by the EP and the Council of the EU, EUSRs are funded out of the CFSP budget, as will be explained later.

The Foreign Affairs Council:

The FAC is a configuration of the Council of the European Union inherited from the Lisbon Treaty that “is responsible for the EU’s external action, which includes foreign policy, defence and security, trade, development cooperation, and humanitarian aid” (Council of the EU, n.d.). According to Article 16 of the TEU, the FAC

“shall elaborate the Union's external action on the basis of strategic guidelines laid down by the European Council and ensure that the Union's action is consistent”. Its relationship with EUSRs is mentioned in Article 33 of the TEU, the FAC providing EUSRs with a mandate related to a *“particular policy issue”*.

Chaired by the HR/VP and composed of foreign ministers from all EU member states, the FAC has appointed the EUSRs according to a qualified majority vote since the Lisbon Treaty. It is often considered an exception to the CFSP intergovernmental procedures of acting, which usually privilege the unanimity rule.

The Political and Security Committee:

The PSC is a preparatory body of the Council of the EU, established under a Council decision in 2001. Composed of member states' ambassadors based in Brussels, the PSC is considered central to the institutionalisation of EU foreign policy as it *“facilitates and expands the regular exchanges between member states and plays a leading role in EU crisis management”* (Maurer & Wright, 2021). The legal basis of the PSC is stated in Article 38 of the TEU, stating that the PSC *“shall monitor the international situation in the areas covered by the CFSP”* with the mission of preparing a *“coherent EU response to a crisis and exercises its political control and strategic direction”* (Council of the EU, n.d.).

Even though the FAC appoints them, EUSRs' primary point of contact within the Council is the PSC, which provides them with strategic guidance and political direction without prejudice to the power of the HR/VP (Tolksdorf, 2013). It also plays a crucial role in the EUSRs' mandate extension, amendment, or termination, as explained in their mandate: *“The Council may decide that the EUSR's mandate be terminated earlier, based on an assessment by the Political and Security Committee and a proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR)¹⁴”*. Finally, EUSR reports to the PSC every six months in Brussels, explaining what they have done in the period and showing their progress in their respective mandate.

¹⁴ Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1340, which appoints Mr Johann SATTLER as the EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This sentence is written in all Council Decisions that appoint an EUSR.

2) The EUSRs and the CSDP

The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) -former name: European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) until 2009- is an integral part of the CFSP that focuses on the progressive framing of a common EU defence policy. The CSDP is the main framework through which member states cooperate on crisis management, as detailed in Articles 42 to 46 of the Treaty on European Union. It aims to enable the Union to “take a leading role in peace-keeping operations, conflict prevention and the strengthening of the international security” (EEAS, 2021). The range of tasks held within the CSDP is detailed in Article 43, Section 2, Chapter II, Title V of the TEU, including humanitarian and rescue tasks; conflict prevention and peacekeeping tasks; tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking and post-conflict stabilisation; joint disarmament operations; and military advice and assistance tasks. All these are in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

As of today, nearly 5,000 EU military and civilian staff work in 18 ongoing missions, of which 11 are civilian, and seven are military (Borrell & EEAS, 2021). From a global point of view, CSDP missions have made significant differences: the Artemis Operation saved lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while Operation Althea has stabilised BiH since 2004 (Andersson, 2024).

Same as the CFSP, the CSDP consolidated over the years and progressively defined its relationships with the EU Special Representatives. Following the 2003 European security strategy that aimed at “achieving a secure Europe in a better world, identifying the threats facing the Union, defining its strategic objectives and setting out the political implications for Europe” (European Security Strategy, 2016), the Civilian Headline Goal (CHG) was approved in 2008. Aiming to coherently use the Community and civilian ESDP instruments, the CHG made the support for EU Special Representatives a priority sector of civil crisis management (Doyle, 2022).

The 2016 EU Global Strategy, which gave a “new impetus and strategic guidance to the work of crisis prevention, intervention and stabilisation” (Rehrl, 2019) in the field of the CSDP, acknowledges EUSRs’ role as a tool for pre-emptive peace,

contributing to an integrated approach to conflicts and crises (European Union, 2016). In the end, EUSRs are tasked to liaise on the ground with CSDP actors and sometimes are integrated into the latter mission's chain of command. If this is the case, EUSRs must coordinate the European Delegations and the CSDP actors in missions to ensure coherence in the global EU foreign policy and avoid potential overlapping. Regarding the decision-making process, the HR/VP proposes and implements the decisions related to the CSDP that are adopted -apart from certain exceptions- unanimously by the European Council and the Council of the EU.

The Western Balkans, which are the subject of this study, are usually defined as the cradle of the ESDP (Grevi, 2007). As EU military CSDP missions are primarily set to support EU candidates or partner countries (Andersson, 2024), their historical presence in the region is not a surprise. The first mission launched within the CSDP framework is the EU's policing mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM) in 2003, and the largest one to date is the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo). Both were deployed following UN missions¹⁵ as a symbol of the EU trying to take over a role in its close neighbourhood. The EU Special Representatives in BiH and Kosovo play a key role in both missions, acting in tandem (Mutluer & Tsarouhas, 2018) and being tasked to provide general guidance to the respective missions (Muletti, 2023), as well as cooperating with the other CSDP mission in BiH (EUFOR Althea) and UN mission in Kosovo (KFOR). Without prejudice to the former CSDP's mission chain of command, the EUSR in the BiH "offers political guidance to the EUFOR Commander on military issues with a local political dimension" (EEAS, 2021). The support shown by Operation Althea since 2004 highlights the commitment of member states to military CSDP missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Andersson, 2024).

3) The EUSRs and the EU Delegations/Office

The EU Delegations are set to represent the EU and its citizens around the globe to promote the values and interests of the EU. Since the amendment of the Lisbon Treaty, EU Delegations have taken over the Commission's Delegations and thus

¹⁵ The United Nations Mission in BiH (UNMBIH) lasted from 1995 to 2022, and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has played a minor role since EULEX's creation in 2008.

have been placed under the authority of the HR/VP, being fully embedded into the EEAS structure¹⁶. The network is composed of 144 Delegations “responsible for all policy areas of the relationship between the EU and the host country – be they political, economic, trade or on human rights and in building relationships with partners in civil society” (European Union Visitor Program, 2020).

The relationship between the Head of EU Delegation and EU Special Representatives is particular in many points. Primarily, the Lisbon Treaty changed the traditional European Commission Delegations (ECDs) to European Delegations. By doing so, it blurs the line of division of labour. Pre-Lisbon, the former European Commission Delegations -which are permanent- were supposed to represent the long-term interests of the EU, overseeing the monitoring and implementation of projects initiated by the Union (Tolksdorf, 2015). Contrarily, EUSRs -which are appointed on a given period- were exclusively tasked to focus on security policy and crisis management (Mateja, 2012) and thus received their mandates from the Council.

Due to the Lisbon Treaty, ECDs turned into EU Delegations and are now formally part of the EEAS. Consequently, it was expected that the EUSR role would be gradually replaced, as HR/VP Catherine Ashton wanted. Questions were arising on the necessity of having two CFSP bodies covering the same area in terms of coherence in the EU’s approach to the troubled regions. Because the relationship between the two has often been strained due to an overlap of the tasks, one of the potential pitfalls is when appointing a EUSR with a mandate similar to the missions held by the Head of an EUD.

Even though meant to be complementary, the two positions often overlap each other. Adding these, the structural differences (budget, office, etc.) between the two increase the danger of creating fragmentation in the EU’s approach and undermining its competencies (Lecocq, 2020). One of the interviewees working in an EUSR team highlights this problem, emphasising the need for harmonisation between the two

¹⁶ Article 221, Title VI of the TFEU states that: “*Union delegations in third countries and at international organisations shall represent the Union. Union delegations shall be placed under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*”.

bodies' actions as part of the same service despite the differences¹⁷. This harmonisation is important as EUSRs usually participate in high-level meetings during which they need to ensure that they represent a common and unified EU position (Tolksdorf, 2015).

Then, the particularity of the double-hatted EUSRs as Heads of the EU delegations emerge. This possibility was unthinkable for a long time, as the former EU Commission Delegations and EUSRs were integrated into two different pillars. The first time the two positions were merged was in 2005 in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), when Erwan Fouéré was appointed as European Union Special Representative and Head of Delegation in the FYROM. This decision was made to increase the EU's coherence in the Western Balkans, as EU military and police missions were growing, as well as the number of EU actors on the ground (Fouéré, 2016).

Following the success of the first double-hat, which the different interlocutors in FYROM welcomed (Mateja, 2012), the double-hatted approach developed in Afghanistan, the African Union, and the Western Balkans. As of today, only two EUSRs out of the ten positions are double-hatted. Both are subjects of this study and work in the Western Balkans. The EUSR in BiH has been double-hatted Head of the EU Delegation in BiH since 2011, and the EUSR in Kosovo, following the Ahtisaari Plan, has been double-hatted Head of the EU Delegation in Kosovo since 2012. But questions remain: as stated, EUSRs and Head of EU Delegations have structural differences in their prerogative and rights. It is thus sometimes difficult to determine “where one hat ends, and the other hat starts¹⁸”, as the EUSR's budget comes from the CFSP and is managed by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, whereas EUDs are funded by the EEAS (European Parliament, 2019).

On the side, regarding the Western Balkans, Erwan Fouéré (2016), former double-hatted EUSR and of the EUD for the FYROM, pledged for the nomination for an “EUSR for the Western Balkans”, replacing the two double-hatted in BiH and Kosovo. This idea was submitted to one of the interviewees, who clearly stated that it

¹⁷ Interview with an EEAS official, 3/10/2023.

¹⁸ Interview with an EEAS official, 20/10/2023.

would be helpful regarding the enlargement policies in general, as the EU has been an active player in the Western Balkans for a long time¹⁹. As the work is not going “as fast as expected”, the idea might be envisaged but with clearly considering not overlapping the tasks of Mr Ambassador Lajčák.

B) The EUSRs: Institutional generalities and legal framework

1) Appointment process

As explained in Chapter I, the progressive institutionalisation of the EUSRs alongside the CFSP consolidation made their status evolve. As of today, EUSRs have evolved in a framework that includes 1) EU institutions: the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU, and 2) the EEAS, FAC, the PSC, and the HR/VP. In detail, the current nomination process for an EU Special Representative is as follows:

- 1) According to Article 33 of the TEU, EUSRs are appointed by the Council “*on a proposal from the High Representative*”. Since the Lisbon Treaty, the HR/VP has had the monopoly to propose an EUSR, as it is his proposal that triggers the appointment process (Koutrakos, 2017). Nevertheless, according to the “Guidelines on Appointment, Mandate, and Financing of EU Special Representatives” (that are non-binding), the Council of the EU “may invite the HR to present a proposal for the appointment of an EUSR with a mandate in relation to a particular policy issue” (Council of the EU, 2014).
- 2) Once the HR/VP proposes an appointment, the PSC reviews it. In assessing the proposal, the PSC can invite the competent Council Working Parties (e.g., RELEX Working Party for the legal, institutional and financial aspects, etc.) to examine the mandate (EU Parliament, 2019) and draw recommendations.
- 3) If the PSC agrees on the mandate, a draft is finalised for adoption by the Council, and an agreement in principle is set. member states, through the PSC, will start proposing candidates for the position. This agreement is made according to Article 31(2) of the TEU, which allows the Council of the EU to

¹⁹ Interview with an EEAS official, 3/10/2023.

make decisions by QMV. One of the specific circumstances for using the QMV in a CFSP characterised by unanimity is the appointment of an EU Special Representative (Navarra, C., Jančová, L., Ioannides, I., & European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023).

- 4) The HR/VP and the EEAS are tasked to organise the selection process
- 5) Once the choice is made and the PSC gives its political endorsement to the member states' recommendation, the EUSR is formally appointed by the Council of the European Union through a Council Decision, as explained in Chapter I.

Once in missions, the EUSRs provide the HR and the PSC with reports, as well as—if needed—the FAC, the EP, and the communication network of the European Union for the communication of the Council of the European Union (COREU) and liaise with all the different CFSP and non-CFSP relevant actors.

2) Budget

As stated, EUSRs have a particular status within the EEAS. Due to their contract as CFSP advisors, all administrative and operational expenditures related to EUSRs are funded out of the EEAS budget (Adebahr, 2009). Practically, EUSRs' budget is managed by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), a joint service of the Commission and the Council of the EU whose mission is “to put EU foreign policy into action, fast and flexibly, in a policy-driven and integrated approach” while closely collaborating with the EEAS and all the Commission's Directorates-General to ensure global coherency in the EU's Foreign Policy (European Commission, n.d.). The FPI is located within the EEAS headquarters because the HR-VP wears the hat of Vice-President of the European Commission.

When managing EUSRs' budgets on behalf of the Commission, the FPI has to comply with Article 317 of the TFUE, stating that:

“The Commission shall implement the budget in cooperation with the Member States, in accordance with the provisions of the regulations made pursuant to Article 322, on its own responsibility and within the limits of the appropriations, having regard to

the principles of sound financial management. Member States shall cooperate with the Commission to ensure that the appropriations are used in accordance with the principles of sound financial management”.

These principles of “sound financial management” that the FPI must cope with are explained in Article 33 of the Financial Regulation and refer to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness (European Parliament & Council of the EU, 2018). In addition, in the preparatory phase of appointing an EUSR, the FPI drafts a budgetary impact statement that is assessed by the RELEX working parties (EU Parliament, 2019). In the end, as stated in the Guidelines,

“The management of the expenditure is subject to a contract between the EUSR and the Commission. In the framework of his contract with the Commission, the EUSR will be accountable to the Commission for all expenditure charged to the CFSP chapter in the EU budget” (Council of the EU, 2014).

EUSRs are thus accountable to the Commission, a precision of accountability that is mentioned in all Council Decisions that appoint an EUSR. At stake, each EUSR budget differs from one to another as the biggest variable of the budget is the operational expenditures of EUSRs, which depend on the number and composition of the staff they work with. EUSRs are tasked with building their own Office, which can be composed of staff from member states, EU institutions, local staff, etc. This means that EUSRs are rather autonomous –the European Commission qualifies them as “independent natural persons”- when it comes to the management of their budget and EUSRs that are country-based might have a bigger budget due to additional costs. For example, it stated in Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1135 appointing the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo that:

“Within the limits of the EUSR’s mandate and the corresponding financial means made available, the EUSR shall be responsible for constituting a team. The team shall include the expertise on specific policy issues as required by the mandate. The EUSR shall keep the Council and the Commission promptly informed of the composition of the team. Member States, institutions of the Union and the EEAS may propose the secondment of staff to work with the EUSR”.

Regarding the mandates of the three EUSRs in the Western Balkan, budgets are as follows since their first appointment in office:

According to the Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1527 related to the extension of the EUSR's mandate in Kosovo, Mr Ambassador Szunyog, *“The financial reference amount intended to cover the expenditure related to the EUSR's mandate for the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024 shall be EUR 2 850 000”*.

Table 1: Budget of EUSR Tomas Szunyog since in Office:

<i>Mandate</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Budget</i>
1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021	One year	EUR 3 300 000
1 September 2021 to 31 August 2023	Two years	EUR 6 600 000
1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024	One year	EUR 2 850 000

According to the Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1516 related to the extension of the EUSR's mandate in BiH, Mr Ambassador Johann Sattler, *“The financial reference amount intended to cover the expenditure related to the EUSR's mandate for the period from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024 shall be EUR 5 530 000”*.

Table 2: Budget of EUSR Johann Sattler since in Office:

<i>Mandate</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Budget</i>
1 September 2019 to 31 August 2021	Two years	EUR 13 700 000
1 September 2021 to 31 August 2023	Two years	EUR 12 800 000
1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024	One year	EUR 5 530 000

According to the Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1969 related to the extension of the EUSR's mandate for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, Mr Ambassador Lajčák, *“The financial reference amount intended to cover the expenditure related to the EUSR's mandate for the period from 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2024 shall be EUR 5 200 000”*.

Table 3: Budget of EUSR Miroslav Lajčák since in Office:

<i>Mandate</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Budget</i>
2 April 2020 to 31 March 2021	One year	EUR 1 200 000
1 April 2021 to 31 August 2022	One year	EUR 2 580 000
1 September 2022 to 31 August 2024	Two years	EUR 5 200 000

Table 4: Overview of the current EUSRs' budget, higher to lower²⁰:

<i>One-year mandate</i>		
EUSR to BiH	2023-2024	EUR 5 200 000
EUSR to Kosovo	2023-2024	EUR 2 850 000
EUSR for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia	2023-2024	EUR 2 763 000
EUSR for Human Rights	2023-2024	EUR 1 567 461,56
<i>Two-years mandate</i>		
EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other WB regional issues	2022-2024	EUR 5 200 000
EUSR for the Horn of Africa	2022-2024	EUR 4 744 381,14
EUSR for Sahel	2022-2024	EUR 3 450 000
EUSR for Central Asia	2023-2025	EUR 2 665 000
EUSR for the Middle-East peace process	2023-2025	EUR 2 099 463,58
EUSR for the Gulf Region	2023-2025	EUR 1 800 000

Here are the budgets of the ten current EUSRs in positions. Proportionally, the three EUSRs in the Western Balkans have the highest budget compared to others, a symbol of the EU's emphasis on and engagement with the region.

²⁰ The source of the number is each Council Decision that appoints or extends the mandate of the EUSRs.

3) Policy objectives and functions

The mandates of EUSRs contain two dimensions: the policy objectives and the functions of the mandate.

The policy objectives are specific to each mandate as they are designed to address the crisis EUSRs are aimed to work on. Whereas the EUSR for Central Asia is mainly tasked with implementing the European Strategy for Central Asia, the EUSR for the Middle-East Peace Process is tasked with maintaining close contact with all parties involved in the peace process, as well as with other organisations, such as the UN or the League of Arab States. Consequently, there is no “uniform” design of policy objectives as each crisis is by nature different. However, common patterns emerge when EUSRs work in the same region, as the crises they work on are often intertwined. This is the case regarding the policy objectives of the EUSRs in the Western Balkans, which are rather similar due to the region’s recent history and the Balkans wars. The details of each of the three mandate’s policy objectives will be provided in the case study (Chapter IV), but here are a few common patterns related to the stability of the region, the path toward the EU and the promotion of Rule of Law.

Table 1: Similarities in policy objectives of the EUSRs in the Western Balkans:

EUSR to BiH policy objectives	EUSR to Kosovo policy objectives	EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue policy objectives
To create a ‘ stable, viable and peaceful, multiethnic and united’ BiH	To create a ‘ stable, viable and peaceful, multiethnic and united’ Kosovo	To contribute to peace, security and stability in the region by promoting the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina
To ensure that BiH is irreversibly on track towards Union membership	To support Kosovo’s European perspective and rapprochement with the Union	To achieve comprehensive normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which is key to their respective European paths
To ensure the implementation of the Union’s efforts in the entire range of activities in the field of the rule of law and the security sector reform	To promote a Kosovo that is committed to the rule of law and the protection of minorities	/

Contrarily to the policy objectives, the functions are in line with serving the EU's policies and interests in the mandated area and are thus common to all EUSRs in position. They are derived from the "Guidelines on appointment, mandate, salaries and financing of EUSRs" and are linked to the different bodies involved in the appointment process of an EUSR. These functions can be seen as responsibilities EUSRs need to take vis-à-vis the EU and must be fulfilled carefully.

One of the very first functions of their mandate refers to their qualification as the EU's "ears and eyes" in the mandated area (Grevi, 2007). At stake, EUSRs are tasked with providing member states in Brussels with information related to the progress of their mandate. This mission of reporting is even more crucial when it concerns entities such as Kosovo that the member states do not unanimously recognise (and thus may not have a presence there). The EUSR may thus appear as a privileged source of information, and their position makes them privileged interlocutors for member states. The reporting to member states can be done through the PSC in person or sometimes to the PSC through the HR/VP (Tolksdorf, 2013). One of the interviewees specified that a report is made to the PSC every time something important happens, in accordance with the function of the mandate²¹. Adding this, EUSRs do not only use the PSC to report but rather use all channels to provide information when deemed necessary (HR/VP, FAC, EU Parliament, Commission, Western Balkans Summit, etc.).

A second function related to the EUSR's mandate is to contribute to the better coordination of EU activities in their mandate areas. This function aims to ensure unity, consistency, and effectiveness of the Union's actions, making EUSRs cooperate closely with all of the Union's instruments and different member states (EU Parliament, 2019). At stake, EUSRs are tasked to work in coordination with 1) the EEAS and the EU Delegations, 2) the Head of the CSDP Missions in their mandated areas with providing local political guidance, 3) EU Institutions and bilateral initiatives taken by member states (Tolksdorf, 2013). Emphasis can be placed on the need to liaise with CSDP missions in the mandated area, which is crucial and stated in the Council Decision that appoints an EUSR. For example, EUSR to Kosovo's mandate states that one of its functions is to "provide local

²¹ Interview with an EEAS official, 20/10/2023.

political guidance to the Head of EULEX KOSOVO, including on the political aspects of issues relating to executive responsibilities”. EUSRs thus strive to coordinate all the relevant actors to achieve the greatest coherence possible (Adebahr, 2009).

A third function related to the EUSR’s mandate is to demonstrate the EU’s engagement and interests in the mandated area and strengthen the Union’s visibility. As stated by Solana in his opening remark, EUSRs are “the face of the EU in the field”, acting as the “visible expression of the EU's growing engagement in some of the world's most troubled countries and regions”²². As highlighted by one of the interviewees, “*When the EUSR speaks to ministers or deputies, it is, “The EU said”*”²³. EUSRs are the voice, face, ears and eyes of the EU in all instances we work with, as they are the practical proof the EU is paying attention to the mandated area. This function is facilitated by the direct access EUSRs have to any politician and their facility to set up high-level meetings when needed.

A fourth and final function related to the EUSR’s mandate is linked to the EU's global approach toward the mandated area. There, EUSRs are tasked with contributing to the implementation of the EU’s policies and strategies, as defined by the EEAS. The service published general strategies on the Western Balkan²⁴ and Central Asia that the EUSRs are asked to implement when fulfilling their mandate.

²² Opening remarks by Javier Solana, *op. Cit.*

²³ Interview with an EEAS official, 20/10/2023.

²⁴ The document called ‘*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*’ was published in 2018. European Commission. (2018). A Credible Enlargement Perspective and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/western_balkans_strategy_brochure.pdf

Chapter III: Objectives, Theory and Methodology

Chapter III introduces the “effectiveness” conceptualisation used to assess the EUSRs in the Western Balkans. It also explains in detail the methodology used for the work and provides the hypotheses that will be tested to answer the research question.

1) Conceptualisation and literature review

As stated, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of the EUSRs in the Western Balkans, a topic that has not been extensively explored in the academic sphere. This choice can be explained by the fact that despite increased attention (theoretical and empirical) to the performances and role of EU Special Representatives in EU foreign policy (European Parliament, 2019; Grevi, 2007; Fouéré, 2016; Tolksdorf, 2015; Adebahr, 2009), only a few scholars have tried assessing their *effectiveness*. When this was done, attention was generally focused on the mandate of one special Representative (West, 2016), thus focusing on a particular case study. Studying the effectiveness of the three EUSRs in the Western Balkans will highlight common dynamics and issues specific to the region. This will enable a precise study of the EU's presence there and the possibility of proposing recommendations to increase its effectiveness.

Assessing an actor's effectiveness is complicated as the concept itself is rather subjective and slippery (Baldwin, 2000). There is not just one dimension of effectiveness but rather many, considering different variables such as the use of available resources and institutional capacities, the clear-cut victories (or not), the backlash, the progress towards an ideal-type situation, etc.

In this conceptualisation, the main factor of effectiveness will be understood as “goal attainment”. This choice can be explained by the fact that EUSRs are, by definition, goal-oriented, aiming to see how well they have been able to reach and solve the problem dimension underlined in the policy objectives of their mandate. The latter are longstanding and rather broad, and the fact that EU Special Representatives are still in positions means the issues have not been solved yet nor fully addressed. Goal attainment and effectiveness are thus here a question of “degree”, going beyond the binary view of “effective versus ineffective” or “success versus failure” that

generally characterises the study of EU foreign policy. This nuanced approach opens up possibilities for improving the effectiveness of EU Special Representatives in the Western Balkans, offering hope for more successful outcomes in the future.

From this, the retained definition of effectiveness is “*the degree to which EUSRs achieve the pre-determined objectives of their mandate*”.

Assessing the EU Special Representatives' actions in the Western Balkans thus requires a model that builds on this question of “degree of success”, requiring evidence of the situation they sought to influence before and after to highlight the concrete changes that have occurred in the mandated areas thanks to their actions. Here, effectiveness focuses more on the outcomes (analysis of the engaged policy process, its normativity, and its results), goal attainment and their consequences (an EUSR success serves the Union’s interests and its foreign policy), and the increase in the influence and coordination of actors on the ground (more coordination leads to more coherence in the EU and thus is a factor of effectiveness).

Thus, EUSRs’ effectiveness will be assessed according to an empirical threshold of four degrees based on the expected outcome of their actions regarding the policy objectives of their mandate. Hence, the degrees of effectiveness will be attributed to how far the EUSRs are in reaching the expected outcome of their actions (considering the milestones, the backlash, as well as the factors they are subject to and can not have an impact on) and understanding the progress they have made since their appointment in office. In the end, the assessment will thus compare the outcome of their actions with what is theoretically expected from the latter.

Expected outcome of their actions	Outcome of their actions	Degree of effectiveness
/	/	Ineffective
/	/	Rather ineffective
/	/	Rather effective
/	/	Effective

This conceptualisation will be used on two hypotheses, aiming to assess EUSR's contribution and action to the EU CFSP regarding their mission.

H1: EUSRs' legal and institutional framework leads to more effectiveness.

The "legal and institutional framework" provides the general framework for action of the EU Special Representatives, giving them a wide range of possibilities. This point focuses on the characteristics of their positions 1) The "political clout" of their positions both within and out of the EEAS that serve them for the better in taking actions such as pursuing quiet diplomacy, 2) the flexibility of their mandates that allow them to make unique decisions by using the means they deem most appropriate and 3) the position added-value of the EUSR on the ground and how the latter is function of their effectiveness.

H2: EUSRs' extensive granted powers lead to more effectiveness.

The EUSRs, with their unique position and extensive powers delegated by the 27 member states, play a pivotal role in the landscape of Western Balkans Politics. They represent the EU in a distinct and unparalleled manner, filling a crucial capability-expectations gap that has long characterised EU action in the region.

Addressing these two hypotheses aims to provide practical insights into the effectiveness of the EUSR in the Western Balkans. To achieve this, we will present our findings in the form of comparative tables. These tables will allow us to assess the degree of effectiveness of the studied EUSR. This structured approach will provide a comprehensive assessment of the EUSRs' effectiveness.

Table 1: EUSR to Kosovo, degree of effectiveness regarding the policy objectives of the mandate:

	<i>Expected outcome</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Degree of effectiveness</i>
<i>To offer the EU's advice and support in the political process and promote Union political coordination in Kosovo</i>			
<i>Strengthen the presence of the Union in Kosovo and ensure its coherence and effectiveness</i>			
<i>Provide local Political guidance to the Head of EULEX Kosovo</i>			
<i>To promote a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo</i>			

Table 2: EUSR to BiH, degree of effectiveness regarding the policy objectives of the mandate:

	<i>Expected outcome</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Degree of effectiveness</i>
<i>Continuing progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process</i>			
<i>Ensuring a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic, and united BiH that cooperates peacefully with its neighbour</i>			
<i>Ensuring that BiH is irreversibly on track towards Union membership</i>			

Table 3: EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, degree of effectiveness regarding the policy objectives of the mandate:

	<i>Expected outcome</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Degree of effectiveness</i>
<i>To achieve comprehensive normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, which is key to their respective European paths</i> <i>To enhance the EU's visibility and effectiveness through public diplomacy and contribute to the consistency and effectiveness of EU action in the Western Balkans</i> <i>To improve good neighbourly relations and reconciliation between partners in the Western Balkans</i>			

2) Methodology

Assessing the effectiveness of the EU Special Representatives as a tool of the EEAS and the CFSP requires the collection of qualitative rather than quantitative data. This choice can be explained by the fact that this study aims to offer in-depth insights into the EUSRs' actions in the Western Balkans, and not things such as drawing patterns or making predictions. Nevertheless, assessing effectiveness is rather subjective and not only relies on the analysed data selected for this research. Hence, the results of this study do not aim to be generalised for the other EU Special Representatives or to offer replicable results for other qualitative studies.

This study relies on two methods of data collection.

The first one consists of secondary research. Most of the information regarding the institutional settings, the legal frameworks and the development related to effectiveness comes from the Scientific Literature, as well as (particularly) from policy documents and briefs published by institutions, States' administrations, Think Tanks and groups of reflection. A particular focus was placed on literature regarding the EU Special Representatives, Effectiveness in Foreign Policy and the EU-Western Balkans relationship both from an institutional and historical perspective.

The second source of data collection is qualitative: semi-structured interviews conducted with various people related to the thesis topics. At the end of my work, four people were interviewed²⁵, including one EU Special Representative:

- The Head of the Political Section of the office of Mr Ambassador Szunyog, the EU Special Representative for Kosovo, on 3/10/2023.
- The EU Special Representative for Kosovo, Mr Ambassador Tomasz Szunyog, on 15/05/2024.
- The Chief Political Advisor to Mr Ambassador Miroslav Lajčák, the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, on 20/10/2023.
- The Deputy Head of Division Western Balkans of the EEAS, on 12/10/2023.

²⁵ Despite numerous tries, no interview could be set with someone from the Office of Mr Sattler.

This choice of interviewees can be explained by the need for empirical data to support the theoretical findings. Hence, all the questions asked during the interviews were related to the findings coming from secondary research to support or counter them. For example, the scientific literature related to the EUSRs focuses a lot on the “double-hatted specificity” of the EUSRs in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina as Head of Delegation (Mateja, 2012; Fouéré, 2016). However, there is no consensus on whether this choice reinforces the EU’s coherence on the ground or weakens it. It was thus primordial during the interviews to produce related questions to gain insights into the consequences of this choice made by the EU. It also helped to empirically answer the questions related to “coherence”, seeing if combining the two positions into one person helped increase EUSRs’ effectiveness or just gave more work to one person.

Regarding the interviews with people working in an EUSR office, they were quite similar. Broad questions on their missions/role within their respective office were asked, as well as more personal questions such as: How do they perceive the EUSRs status as a factor of effectiveness? What are the biggest issues encountered in fulfilling their missions? How is the cooperation between EU and non-EU bodies? What is the EUSR added value on the ground? The idea of these interviews was to have a concrete view from people working with the Ambassadors. As the interviewees were appointed to their positions by the Special Representatives themselves, the relevance of their arguments is not to be proven nor demonstrated.

On the contrary, the interview with the EEAS Officer was rather theoretical and did not discuss private opinions much. The purpose of the interview was to better understand the role of the Western Balkans Division of the EEAS and its connections with the EUSRs. The only subjective question asked was about the interviewee's opinion on EUSRs’ floating status as a factor of effectiveness.

The forty minutes of the interview with the EU Special Representative for Kosovo were mostly spent on general appreciation of his work (milestone reached, backlash encountered) and more specific questions related to Kosovo’s politics, his perception of the double-hat characteristics, and the importance of his position in the Western Balkan and particularly Kosovo.

Regarding the way these interviews were conducted, they were conducted online, through videoconference, and in a semi-structured manner. The questions were sent a week (except for Mr Ambassador Szunyog) before the meeting so the interviewees could prepare and produce remarks if needed. During the meeting, questions were asked according to a predefined order going on by one. Before asking each question, the openness of the process was reminded so the interviewees could extend and broaden their responses further. The openness of the process was an added value in collecting information that is rarely seen in the Scientific literature related to the EU Special Representatives.

Chapter IV: Case Study: The EUSRs and the Western Balkans

The EU-Western Balkans relationship started in the aftermath of the numerous wars of the nineties. For over 20 years, the enlargement perspective has been at the heart of the relationship, deeply influencing the role of the EUSRs in the region. The EU is pursuing with the Western Balkans an attitude of conditional cooperation that has proved to be effective in promoting the EU's norms and values (Maliqi, 2023). This fourth part aims to introduce in detail the EU relationship with the region from an institutional perspective -in sort of a timeline- before presenting each of the respective EUSR mandates according to the latest council decisions, as well as the specificities of their actions in their mandate area (double-hat as Head of EUD, collaboration between the EUSR and other entities on the ground, etc.).

A) EU relations with the Western Balkans: Historical and Institutional approach

1) The EU and the Western Balkans, an institutional approach

It is not a hazard that three out of the ten EU Special Representatives in positions are working in the Western Balkans, a region that has long been seen as Europe's troublemaking periphery (Vila, 2023). The term "Western Balkans", which usually refers to six countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo²⁶, North Macedonia, and Montenegro), was introduced at the Vienna European Council (1998), where a need for establishing a common strategy under the label of "promoting stability and prosperity throughout Europe and in the world" was stated (Council of the EU, 1998).

As of today, all six countries have a particular bilateral relationship with the EU: five of them (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia) are EU membership candidates, while Kosovo is a potential membership candidate.

To clearly understand the EU-Western Balkans relationship, a start needs to be taken in the late 1990s. Following Kosovo's military conflict (1998-1999), the EU decided

²⁶ For all work, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

at the Cologne European Council (1999) and in accordance with the need stated at the Vienna European Council for a “Common Strategy on the Western Balkans”, to launch the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe (SPSEE) (Uvalić, 2023). With the aim of “fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity” (Refworld, 2024), the SPSEE prefigured the launch in the same year of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), a progressive general framework that covers the eventual membership of Western Balkans countries (European Commission, n.d.).

Still effective today and framing the EU-Western Balkans relationship, the SAP aims to “stabilise the region and establish a free-trade area” by setting out “common political and economic goals” and offering each country “mixed trade concessions, economic and financial aids” (Nežirović S., Živko A., Durmišević B., Hodžić A., 2022). The framework was enshrined in the declaration made at the end of the Feira European Council (2000), where it was stated that:

“The European Council confirms that its objective remains the fullest possible integration of the countries of the region into the political and economic mainstream of Europe through the Stabilisation and Association process, political dialogue, liberalisation of trade and cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs. All the countries concerned are potential candidates for EU membership” (European Parliament, 2000).

The SAP gave the EU the role of a quasi-enlargement actor aiming to -potentially- integrate the Western Balkans countries, the enlargement perspective being an incentive to bring and implement various reforms in the region. Within the SAP, the EU has tailored contractual relationships with Western Balkans countries under the name of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) that are integrated into the EUSRs in BiH and Kosovo mandate. The SAAs are tailored to the needs of each partner country and generally include “economic and financial assistance, cooperation, political dialogue, achieving a free trade area, approximation to EU legislation and practices and cooperation in areas such as justice and home affairs” (Lika, 2024). At stake, the SAA aims to help candidate countries meet the criteria required to join the EU, the longstanding *Acquis Communautaire*, and serve as a basis of the policy objectives of the EUSRs in the Western Balkans.

Since the first SAA signature between North Macedonia and the EU in 2001, the relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans has been strengthened (along with other SAA signatures such as the one with Bosnia and Herzegovina (2008), Serbia (2008), and Kosovo (2015) and marked by numerous summits and declarations, all of which emphasise and remind the potential EU's future of the Western Balkans. EUSRs evolve in this framework, their mandate including promotion of the SAA in their respective countries.

Firstly, the SAP framework was strengthened at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, a “milestone in the European Union's relations with the Western Balkans” (European Commission, 2003), taking over elements of the accession process²⁷. From this Council came the “Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans: Towards European Integration,” which was considered by EU member states “a new important step in the privileged relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans” (Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans Summit Thessaloniki, 2003). In their final declaration, EU member states highlighted that “the future of the Balkans is within the European Union” (*Ibid*), a meaningful sentence only two months after the signature of the Treaty of Athens that granted most of the Balkan's post-communist neighbours from the eastern front the EU membership (Poland, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta).

However, the transition toward a planned and liberal democracy that adopted the model of a market economy took way more time than expected, with Western Balkans countries lagging behind their post-communist neighbours (Vachudova, 2019; Fagan & Sircar, 2015). Moreover, Western Balkans countries have been considered “weak states” with “diminished governing capacities” since the late 90s (Kaufman et al., 2012), and the situation has not evolved much in the last two decades following the Thessaloniki Summit, as the compliance with the required “Acquis Communautaire” takes time.

²⁷ The official document states that: “*The current framework for European relations with the region, known as the Stabilisation and Association process, will remain central, but it will be enriched with elements drawn from the recent successful enlargement process. These include strengthened political cooperation, enhanced support for institution building, promotion of economic growth by increasing the region's export possibilities through concrete trade measures, and the possibility for the countries of the Western Balkans to participate in some Community programmes*”.

In March 2011, the EU-facilitated dialogue was launched with the aim of establishing comprehensive and normalised relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Two years later, in 2013, the first Agreement was signed in Brussels.

In 2014, the Berlin Process was a new impetus to staging relations between the EU and the Western Balkans. Consisting of a platform for high-level cooperation between representatives of the Western Balkans and their peers in Berlin Process host countries, the process had four goals, namely: Resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues; Achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region; Enhancing regional economic cooperation; Laying the foundations for sustainable growth (Berlin process, n.d.). The initiative was strengthened by a meeting held every year, such as in 2017 in Trieste, where the possible opportunities for Western Balkans countries to join the EU faster were discussed (Szenes, 2017). However, as of today, the progress made by the Berlin Process in strengthening the relationship could be stronger, with little overall achievement²⁸ (Marciacq, 2017; Jovanovic & Holzer, 2023).

Following the 2017 Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union address in which the former European Commission president advocated for a "credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans," the EUC launched a new enlargement strategy in 2018 (Uvalić, 2023). The latter is made up of three chapters (A credible enlargement perspective requires credible efforts and reforms in the Western Balkans; A credible enlargement perspective requires support from the EU; Preparing the EU to welcome new members), and it solely focuses on the enlargement perspective of the Western Balkans countries and how to approach them better²⁹. Again, the EU Strategy achieved little due to a lack of political commitment from member states (Cvijic, 2020).

²⁸ This postulate is even mentioned in a Policy Paper called "The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Four Recommendations to Achieve Progress", published by the Federal Academy for Security Policy, the Republic of Germany's Interministerial Institution for Advanced Studies, education and training in security policy. https://www.baks.bund.de/sites/baks010/files/working_paper_2022_10.pdf

²⁹ European Commission. (2018). *A Credible Enlargement Perspective and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans*. Op. Cit.

Numerous declarations that came out of the different EU-Western Balkans Summits continued enhancing the long-lasting perspective of the EU integration (in Sofia in 2018, Zagreb in 2020, Brdo in 2021 and Tirana in 2021). In 2022, the EU released the Tirana Declaration, stating that the Union:

“(...)reconfirms its full and unequivocal commitment to the European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans and calls for the acceleration of the accession process, based upon credible reforms by Partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits, which is in our mutual interest” (Tirana Declaration, 2022).

But as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia sometimes have “episodes of political instability (...) political scandals associated with corruption, backsliding in democracy and the tendency towards authoritarian regimes” (Uvalić, 2023), the question of “enlargement fatigue” lately arises as the political process of integration is rather slow and also considering the fact that since the launch of the SAP in 1999, only Croatia joined the EU in 2013. In the own words of Mr Ambassador Szunyog:

“The question of the enlargement is linked to the internal reforms of the EU. The EU needs to sort out this problem, and it is important to demonstrate its strength. If we cannot proceed, the people in the Western Balkans will act independently and choose whether or not to join the EU”³⁰.

What might become “political paralysis” in postponing the enlargement process should be addressed, notably considering the fact that 1) the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue remains an unresolved bilateral issue³¹ (Bonomi & Uvalić, 2019), 2) Bosnia and Herzegovina shows low progress in improving fundamental rights, and it “needs to ensure that all citizens are able to exercise their political rights and also non-discriminating, inclusive and quality education for all” (European Commission Report for Bosnia, 2022) and 3) Kosovo is not a fully recognised entity (four NATO and five EU states—Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Cyprus) that dealt with many unresolved issues when it comes to its internal management as well as with the relationship with Serbia.

³⁰ Interview with Mr Ambassador Szunyog, 15/05/2024.

³¹ This is why the EUSR’s position was created one year later.

Apart from the enlargement dimension, the EU is a strong and leading partner in trade with the Western Balkans, accounting for almost 70% of the region's total trade in 2022 (European Commission, 2020). The European Commission Strategy of 2018 highlights an increase in cooperation in the field of the CFSP, emphasising the need for more contributions from Western Balkans countries to EU missions and operations.

As explained, the EU-Western Balkans relationships are mainly based on the EU enlargement perspective, as all the summits and meetings that are held have the potential integration of the EU in their background. This perspective influences the EUSR's role in the region, as will be seen when explaining their mandates. This made EUSRs the personification of the enlargement actor dimension of the EU.

B) The EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina

1) Policy objectives

The policy objectives and functions of the EUSR's mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina are mentioned in the Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1340, which appoints Mr Johann SATTLER as the EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As of 2024, the missions set in 2019 have not changed, as noticed in the two different Council decisions (Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1193 and Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1516) that extend his mandate. The only changes included in the different Council Decisions refer to the allowed budget (see Chapter II).

As stated in Article 2 of the Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1340, the policy objectives of the EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina are:

- Continuing progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process;
- Ensuring a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic and united BiH that cooperates peacefully with its neighbours;
- Ensuring that BiH is irreversibly on track towards Union membership following the publication of the Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union on 29 May 2019.

These “big” policy objectives are rather similar over time, such as those of Mr Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, the previous EUSR to Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2015 to 2019. In his mandate, an emphasis was placed on the EUSR’s support of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina³² (Dayton Agreement), which has been carried by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, his Excellency Christian Schmidt, since 2021.

When fulfilling the policy objectives of his mandates, the EUSR has numerous duties. These are detailed in his mandate:

- To offer the Union's advice and facilitate the political process, in particular with the promotion of dialogue between the different levels of government;
- To ensure consistency and coherence of Union action;
- To facilitate progress on political, economic and Union priorities (...);
- To support domestic efforts in line with European standards to ensure that election results can be implemented;
- To monitor and advise the executive and legislative authorities at all levels of government in BiH and liaise with the authorities and political parties in BiH;
- To ensure the implementation of the Union's efforts in the whole range of activities in the field of the rule of law and the security sector reform, promote overall Union coordination of, and give local political direction to, Union efforts in tackling organised crime, corruption and terrorism and, in that context, provide the HR and the Commission with assessments and advice as necessary;
- To provide support for a reinforced and more effective interface between criminal justice and the police in BiH, as well as for initiatives which aim to strengthen the efficiency and impartiality of the judicial institutions, in particular, the Structured Dialogue on Justice;
- To, without prejudice to the military chain of command, offer the EU Force Commander political guidance on military issues with a local political dimension (..);
- To coordinate and implement the Union's communication efforts on Union issues towards the public in BiH;
- To promote the process of Union integration through targeted public diplomacy and Union outreach activities designed to ensure a broader understanding and support among the BiH public on Union-related matters, including by means of engagement of local civil society actors;

³² Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/77 of 19 January 2015 appointing Mr Lars-Gunnar Wigemark the European Union Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32015D0077&from=GA>

- To contribute to the development and consolidation of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in BiH, in accordance with the EU human rights policy and EU Guidelines on Human Rights;
- To engage with relevant BiH authorities with regard to their full cooperation with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals;
- To, in line with the Union integration process, advise, assist, facilitate and monitor political dialogue on the necessary constitutional and relevant legislative changes;
- To maintain close contacts and close consultations with the UN High Representative in BiH and other relevant international organisations working in the country; in that context, inform the Council about discussions on the ground regarding the international presence in the country, including the Office of the UN High Representative in BiH;
- To provide advice to the HR as necessary concerning natural or legal persons on whom restrictive measures could be imposed in view of the situation in BiH;
- To, without prejudice to the applicable chains of command, help to ensure that all Union instruments in the field are applied coherently to attain the Union's policy objectives.

2) The double-hatted specificity

As explained, the EUSR to Bosnia and Herzegovina has been the “double-hatted” head of the EU Delegation to the country since 2011. Even though they act as one voice on the ground, both offices have their missions and functioning processes that are based on the SAA signed with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mr Ambassador Sattler, depending on his “hat,” has specific missions.

Like the other EUDs around the world, the EUD in Bosnia and Herzegovina is mainly tasked with promoting the overall EU’s policies (e.g. CFSP, agriculture, health, etc.) and interests toward the country. In doing so, Mr Ambassador Sattler is tasked to present and implement the different EU policies in the country, acting as the main point of contact, conducting the analysis and report on the policies’ development and evolution in the country, as well as negotiating on behalf of the European Union. In this line, as Head of the EUD to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Ambassador Sattler is tasked to supervise the implementation of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in the country, an instrument of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR).

Set on specific periods, the IPA aims to support the ongoing reforms in the EU's candidate countries, as well as potential candidates. It is thus officially stated that the funds are used according to the "Western Balkans Strategy, A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", which was previously mentioned. In the period 2014-2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina received €552 million from IPA II (out of a total IPA budget of €13 billion), which was used on priority sectors such as Democracy & Governance, Rule & Fundamental Rights etc. The current IPA framework, IPA III, is made of an envelope of €14.162 billion, from which a part is allocated to Bosnia and Herzegovina (IPA, 2021).

Contrary to that, when acting as EUSR to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Ambassador Sattler is tasked with the aforementioned policy objectives (Part I), which are much more political and diplomatic than the EU Offices. His primary interlocutors are politicians and members of the governments to whom he is giving advice and support. His team supports him in doing so. The EUD and the Office of the EUSR have regional offices around the country, located in Banja Luka, Brčko and Mostar.

3) The EUSR, the High Representative (HR) for BIH and the Bonn Power

A particular actor in Bosnia and Herzegovina who needs to be mentioned is the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (HR), who is in charge of supervising the Civilian Implementation of the Dayton Agreement (1995) in the country. The position's creation precedes one year of the EU Commission Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996) and of seven of the EU Special Representatives to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Before going deeper into the HR roles and missions, it is worth mentioning that his position and the one of the EUSR were combined from 2002 to 2011³³, before the "new" combination of the EUD and the EUSR, which occurred due to the Lisbon Treaty in 2011.

Following the deadly war that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995, the warring parties, represented by three leaders (Slobodan Milošević for the Bosnian Serbs, Franjo Tuđman, President of Croatia, and Alija Izetbegović,

³³ This merge was pretty innovative as the HR is elected by the Peace and Implementation Council and thus can be from any nationality, which is not the case with the EUSR. This resulted in the fact that since its creation, the HR has always been an EU citizen.

President of Bosnia and Herzegovina), agreed to sign the Dayton Agreement. Negotiated with the international community, the Agreement contained, in Annex 10, an “Agreement on Civilian Implementation” that states in its Article I related to the High Representative:

“In view of the complexities facing them (reference is made to the reconstruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the rehabilitation of infrastructure in the country, etc.), the Parties request the designation of a High Representative, to be appointed consistent with relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, to facilitate the Parties’ efforts and to mobilise and, as appropriate, coordinate the activities of the organisations and agencies involved in the civilian aspects of the peace settlement by carrying out, as entrusted by a U.N. Security Council resolution, the tasks set out below”. At stake, the High Representative is an example of how international institutions may exercise public authority in a given country, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banning, 2014).

While the initial missions of the HR are mentioned in the Dayton Agreement (Annex 10, Article II), the latter received extensive prerogative at the 1997 Bonn meeting organised by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). This international body appoints the HR and finance his office. In the Meeting’s conclusions, the so-called “Bonn Powers” were introduced, giving the HR and his Office (OHR) incommensurable powers over Bosnian politics, namely the ability to change laws and the constitution (Stopic, 2021). In the words of Carlos Westendorp, HR in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1997 to 1999,

“If you read Dayton very carefully, Annex 10 even gives me the possibility to interpret my own authorities and powers” (Banning, 2014).

Another addition of the Bonn Powers is the HR ability to dismiss public officials (no matter the importance of their position) from their offices and prevent those same officials from holding public employment again. Two significant examples are the removal of Nikola Poplasen from the Office of President of Republika Srpska in March 1999 and the decisions of the HR in 2004 to “froze 26 individuals’ or companies’ bank accounts and dismissed six people” (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2004). These powers are often criticised, as in 2004 by the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina who stated that:

“The Assembly urges the High Representative to continue with this trend and in particular to stop the practice of removing officials, including judges and elected representatives, from office” (Ibid).

Thus, the EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina must work with the HR, even though the latter’s decisions may significantly affect his work. In 2023, his Excellency Christian Schmidt, HR since 2021, acted to remove the laws adopted by the Republika Srpska National Assembly because it was considered an “attack on the integrity of the Constitutional Court of BiH and on the BiH Constitution” (EUSR in BiH, 2023). Following that, Mr Ambassador Sattler stated that “it was inevitable for the High Representative to act to put them out of force” and that he “recalls that the Bonn Powers are a measure of last resort against irreparable unlawful acts” (*Ibid*).

Finally, it’s worth mentioning that the OHR budget is rather similar to the one of the EUSR, being € 5.3 million for 2020-2021, mainly coming from the European Union (54 %), the United States of America (22 %), Japan (10 %), Russia (4 %), Canada (3.03 %), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (2.5 %), and others (5.47 %) (Stopic, 2021).

C) The EUSR in Kosovo

1) Policy objectives

The policy objectives and functions of the EUSR's mandate in Kosovo are mentioned in the Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1135 of 30 July 2020 appointing the European Union Special Representative in Kosovo, Mr Ambassador Tomas Szunyog. As of 2024, the missions set in 2020 have not changed, as noticed in the two different Council decisions (Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1194 and Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1527) that extend his mandate. The only changes included in the different Council Decisions refer to the allowed budget (see Chapter II).

According to the Council Resolution 2020/1135, the policy objectives of the EUSRs in Kosovo are the same as the ones of the two previous EUSRs in Kosovo, Ms Nataliya Apostolova (2016-2020) and Mr Samuel Žbogar (2012-2016), and thus are

rather constant over time. The policy objectives are mainly centred on the SAA, which was signed with Kosovo in 2015 and entered into force in 2016.

- To play a leading role in promoting a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo which cooperates with the region.
- To strengthen stability in the region and contribute to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans.
- To promote a Kosovo that is committed to the rule of law and to the protection of minorities and of cultural and religious heritage.
- To support Kosovo's European perspective and rapprochement with the Union in line with the perspective of the region and in accordance with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and Kosovo, of the other part and Council Decision (EU) 2015/1988, and in line with the relevant Council conclusions.

In doing so, Mr Ambassador Szunyog has been tasked with numerous missions and duties:

- To offer the Union's advice and support in the political process;
- To promote overall Union political coordination in Kosovo;
- To strengthen the presence of the Union in Kosovo and ensure its coherence, effectiveness and visibility;
- To provide local political guidance to the Head of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX KOSOVO), including on the political aspects of issues relating to executive responsibilities;
- To ensure consistency and coherence of Union action in Kosovo, including in guiding locally the EULEX KOSOVO transition for the eventual transfer of activities to the EUSR or the EU Office in Kosovo and/or the local authorities, as appropriate and if local circumstances permit;
- To support Kosovo's European perspective and rapprochement with the Union, in line with the perspective of the region and in accordance with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and Decision (EU) 2015/1988, and in line with the relevant Council conclusions, through targeted public communication and Union outreach activities designed to ensure a broader understanding and support from the Kosovo public on issues related to the Union, including the work of EULEX KOSOVO;
- To monitor, assist and facilitate, by all the means and instruments at the disposal of the EUSR and with the support of the EU office in Kosovo, progress on political, economic and European priorities, in line with respective institutional competencies and responsibilities and support the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, including through the European Reform Agenda;

- To contribute to the development and consolidation of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Kosovo, including with regard to women and children and the protection of minorities, in accordance with the Union's human rights policy and Union Guidelines on Human Rights;
- To support, as required, the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue facilitated by the Union, including operational support tasks that have to be eventually transferred from EULEX KOSOVO, in coordination with the EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues and with emphasis on promoting a conducive environment for the process;
- To support the mandate of the Specialist Chambers and the Specialist Prosecutor Office, as appropriate, including through communication and outreach.

2) The double-hatted specificity

The EU is represented in Kosovo through three main bodies: the civilian mission EULEX Kosovo, the EU Special Representative, and the EU Delegation. As for the EUSR to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a clear distinction in the missions held under the “double-hat” specificity can be noted, even though both are based on the SAA signed with Kosovo in 2015.

When acting as EUSR, Mr Ambassador Szunyog's role is mostly political and diplomatic (Derks & Price, 2010). When seeing the policy objectives of its mandates, it is clear that his main interlocutors are politicians and members of the governments to whom he is giving advice and support. In the words of one of the interviewees, the particular status of the EUSR offers him a *“position in which he's talking to politicians directly, offering advice on legal matters, and explaining that sometimes it's not practical to pursue assertive ways in communications and dialogues”*³⁴. This lens that focuses more on Kosovo's internal politics (is materialised in the EUSR's office organisation, which comprises six sections: Political and Policy Coordination (in charge of providing Kosovo authorities with support in political processes and monitoring and fostering Kosovo's advancement on EU-related political priorities through work with local stakeholders (EUSR in Kosovo, 2021) ; Non-Majority Communities, Religious and Cultural Heritage and North (in charge of contributing to the development and consolidation of the respect, protection and promotion of fundamental rights of non-majority communities throughout Kosovo); Rule of Law,

³⁴ Interview with an EEAS official, 3/10/2023.

Human Rights and Legal Matters (provides legal expertise and follow the strengthening of human rights and gender equality in Kosovo); Finance and Administration Section (in charge of ensuring the fonctionnement of the office); Communication Section (in charge of bringing the work and actions of the EUSR closer to the people of Kosovo through particular media) and a Security Section (Officers in charge of the safety of the EUSR staff) (*Ibid*). As of 2023, the Office of the EUSR is composed of eight people (four international officers and four locally contracted people).

Contrary to that, as a member of the worldwide EU Delegations network, the EU Office in Kosovo is tasked with “presenting, explaining, and implementing EU policies” (*Ibid*). This puts the EU Office in charge of conducting and monitoring all kinds of financial support to Kosovo, having under its supervision the management of the EU’s financial assistance to

Kosovo made through the IPA funds. As for the EU Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the funds are allocated to priority sectors such as Democracy and governance and Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights. In the period 2014-2020, € 602.1 million were allocated to Kosovo (Kosovo - financial assistance under IPA, n.d.). The Office is also in charge of supervising the enlargement dimension of the EU in Kosovo, primarily dealing with the SAP and auditing all kinds of documents issued by the Kosovo counterpart. This rather “technical” lens is materialised in the EU Office organisation that is composed of six sections orientated on external policies: European Integration, political, information and press section; Rule of Law and Advisory on Legal Matters Section; Cooperation Section; Finance, Contracts and Audit Section; Administration Section and a Regional Security Officer (EUSR in Kosovo, 2021).

In the words of one of the interviewees, the EU Office also has some similar missions to the EUSRs that are reflected in the Office's organisation (e.g., the Rule of Law and Advisory on Legal Matters Section), and there is sometimes a bit of overlap³⁵. However, the same interviewee also highlighted the complementarity of

³⁵ Interview with an EEAS Official, 3/10/2023.

both bodies, the EUSR's office helping Kosovo to grow into the EU resemblance the EU Office is looking for in the EU accession process:

“These themes (enlargement policies, etc) are in the portfolio of the EU office, but the EUSR supports them. Mr Ambassador said, “Let’s make it together”. The EUSR team helped Kosovo grow into an EU resemblance, ensuring all the rights to apply were checked and the road was open. It’s a unique support role.”

“The mandate says that the EUSR works on the SAA, and the EU office monitors the reform simultaneously. Both support each other’s work and mandate. This only adds effectiveness so we can ensure everything is covered on preparedness to help Kosovo move on”.

Finally, in the own words of Mr Ambassador Szunyog:

“It’s good to be double hatted so all the EU tools in Kosovo are coherent”³⁶.

D) The EUSR for Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues– mandate and specificities

1) Policy objectives of the mandate

The policy objectives and functions of the EUSR's mandate for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues are mentioned in the Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/489 of 2 April 2020 appointing the European Union Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, Mr Ambassador Miroslav Lajčák. As of 2024, the missions set in 2020 have not changed, as noticed in the two different Council decisions (Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/470 and Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1969) that extend his mandate. The only changes included in the different Council Decisions refer to the allowed budget (see Chapter II).

According to Council Resolution 2020/489, the policy objectives of the EUSRs for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues are the same as the current ones. Adding this, Mr Ambassador Lajčák has been the same

³⁶ Interview with Mr Ambassador Szunyog, *Op. Cit.*

incumbent since the creation of the position. In the words of one of the interviewees, all of these policy objectives are intertwined as *“it’s difficult to have a good neighbourhood relationship if there is no normalisation, but there will be no normalisation if they (Belgrade and Pristina) don’t overcome the past”*. The policy objectives of the mandate are:

- To first and foremost, achieve comprehensive normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, which is key to their respective European paths;
- To improve good neighbourly relations and also promote reconciliation
- To enhance the Union's visibility and effectiveness through public diplomacy;
- To contribute to the unity, consistency and effectiveness of Union action in the Western Balkans, as appropriate.

In doing so, Mr Ambassador Lajčák has been tasked with numerous missions and duties, the most prominent one being the need to conclude a “legally binding agreement that addresses all outstanding issues between the parties in accordance with international law and contributing to regional stability”³⁷.

- As regards the core of the mandate, to facilitate on behalf of the HR the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue in close coordination with the Member States, to work on the comprehensive normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo through the conclusion of a legally binding agreement that addresses all outstanding issues between the parties in accordance with international law and contributes to regional stability, and to monitor and assist as necessary the work of the parties on the implementation of past agreements reached within the framework of the EU-Facilitated Dialogue;
- Additionally, as appropriate, to work on improving good neighbourly relations and reconciliation between partners in the Western Balkans, helping overcome the legacy of the past;
- Actively to engage in enhancing the Union’s effectiveness and visibility in the Western Balkans through public diplomacy, as well as to communicate and promote Union values and the broader Union agenda for the region, as appropriate, contributing to a broader understanding of and support for issues related to the Union;
- To work in a coordinated and coherent manner with all the Union’s efforts and the overall Union policies regarding the region, as well as with Union delegations, Union offices and in particular with other EUSRs in the Western Balkans, and to maintain close contact with the Member States;

³⁷ Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1969. *Op. Cit.*

- To support the work of the HR and the activities of the Union in the region.

2) The Dialogue

The EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and the other Western Balkans regional issues is a newcomer, as the position was only created in 2020. However, aware of the need to achieve a comprehensive and normal relationship between Belgrade and Pristina, the dialogue has been ongoing since the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 64/298 (2010), which states

“We (the General Assembly) welcome the readiness of the European Union to facilitate a process of dialogue between the parties; the process of dialogue in itself would be a factor for peace, security and stability in the region, and that dialogue would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to the European Union and improve the lives of the people”³⁸.

Six months later, in 2011, Robert Cooper, serving as EEAS Councillor, was thus tasked with facilitating the Dialogue at the senior officials' level. The goal set back then was clear: “To promote cooperation, achieve progress on their respective European path, and improve the lives of the people” (10 years of Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, 2021). From 2012 to 2020, the different HR/VPs (Baroness Catherine Ashton, Federica Mogherini and Josep Borrell) were in charge of the dialogue, bringing it to a high political level. In these thirteen years, numerous successes were achieved, such as the ability of people and goods to move freely between Kosovo and Serbia and the integration of the judiciary and police structures in northern Kosovo (*Ibid*). In this decade, the 2013 Brussels Agreement was signed, thanks to which Serbia started normalising its relationship with Kosovo (Planitz, 2018). As the status of Kosovo remains an issue among member states, it was not stated if it was “normalisation with recognition” or “normalisation without recognition” (Ćuković, 2019), deeply entailing the effectiveness of the Agreement³⁹.

³⁸ A/RES/64/298 : UN Documents : Security Council Report. (2010). <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/rol-a-res64-298.php>

³⁹ Planitz (2018) explain that Baroness Ashton’s excitement, welcoming the Brussels Agreement as a new landmark, was quickly tempered as the Agreement was rather weak due to structural problems.

Further crises occurred, highlighting the problems of the dialogue being led by the HR/VP. In 2019, the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, stated that: *“Mogherini has damaged the dialogue, and this has caused many problems in the region”* (Ćuković, 2019).

With the aim of giving a new impetus to the Dialogue, the HR/VP Josep Borrell decided to create in 2020 a new position of EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues⁴⁰. The latter was attributed to Miroslav Lajčák, who considered his extensive experience of the region an added value in conducting the dialogue.

Achieving normalisation remains tough as the goals of Belgrade and Pristina are sometimes mutually exclusive. In the words of one of the interviewees, *“It is challenging, especially because of the lack of compromise, patience and strategic views on partners. It is also tough progress as Serbia likes the status quo with Kosovo, contrary to Kosovo, which wants recognition”*⁴¹. To this end, Mr Ambassador Lajčák works in close cooperation with Mr Ambassador Szunyog to progress the dialogue serving the interests of the EUSR in Kosovo. The signature of the *“Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia”* in 2023, which aims to implement a roadmap to facilitate the relationship between Belgrade and Pristina, was thus welcomed by both offices as a positive step.

Article 1 says that:

“Both Parties shall mutually recognise their respective documents and national symbols, including passports, diplomas, licence plates, and customs stamps”.

And Article 4 states that

“Serbia will not object to Kosovo’s membership in any international organisation” (Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, 2023).

⁴⁰ « Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Time to take responsibility and move towards the EU ». Statement by Josep Borrell in which the HR/VP states that: *« The EU has been doing its part and the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue a central part of my mandate. The Council agreed with my proposal to appoint Ambassador Lajčák as the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, with the first task to accelerate the process. And this is what we did »*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-time-take-responsibility-and-move-towards-eu_en

⁴¹ Interview with an EEAS official, 20/10/2023.

As of 2023, the Office of the EU is composed of a main team in Brussels (ten people that are specialised in specific issues) plus two teams: one in Belgrade (made of three people, including two local contracted staff) and one in Pristina (made of fifteen people, including ten local contracted staff -who are mostly interpreters-).

Table 1: Summary of the policy objectives and mandate's function of the EUSRs.

<i>EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	Continuing progress in the SAP	
	Ensuring a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic and united BiH	
<i>EUSR in Kosovo</i>	Ensuring that BiH is irreversibly on track towards Union membership	To demonstrate the EU's engagement and interests in the mandated area and strengthen the Union's visibility
	To play a leading role in promoting a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic, and multi-ethnic Kosovo	
	To strengthen stability in the region and contribute to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans.	To provide information on the political situation in their mandate areas to the EU institutions and Member States
	To promote a Kosovo that is committed to the rule of law , the protection of minorities , and cultural and religious heritage.	
	To support Kosovo's European perspective and rapprochement with the Union in line with the SAA	To contribute to better coordination of EU activities in their mandate areas
<i>EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues</i>	To achieve comprehensive normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia	
	To enhance the EU's visibility and effectiveness and contribute to the consistency and effectiveness of EU action in the Western Balkans	To contribute to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia's path to the EU, as well as Kosovo recognition
	To improve good neighbourly relations and reconciliation between partners in the Western Balkans	

Chapter V. Results

This chapter is the final one and aims to answer the research question: How effective are the EU Special Representatives in the Western Balkans in promoting the EU's policies and interests?

Context: Analysing the effectiveness of the EUSRs in the Western Balkans considers various aspects of their work and environment. In their day-to-day life, each of the three EUSRs is subject to a myriad of internal and external factors that significantly influence their work and can deeply impact their effectiveness. Most of these factors are intricate and inherent to the Western Balkans.

One of these factors inherent to the region is ethnic tensions between communities, inherited from the Yugoslavian wars of the late nineties. In reaching the main policy objective of his mandate, achieving comprehensive normalisation of the relation between Kosovo and Serbia, Mr Ambassador Lajčák is tributary to the stability of Kosovo -and more particularly, North Kosovo-, one of Mr Ambassador Szunyog's policy objectives. To this end, the situation in North Kosovo is a concern, as the violence that regularly occurs exacerbates ethnic tensions, creating significant backlashes for both EUSR. The problem is also present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the regular tensions among Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats in the Republika Srpska. The whole region was melting in a deadly ethnic war only twenty-five years ago, and the stigmas of the latter are still present today.

Another factor that affects the EUSR's effectiveness is the EU's attitude toward putting sanctions on the Western Balkans. Despite being the highest EU official in their respective country, EUSRs do not have a hand in this kind of issue, making them tributary to the EU CFSP general direction and its potential impact on the conduct of their mandate. Thus, when the EU sanctioned Serbia after the troubles in 2023 and the attack against KFOR troops, the Office of Mr Ambassador Lajčák explained that they believed “*the measures should be lifted to keep an impetus to the Dialogue*”⁴², while Mr Ambassador Szunyog, after reminding that the twenty-seven member states decide the sanctions, also stated that “*it would be good on the side of the Office to move from the sanction*”⁴³.

⁴² Interview with an EEAS official, 20/10/2023.

⁴³ Interview with Mr Ambassador Szunyog, *Op. Cit.*

Finally, the question of recognition remains, as two of Kosovo's five non-recognisers are Western Balkans countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Mr Ambassador Szunyog

Regarding the success in fulfilling the policy objectives of his mandate, Mr Ambassador Szunyog qualifies the journey since 2020 as “a mixed picture,” characterised by both major successes and failures. In his own words, the most significant successes are visa liberalisation, progress on the Dialogue with Serbia, and the resolution of the car plate issue⁴⁴ Other successes of his tenure include Kosovo's ability to receive vaccines and financial packages for economic and social recovery during the COVID crisis and progress on the energy transition question. However, a number of legal issues still have to be fixed. Briefly, the latter are linked to improvement in elections, general stability in the country, and the long-lasting fight against corruption.

These appreciations mostly concern the fourth policy objective of his mandate, which is definitely the most challenging: promoting a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic, and multi-ethnic Kosovo. In comparison, the first three policy objectives are rather “easy” to achieve as they focus on things the Special Representative can manage on its own without being really dependent on external factors or actors. More than that, the first three policy objectives of his mandates are in some ways essential in setting the theoretical scene on the EU's side to maximise the chance of fulfilling the fourth policy objective. In order to promote a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic, and multi-ethnic Kosovo, the EU must be coherent and united in its approach, and this goes through increased collaboration among the EU bodies (EULEX), in the countries, support in Kosovo's political process, etc. Mr Ambassador Szunyog's consistency is thus crucial to its effectiveness.

Regarding the first policy objective of its mandate, to provide local political guidance to the Head of EULEX Kosovo, the expected outcome is a coherent and effective collaboration between the EUSR Office and the one of EULEX, through which the EUSR advises on issues such as multi-ethnicity, sustainability, and accountability, thus promoting the EU's policies and interests. Interactions between both bodies are thus crucial -and historical, as bodies were, in the beginning, integral

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

parts of the Ahtisaari Plan⁴⁵ - and it is up to the EUSR to provide political guidance to the Head of EULEX. However, the contractual relation is rather fussy and weighs more on the EUSR's shoulders, as the head of EULEX only has to share information that is deemed useful⁴⁶. Adding this, it is the EUSR that represents the EU in Kosovo, not EULEX, that stays a legal CSDP mission that took over from UNMIK (Mateja & Osland, 2019). This means that with only having minor control over EULEX's missions and actions, the EUSR is in charge of defending and assuming the latter's outcome. Thus, it is extremely important for the EUSR to ensure good provisions to maximise its effectiveness.

As of today, to fulfil this policy objective, Mr Ambassador Szunyog holds weekly meetings with the head of EULEX to provide political assessment and discuss the priorities that need to be considered. On the side of EULEX, the EUSR is sometimes invited to the Joint Rule of Law Coordination Board, which has the purpose “to coordinate EU and Kosovo authorities’ efforts in order to enhance the justice and the rule of law systems” (EULEX, 2011). Adding this, when doing his reports to the PSC every six months, Mr Ambassador Szunyog coordinates its reports with one of the Head of EULEX, and both Heads generally go together to the meetings in Brussels. Mr Ambassador Szunyog has proven to be efficient in guiding EULEX as the EUSR and the Head of EULEX have an amiable and good working relationship⁴⁷.

Their cooperation goes even further and is linked to Mr Ambassador Szunyog's second policy objective: strengthening the Union's presence in Kosovo and ensuring its coherence and effectiveness.

Since its creation in 2008, EULEX has been the only official EU body represented in Kosovo, along with the EUSR and the EU Office. Being double-hatted since 2011 and in charge of providing political guidance to EULEX, Mr Ambassador Szunyog is involved in every aspect of the European Union's presence and action in Kosovo and thus is a guardian of the EU's coherence there. Talking about the EU's coherence in Kosovo, it is important to mention that the double-hat that occurred in 2011 during Mr Samuel Žbogar's first mandate as EUSR to Kosovo followed a demand of local

⁴⁵ The EUSR is explicitly mentioned, while EULEX is envisaged. https://web.archive.org/web/20091009130102/Comprehensive_proposal-english.pdf

⁴⁶ Interview with an EEAS official, 3/10/2023.

⁴⁷ Interview with an EEAS official, 3/10/2023.

officials and civil society groups in Kosovo, “who found the EU too scattered and poorly coordinated in Kosovo” (West, 2016).

When it comes to strengthening the Union’s presence in Kosovo, the EU is undeniably stronger. The success achieved during the four-year tenancy not only contributed to the fourth policy objective of the mandate but also strengthened the EU’s presence as a key actor in Kosovo, capable of imposing concrete change there through effective crisis management (as highlighted with the car plate issue). Adding this, the role played by the EU during the COVID crisis highlighted how integrative the Union could be in its approach to the Western Balkans. The financial and aid packages provided keep the EU’s leverage on the Kosovo government rather high, and the EUSR is effectively implementing the SAA as stated in its duties.

The third policy objective of his mandate is to offer the EU’s advice and support in the political process and promote Union political coordination in Kosovo.

Kosovo's application for EU membership in December 2022 highlights this third policy objective, which aims to bring Kosovo closer to the EU through advice and support during its journey. Adding this, the successful ending to the Visa liberalisation question that was pushed by Mr Ambassador Szunyog's predecessor in Office, Mr Samuel Žbogar, is a major milestone. The process took years to complete as the EU set ninety-five criteria for visa liberalisation, and the Council of the EU spent a huge amount of time agreeing on the decision as a QMV was needed (West, 2016). During the time of the negotiation, Mr Ambassador Szunyog regularly appeared in the news, sharing and defending the EU’s views and positions and enhancing the need for Kosovo to do “its homework”. All this led to a successful ending of the Visa liberalisation question, allowing Kosovo passport holders to travel to the EU without a visa for up to 90 days in any 180 days. Mr Ambassador Szunyog welcomed the Visa liberalisation as a “step towards the EU” and means noteworthy progress in the RoL sector on the side Kosovo (Szunyog, 2021).

However, problems remain concerning the Union's political coordination in Kosovo. Despite having a mandate decided by the twenty-seven member states, not all member states have recognised Kosovo and thus pursued different strategies there. This hindered the General Union's political coordination in Kosovo and its coherence when talking about the European perspective of the country or any related topics.

The last policy objective, promoting a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic, and multi-ethnic Kosovo, hindered the EUSR's effectiveness the most.

When it comes to a multi-ethnic Kosovo, the attack against the KFOR mission can be considered a significant backlash as Serb protestors in North Kosovo have conducted it, a part of the country that remains particularly unstable. Another example is the attack against Kosovo police in September 2023, still perpetrated in North Kosovo. Adding this, the 2022 boycott of the Srpska Lista, the dominant Serb party in Kosovo's Assembly, highlighted how cross-party cooperation remains an issue (Key findings of the 2023 Report on Kosovo, 2023) and how undemocratic Kosovars can be among each other. Another crisis linked to ethnic tensions occurred with the election of Albanian mayors in the Serbian-majority towns of Kosovo due to a boycott. These crises not only exacerbate ethnic tensions but also hinder Kosovo's journey to a stable and viable democracy.

However, despite these backlashes, a significant milestone was reached in 2022 with the end of the issue of car plates. Serbia stopped issuing license plates with Kosovo cities' denominations, while Kosovo will cease any further actions related to vehicle re-registration (Preussen, 2022). This was welcomed as a positive step towards Kosovo's stability.

When it comes to a viable Kosovo, the 2023 Reports on Kosovo from the European Commission states that "Kosovo is in between an early stage and some level of preparation in the fight against corruption. Limited progress was made during the reporting period, and corruption remains an issue of concern" (Key findings of the 2023 Report on Kosovo, 2023). The same postulate has been made in the report regarding organised crime, with encouragements made for Kosovo to "step up efforts". Progresses have been made during Mr Ambassador Szunyog's tenancy, but the journey toward a viable Kosovo remains quite long.

Regarding H1, we argue here that the results achieved after Mr Ambassador Szunyog's four-year tenancy and its effectiveness can be partially explained by the institutional and legal framework of EUSRs. The latter allows him to be reactive to any situation that can happen in Kosovo, as he has for purposes to be flexible. Thanks to the latter, his presence on the ground and his extensive use of quiet diplomacy with top-level actors in Kosovo, Mr Ambassador Szunyog has been able

to break a deal between Serbia and Kosovo on the car plate issue, promote the RoL and other of the SAA's requirements. Finally, his constant presence in Kosovo is a real plus, being the representation of the EU's interest in the country and fostering its presence there in the way he deems the best. EUSR's institutional and legal framework allows him to be more effective in fulfilling the policy objective of his mandate, as well as his flexibility and presence on the ground, allowing him to serve the Union's policies and interests.

When it comes to H2, the extensive power granted to the EUSR allows him to strengthen the EU's effectiveness in the country and guard the EU's coherence. Mr Ambassador Szunyog is the voice and face of the EU in Kosovo, advising and directly impacting different stakeholders. This allows him to have direct access to the EULEX Head when needed as a representative of the twenty-seven member states, to top Kosovo politicians at all levels (from the Prime Minister to the local mayor), as well as talking in the news and media in the name of the EU.

However, despite all these, some factors remain out of the EUSR's control. The latter are linked to societal issues and have been the same Kosovo has been dealing with for decades. Mr Ambassador Szunyog is thus highly effective in promoting the EU's policies and interests regarding the first three policy objectives of his mandate. Still, he is partially effective regarding the fourth policy objective due to the significant backlash that he has encountered that is out of his control.

Table 1: Mr Ambassador Szunyog's effectiveness, summary:

	<i>Expected outcome</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Degree of effectiveness</i>
<i>Provide local Political guidance to the Head of EULEX Kosovo</i>	Effective EULEX that acts in coordination with the EUSR office	Effective EULEX that acts in coordination with the EUSR office	Effective
<i>Strengthen the presence of the Union in Kosovo and ensure its coherence and effectiveness</i>	Coherent and united EU action and presence in Kosovo	Coherent and united EU action and presence in Kosovo	Effective

<i>To offer the EU's advice and support in the political process and promote Union political coordination in Kosovo</i>	Coordinated EU action in Kosovo	Coordinated EU action in Kosovo	Effective
<i>To promote a stable, viable, peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo</i>	Stable, viable, peaceful, democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo	Stable and viable but really democratic nor peaceful and multiethnic	Rather effective

Mr Ambassador Lajčák

Mr Ambassador Lajčák was appointed EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues in 2020. As a reminder, the main policy objective of his mandate is to achieve comprehensive normalisation of the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia. In assessing his effectiveness, a few things need to be considered.

- 1) When first appointed, the feelings about his nominations were mitigated, as specialists considered his extensive experiences in the region a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, most of his qualifications made Mr Lajčák the ideal choice: he speaks Serbian, is from Slovakia, and has an extensive background in high-level positions in the Western Balkans. Moreover, in addition to his positions on the ground, he served as a managing director in the EEAS in late 2010.

On the other hand, Slovakia is one of the fifth EU countries that has not yet recognised Kosovo, and Spain, from which Mr Borrell comes. His nomination was thus an ambiguous signal that created mitigated feelings on the side of Kosovo, as will be seen later. Other critics focused on his track records in the Balkans prior to his nomination, arguing that his results have been limited and that his nomination was counterproductive to the Dialogue's initiative as he is apparently "ambition-driven" (Tempest, 2020).

- 2) Throughout his time in office, these critics have found an echo both at the national level and within the press.

In September 2023, following a meeting in Brussels between Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian Prime Minister Aleksander Vucic, Mr Kurti accused the ambassador of being "biased" in the process and positioned "against Kosovo" (Europe Western Balkan, 2023). These positions have also been taken by Kosovo's parliament speaker, Glauk Konjufca, who went even further, saying that "Lajcak's positions, which he articulates most, are those of Serbia" and that "the mechanisms and formations he proposes could have been the starting point of Serbia's positions" (Taylor & Mandilara, 2023).

These feelings of mistrust toward the EU Special Representative are reinforced by the general EU's actions in the field of the CFSP. It has been stated earlier that Mr Ambassador Lajčák, regarding the sanction implemented towards Kosovo after the trouble in the North, asked for a lift of the EU's actions. The main reason behind this attitude is the strengthening of the mistrust, as materialised by Kosovo's President Vjosa Osmani's statement, saying that the EU sanctions adopted after the trouble in the North in 2023 created an imbalance in the dialogue and disfavoured Kosovo (Europe Western Balkan, 2023).

In the press, Dušan Proroković, a former Member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, stated that he could not see "the long-term solution in what he - Mr Ambassador Lajčák- has been doing" and that Kosovo is dealing in 2024 with the same issues as in 2008 (Kosovo Online, 2024). Dušan Proroković even concluded his talks by saying that the "result of Lajcak's mediation is increased conflict potential between Belgrade and Pristina".

In addition, when not about the Ambassador himself, numerous articles and online papers aim to address the question of the failure of the EU-led mediation.

- 3) Member states limit Mr Ambassador Lajčák in finding options.

According to Zweers & de Bloon (2022), Mr Ambassador Lajčák can not act freely as member states control his actions through the PSC, which may seem counterintuitive as the purpose of the EUSRs is to be rather flexible and autonomous

in the field of crisis management. Despite being autonomous, he can not, in his proposals, go in the direction that he deems the best to establish comprehensive normalisation. For example, he cannot propose a land swap between Kosovo and Serbia (e.g., the idea was rejected by Germany and Finland but accepted by Spain, Belgium, or Austria). In their study, Zweers & de Bloon highlight how member states have different “red lines” when it comes to the dialogue resolution, blurring the line for the EUSR to be effective in fulfilling its mission.

- 4) Mr Ambassador Lajčák is tributary to the political situation and stability of both Kosovo and Serbia, which are often unwilling to negotiate.

Despite the signature of an Agreement in 2023, both countries show little ownership of the dialogue (Zweers & de Bloon, 2022). In the past years, Serbia has witnessed a degradation in the field of RoL and an increasing mismatch with the CFSP direction since the war in Ukraine started (Németh & Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2023). On the side of Kosovo, increased tension in the North and severe mistrust toward the work of Mr Ambassador Lajčák create backlashes. Finally, both Kosovo and Serbia are most of the time unwilling to engage in negotiations, despite Mr Ambassador Lajčák's goodwill.

The first policy objective of his mandate is to enhance the EU's visibility and effectiveness through public diplomacy and contribute to the consistency and effectiveness of EU action in the Western Balkans. According to the EEAS, this policy objective is all about “engaging over the long term with citizens and potential partners around the world in order to build trust and mutual understanding and, by doing so, facilitate future cooperation to tackle our common challenges” (EEAS Public Diplomacy, 2022). To this end, the Office of Mr Ambassador Lajčák is the one out of the three studied EUSRs that is engaged the most abroad, looking for support and options in fulfilling his mandate.

According to one of the interviewees, all the platforms are used to enhance the consistency and visibility of the EU action regarding the Dialogue: the Western Balkans summits, the new EU Communities of French President Macron, the UN Assembly, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, Think Tank initiatives, GLOBESEC,

etc⁴⁸. Moreover, numerous projects are led with other non-EU bodies, such as NATO and the UK (through their Special Envoy for the Western Balkans) and other tier countries, such as the US or through the QUINT. Establishing himself as the face of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, Mr Ambassador Lajčák has been quite effective in enhancing the EU's visibility in the region as he is constantly looking for support and launching initiatives.

The second policy objective of his mandate is to improve good neighbourly relations and reconciliation between partners in the Western Balkans. Highlighting how this policy objective is intertwined with the other two, one of the interviewees said, *“It’s difficult to have a good neighbourhood relationship if there is no normalisation, and there will be no normalisation if they -Western Balkans partners—don’t overcome the past.”*⁴⁹

Adding this, the non-recognition of Kosovo by BiH and Serbia has an impact on regional cooperation as *“good relations can only happen between equal sticks”*⁵⁰. Thus, it can be stated that as long as Kosovo's status is not fixed and agreed upon by all Western Balkans partners and the EU, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations will never happen.

Finally, out of the Kosovo-Serbia question but still in the Western Balkans, the Albanian factor, which is transversal for both countries, is important to look at. For the same interviewee, the fact that the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr Kurti, shows flags of “Greater Albania” in public meetings in Macedonia (2023) hinders the good neighbourly relationship within the region, as *“all the positions are looked at and interpreted”*. This kind of attitude the Ambassador can only condemn triggers the tensions in the region and makes his efforts ineffective. In a similar vein, Bosnia and Herzegovina is an illustration of these tensions.

The third policy objective of his mandate is to achieve comprehensive normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, which is key to their respective European paths. To this end, effectiveness is rather easy to assess as linked to one question: What is the state of the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia? Has any

⁴⁸ Interview with an EEAS Official, 20/10/2023.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

progress been made toward comprehensive normalisation since the Ambassador's appointment? The answer is a slight yes and a big no.

Despite the signature of the “Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia,” Mr Ambassador Lajčák has not been able to reconcile the protagonists' stances on the question of normalisation. Does normalisation of the relations come with mutual recognition or not? The question is still in dispute.

In October 2020, then-Prime Minister of Kosovo Abdullah Hoti stated that “the dialogue will be concluded with mutual recognition” (KosovaPress, 2020), a position Serbian President Vučić refused when stating in March 2023 that “a factual or de jure recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty, as implied by Point 4 of the EU Proposal, is unacceptable to Serbia” (Kosovo Online, 2021).

In the words of one of the interviewees, for both parties, “*there is no concept of win-win when it comes to normalisation as it is all about win-lose or lose-lose*”⁵¹. For a long time, the relationship between both parties was founded on the hate of the dialogue, and Mr Lajčák, as a facilitator (and not arbitrator) of the dialogue, has been struggling to help the parties overcome the past. As a symbol of the dilemma, the preamble to the Serbian Constitution still refers to Kosovo as “an integral part of the territory of Serbia”⁵².

Moreover, feelings are also rather mitigated regarding the Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia itself, Mr Ambassador Lajcak's biggest success. Even though Josepp Borrell made the document an “integral and binding part of the respective European paths of the Parties” (Borrell, 2023) Serbia's President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti did not sign it. Critics are also present at the EU top level. In a reunion of the AFET committee in 2023, German member of the European Parliament, Michael Gahler, stated: “How do you -Mr Ambassador Lajčák- consider an agreement that was not signed by both parties as successful? Where do you really see success in your work in the last four years?”, arguing that his position has “reduced the credibility of the dialogue” (Taylor, 2023).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Article 114 of the Serbian Constitution states that while assuming the office, the President of the Republic shall take the following oath before the National Assembly: “*I do solemnly swear that I will devote all my efforts to preserve the sovereignty and integrity of the territory of the Republic of Serbia, including Kosovo and Metohija as its constituent part (...).*”

Thus, the question of implementation is still in the books and may never be on the agenda. Adding this, the EU perspective of both countries seems to be less and less a tool of leverage on the EUSR's side, even though normalisation is considered key in the countries' European paths. This echoes Mr Szunyog's statement that if no progress is made on the enlargement questions, Western Balkans countries might choose to move on their own over less binding alternatives. This concern emerges particularly on the side of Serbia, and its progressive misalignment with the CFSP general directions since the war in Ukraine started⁵³.

Finally, to temper these rather “bad” results from the outside, words from one of the interviewees need to be mentioned as it is essential to have the feeling from the inside. To the question: “Do you see the situation you are working on evolving positively? Have you seen progress since you arrived at the Office?” the answer was:

*“Yes, we have seen lots of progress. Since his arrival, Mr. Lajčák made the dialogue back. We had an agreement last year, plus the annexe on implementation. These were all positive steps. It was particularly an achievement because we have been in a crisis resolution mode and not in a normalisation mode since the beginning (we were acting like firefighters taking care of Kosovo, the license plate, the issues of elections being challenged, the recurrent operations in the North from the Kosovo police, etc.). As of today, the stars are not aligned, and it is going to be tough progress as Serbia likes the status quo with Kosovo, contrary to Kosovo, which wants recognition. We work a lot. We should not be judged on the achievements we can see or not see. In the end, it is like in rugby: you score, but don't transform.”*⁵⁴

H1 states that EUSRs' legal and institutional framework leads to more effectiveness. In the case of Mr Ambassador Lajčák, the hypothesis is verified as this framework allowed him to break an Agreement between both parties. Through the pursuit of quiet diplomacy, a constant presence both in Serbia and Kosovo and using the extensive abilities of his position, Mr Ambassador Lajčák succeeded in bringing back the dialogue. This enhanced the EU's visibility and effectiveness through public diplomacy, the Ambassador being an actor in the dialogue and personifying the EU's commitment toward the question.

⁵³ Interview with an EEAS Official, 12/10/2023. The full sentence is “since the Russian Aggression on Ukraine, this alignment is on a variable level”.

⁵⁴ Interview with an EEAS Official, 20/10/2023.

H2 states that EUSRs' extensive granted powers lead to more effectiveness, in the case of Mr Ambassador Lajčák, not really, as he is not able to use them properly in the way he deems necessary. His effectiveness is entailed by the member states themselves, who own the process by implementing different red lines the EUSR must cope with and not cross. Thus, Mr Ambassador Lajčák is partially effective in fulfilling the main policy objective of his mandates, suffering from both a lack of willingness of the parties to negotiate and from the EU's diverging stances on the Dialogue resolution.

Table 2: Mr Ambassador Lajcak's effectiveness, summary:

	<i>Expected outcome</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Degree of effectiveness</i>
<i>To enhance the EU's visibility and effectiveness through public diplomacy and contribute to the consistency and effectiveness of EU action in the Western Balkans</i>	Visible, consistent and effective EU in the Western Balkans	Visible, consistent and effective EU in the Western Balkans	Effective
<i>To improve good neighbourly relations and reconciliation between partners in the Western Balkans</i>	Good neighbourly relations between the partners	Cordial but tense tensions	Rather effective
<i>To achieve comprehensive normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, which is key to their respective European paths</i>	Comprehensive normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia	Not much progress apart from the Agreement	Rather ineffective

Mr Ambassador Sattler⁵⁵:

As the EU Special Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Ambassador Johann Sattler navigates a complex landscape in a country marked by -in his own words- a crisis of governance (Lazovic, 2021). The country's tripartite presidency

⁵⁵ Assessing Mr Ambassador Sattler's effectiveness was a tough process as no interview could be set with someone from his office.

and the lingering effects of the Bosnia War present a multitude of political and societal crises. His role, far from being a mere title, is a crucial part of the EU's efforts in the region. In assessing his effectiveness, it's important to recognise the intricacy of his position.

- 1) Throughout his tenure, Mr. Ambassador Johann Sattler has encountered substantial criticism, both domestically and in the media, for his management of various issues. These criticisms range from his alleged favouritism towards Bosnian Serbs to his handling of political crises, painting a comprehensive picture of the challenges he faces.

In 2022, a group of academics, activists, and citizens signed a petition in the press calling for Mr. Ambassador Sattler's resignation. The document, which reverberated throughout BiH, labelled his tenure as EU Special Representative a “total failure” that “will be remembered for almost constant political crises that have been described as the worst and most unstable period since the end of the war (...)” (Sarajevo, 2022).

The main argument of the protestors behind the petition is that Mr Ambassador Sattler has more conciliatory positions and is apparently favouring Bosnian Serbs, especially when the latter are paralysing the functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions (*Ibid*). On the contrary, he apparently has harsher positions with non-ethnic Serbs in BiH. This criticism makes an echo to the one addressed to Mr Ambassador Lajčák by Kosovo in favouring Serbians' position when it comes to the Dialogue.

- 2) During his tenure, Mr Ambassador Sattler's effectiveness has been affected by the OHR decisions.

As the EUSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Ambassador Sattler must collaborate with the Office of the High Representative, even when the latter's decisions significantly impact his work and effectiveness in building a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic, and united BiH. Two such decisions are noteworthy: In 2023, His Excellency Christian Schmidt, HR since 2021, took action to annul laws passed by the Republika Srpska National Assembly, deeming it an “attack on the integrity of

the Constitutional Court of BiH and on the BiH Constitution” (EUSR in BiH, 2023). In response, Mr. Ambassador Sattler reiterated that the Bonn Powers are a measure of last resort against irreparable unlawful acts.

This scenario repeated in March 2024 when HR Schmidt used his extensive power to enforce changes in BiH's election law system. Mr. Ambassador Sattler, once again, expressed his belief that HR Schmidt should only use his executive powers in the case of irreparable legislative action, a stance that the EU did not consider was the case with negotiations on changes to the country's election law (Hina, 2024). But apart from expressing the EU's unhappiness, there is not much the EUSR can do.

- 3) Similar to Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be burned by ethnic tensions as everything is intricately there.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is ruled through an administrative system inherited from the Dayton Agreement. Since then, BiH has been partitioned between two administrative units (a Serb entity (the Republika Srpska) and a Bosniak-Croat federation) and a three-level presidency that alternatively represents one of the three dominant ethnic groups (Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Serbs). Adding this, there is a central government, the OHR and the EUSR that is double-hatted. Amidst its complex political system, BiH regularly witnesses ethnic tensions among communities, and many observers fear another war to occur. These rather pessimistic feelings are reinforced by the Republika Srpska's threat of secession, a position endorsed today by Milorad Dodik (McGee, 2021), former Head of the Republika Srpska, whom the critics accused Mr Ambassador Sattler of favour.

The first policy objective of his mandate is to ensure continuing progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process. As stated earlier, the SAP aims to “stabilise the region with the prospect of future EU membership for candidate countries (...)”, the SAA being the bilateral tailored version to each country (European Commission, n.d.).

This is through the SAP that the EU received the image of a quasi-enlargement actor in the region, aiming through the latter to potentially integrate Western Balkans

countries within the EU. The expected outcome of the policy objective is a BiH that progresses, through the help of Mr Ambassador Sattler, in implementing various EU reforms and policies included in the SAA towards the EU membership. To track the progress of the SAP implementation, different bodies have been established, including an EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilisation and Association Council, a Stabilisation and Association Committee and a Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (Stabilisation and Association Process, n.d.-b). These bodies ensure that the reforms implemented in BiH with support from the EUSR are shaped according to the EU's best practices. Strong progress and effective implementation of the SAA are prerequisites for BiH to move towards EU accession progress.

Thanks to his action, crucial laws such as one on public procurement and conflict of interests have been passed (ensuring the good use of public funds and full transparency in public procurement procedure), as well as the opening of talks with Frontex in February 2023 (Srna, 2022), bringing BiH a step further into the prospect of an EU integration. Finally, the successful implementation of most of the priorities set by the European Commission in 2019 in various areas of RoL and democracy rewards Mr Ambassador Sattler's work 2022 candidate status.

The second policy objective of his mandate is to ensure a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic, and united BiH that cooperates peacefully with its neighbour. Through this policy objective, Mr Ambassador Sattler is supposed to support the political process of institutions at all levels in BiH while aiming to "ensure greater consistency and coherence of all political, economic and European priorities – particularly in the areas of the rule of law and security sector reform" (EUSR in BiH, 2021).

When granting BiH EU candidate status, the Council of the EU -and the Stabilisation and Association Council- reminds in its conclusions that it is on the understanding that BiH implements the measures related to enlargement policy to strengthen the RoL, the fight against corruption and organised crime (Council of the EU, 2023). However, the same Conclusions welcomed improvement in public administration reforms and migration management.

As of today, not much progress has been made by the Office of Mr Ambassador Sattler, and observers qualify the situation as the worse they have witnessed in the past years. Different sources agreed on the fact that Mr Ambassador Sattler is making “(un)deliberate omissions regarding violation and non-application of international law, legal acquis of the EU and UN and political blockades” and that he “does not report on the true situation in BiH and actions that Milorad Dodik implements through the RS National Assembly and the RS Government” (IFIMES, 2023).

Accused of disfavoursing the Croats through public statements and regularly allowing the legal paralysis of BiH along with HR Schmidt, Mr Ambassador has not proved to be able to ensure a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic, and united BiH. Adding this, when it comes to a BiH that cooperates peacefully with its neighbour, BiH still has not recognised Kosovo and carries variable relations with other Western Balkans countries. To this end, BiH is today unstable, not united, rather peaceful, viable and multi-ethnic. Nevertheless, as guardian of the EU’s coherence in BiH, Mr Ambassador Sattler keeps advising the head of EUFOR, the other EU body in BiH, to try to maximise the EU impact in promoting stability and multiethnicity.

The third policy objective of his mandate is to ensure that BiH is irreversibly on track towards Union membership. To this end, the biggest milestone reached is the grant of EU candidate status by the European Council in December 2022, following a recommendation from the Commission in October 2022. One year later, in December 2023, the European Council decided they would open negotiation for accession once sufficient compliance with the membership criteria was achieved. Finally, it’s as of March 2024 all twenty-seven member states approved opening accession talks with Bosnia and Herzegovina. These steps from the EU’s side welcome years of work in implementing reforms in the areas of RoL and Public Administration on the side of BiH, rewarding the EUSRs in ensuring BiH stays on track towards EU membership.

H1 states that EUSRs’ legal and institutional framework leads to more effectiveness. This is the case of Mr Ambassador Sattler, who, thanks to the latter, can operate directly from BiH and Sarajevo while having regional offices in Banja Luka, Brčko

and Mostar. Through the latter, EUSR Sattler can operate within Bosnia the way he deems the most necessary to successfully fulfil the policy objectives of his mandate. Thanks to his flexibility and presence on the ground, Mr Ambassador Sattler can pursue diplomatic talks when needed, such as with the representatives of the BiH's employer's association in 2022 or members of the Bosniak presidency more recently.

H2 states that EUSRs' extensive granted powers lead to greater effectiveness. This is the case of Mr Ambassador Sattler, speaking as one voice on the ground and being, thanks to his double-hat, guardian of the EU's coherence in BiH. This is despite the fact that the OHR has a bigger impact on BiH politics than he does. However, his extensive power as EUSR allowed him to pursue the successful implementation of the SAA in BiH and make the country closer to the EU. Through his availability to meet high-level politicians such as the President of the BiH Constitutional Court in 2023 or the BiH presidency's member, Mr Ambassador Sattler put all his assets on his side and used his power to fulfil the policy objectives of his mandate. However, the fact that a petition was signed calling for his resignation and that some people see his position as a "blockage" of Bosnian politics express the inability of his position and power when it comes to promoting a stable, viable, peaceful and multi-ethnic BiH. Like the other EUSRs, Mr Ambassador Sattler navigates a complex environment in which many factors remain out of his control.

Table 3: Mr Ambassador Sattler's effectiveness, summary:

	<i>Expected outcome</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Degree of effectiveness</i>
<i>Continuing progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process</i>	Continued progress in implementation of the SAP	Progress in the implementation of the SAP	Effective
<i>Ensuring a stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic and united BiH that cooperates peacefully with its neighbour</i>	Stable, viable, peaceful, multi-ethnic and united BiH	Unstable, not united, rather peaceful, viable and multi-ethnic BiH	Rather ineffective
<i>Ensuring that BiH is irreversibly on track towards Union membership</i>	Progress in BiH accession towards the EU	Significant progress in BiH accession towards the EU	Effective

Conclusion

At the end of this assessment of the EU Special Representatives' effectiveness in the Western Balkans, the results are mitigated. These highly profiled diplomats that Mr Ambassadors Szunyog, Sattler and Lajčák are, despite being invested in an incredible amount of power, are projected in a region that was melting in a deadly ethnic war only twenty-five years ago. Their effectiveness in fulfilling the policy objectives of their mandate is thus dependent on many variables, some of them being out of their control and linked to societal issues that may only pass through with time. Ethnic tensions between communities are hindering most of their work, and as one of the interviewees said: *"We cannot understand what a compromise means for these countries, their politicians and their leaders in general"*. In other words, despite the specificities of their positions, their extensive power and goodwill, there are things out of their control and understanding that they can only go along with.

Nevertheless, as explained, EUSRs are a tool for crisis management, serving the CFSP and the EU foreign policy in regions of interest to the Union. The three studied positions were created because the Western Balkans were trapped in a multitude of crises. And these three successive choices to overcome the crises do not come out of nowhere. The unique institutional and legal framework of EUSRs and the extensive power they receive from the twenty-seven member states allow EUSRs to navigate the complex environment of the Western Balkans better than anyone else.

Since its creation, EUSRs in BiH have been key in making the EU present in the country before there was anything like a CFSP directed towards the Western Balkans. EUSRs in Kosovo, who later appeared, have been crucial in fostering the EU's presence in Kosovo despite the member states divisions on the country's recognition. They allow the EU to have one voice on the ground despite the division. Finally, the presence of a EUSR for the Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina highlights the EU commitment to the stability of the region, underlining the prospects of both country's potential EU accession.

In other words, EUSRs are the perfect (and only?) tool to send in the Western Balkans, as they were created for these exact kinds of missions.

To this end, despite mitigated results, no other CFSP tool than the EUSR would have enabled this level of performance. As one of the interviewees said, “*EUSRs are important in the Western Balkans because Kosovo and BiH are in transition, and we have a special task role there*”⁵⁶. Who else can fulfil this role?

In conclusion, apart from successfully promoting and ensuring multi-ethnicity, peace and viability of the countries they work in due to their lack of control of the internal situation, EU Special Representatives Sattler and Szunyog are effective in promoting the EU’s policies and interests. On the contrary, Mr Ambassador Lajčák is rather effective in promoting the EU’s Policies and Interests, suffering from a lack of control over the Dialogue he’s supposed to facilitate.

⁵⁶ Interview with an EEAS Official, 12/10/2023.

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Annexe 1: Overview of the past EUSRs appointed to a single country:

The colour green indicates the current EUSRs.

Afghanistan	BiH	Kosovo	Georgia	Macedonia	Moldova	Sudan	Former Yugoslavia
Klaus-Peter Klaiber, 2001-2002, Germany	Paddy Ashdown, 2002-2006, Great Britain	Wolfgang Petritsch, 1998-1999, Austria	Pierre Morel, 2008-2011, France	François Léotard, 2001-2011, France	Adriaan Jacobovits de Szeged, 2005-2007, Netherlands	Pekka Haavisto, 2005-2007, Finland	Felipe González, 1998-1999, Spain
Francesc Vendrell, 2002-2009, Spain	Christian Schwarz-Schilling, 2006-2007, Germany	Pieter Feith, 2008-2011, Netherlands		Alain Le Roy, 2001-2002, France	Kálmán Mizsei, 2007-2011, Hungary	Torben Brylle, 2007-2010, Denmark	
Ettore Francesco, 2009-2010, Italy	Miroslav Lajčák, 2007-2009, Slovakia	Fernando Gentilini, 2011-2012, Italy		Alexis Brouhns, 2002-2003, Belgium		Rosalind Marsden, 2010-2013, Great Britain	
Vygaudas Ušackas, 2010-2013, Lithuania	Valentin Inzko, 2009-2011, Austria	Samuel Žbogar, 2012-2016, Slovenia		Søren Jessen-Petersen, 2004-2004, Denmark			
Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin, 2013-2017, Denmark	Peter Sørensen, 2011-2014, Denmark	Nataliya Apostolova, 2016-2020, Bulgaria		Michael Sahlin, 2004-2005, Sweden			
	Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, 2015-2019, Sweden	Tomas Szunyog, 2020-2024, Czech Republic		Erwan Fouéré, 2005-2011, Ireland			
	Johann Sattler, 2019-2024, Austria						

The differences in the length of the mandates can be noted here.

Annexe 2: Overview of the past EUSRs appointed toward a region or thematic issue:

Africa Great Lakes Region	African Union	Central Asia	Horn of Africa	Middle-East peace process	Human Rights	Sahel	Southern Mediterranean
Aldo Ajello, 1996-2007, Italy	Koen Vervaeke, 2007-2011, Belgium	Ján Kubiš, 2005-2006, Slovakia	Alexander Rondos, 2012-2021, Greece	Miguel Ángel Moratinos, 1996-2002, Spain	Stavros Lambrinidis, 2012-2019, Greece	Michel Reveyrand-de Menthon, 2013-2015, France	Bernardino León, 2011-2014, Spain
Roeland van de Geer, 2007-2011, Netherlands	Gary Quince, 2011-2014, Great Britain	Pierre Morel, 2006-2012, France	Annette Weber, 2021-2024, Germany	Marc Otte, 2003-2011, Belgium	Eamon Gilmore, 2019-2024, Ireland	Ángel Losada Fernández, 2015-2021, Spain	
		Patricia Flor, 2012-2014, Germany		Andreas Reinicke, 2012-2013, Germany		Emmanuela Del Re, 2021-2024, Italy	
		Peter Burian, 2014-2021, Slovak		Fernando Gentilini, 2015-2018, Italy			
		Tehri Hakala, 2021-2025, Finland		Susanna Terstal, 2018-2021, Netherlands			
				Sven Koopmans, 2021-2025, Netherlands			

Pact for Former Europe	Royaumont Process	South Caucasus	Persian Gulf Region	Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue	Palestinian Territories
Bodo Hombach, 1999-2001, Germany	Panagiotis Roumeliotis, 1999-2000, Greece	Heikki Talvitie, 2003-2006, Finland	Luigi Di Maio, 2023-2025, Italy	Miroslav Lajcak, 2020-2024, Slovakia	Nils Eriksson, 1997-2002, Sweden
Erhard Busek, 2002-2008, Austria		Peter Semneby, 2006-2011, Sweden			
		Philippe Lefort, 2011-2014, France			
		Herbert Salber, 2014-2017, Germany			
		Toivo Klaar 2017-2024, Estonia			

Abstract

Generally described as the voice, face, eyes, and ears of the European Union, EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) are a unique tool at the service of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Primarily designed for conflict management, EUSRs are senior European diplomats sent to countries, regions, or on a theme of importance to the EU, with the aim of demonstrating its engagement, interests, and visibility. Since 1996, when the first position was opened by the High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana to the Great Lakes region, up to sixty EUSRs have been nominated, and more than twenty positions have been opened.

At present, the EU has ten EUSR positions, three of which are dedicated to the Western Balkans. These three EUSRs are the EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Mr Ambassador Johan Sattler, the EU Special Representative for Kosovo, Mr Ambassador Tomas Szunyog, and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues, Mr Ambassador Miroslav Lajčák. Their presence signifies a significant shift from the EU's historical challenges in the Western Balkans when facing the civil war in former Yugoslavia. Since the late nineties, the EU's approach has evolved into a stabilisation logic, manifested through the creation of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). These agreements have granted Western Balkans countries a “European perspective,” as affirmed at the Thessaloniki Summit (2003) and in the Tirana Declaration (2022), marking a positive trajectory for the region.

The three EUSRs under study operate within a complex framework, each with a specific mandate tailored to the needs of its respective country/theme. For instance, the EUSRs in Kosovo and BiH focus on promoting the Rule of Law, multi-ethnicity, and the EU's coherence, reflecting the EU's commitment to these principles. The EUSR for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkans regional issues prioritises facilitating the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia while enhancing the Union's visibility in the Western Balkans through public diplomacy.

This study aims to assess the three EUSRs' effectiveness in promoting the EU's policies and interests in its mandate areas by analysing their actions and contributions to the CFSP. To this end, a particular focus will be applied to their legal and institutional framework and the power they receive from the twenty-seven member states.

Keywords: EU Special Representatives; Common Foreign and Security Policy; Western Balkans; European Union