In a more troubled and less secure world, the European Union needs a strong common foreign and security policy. Confronted with new geopolitical rivalries, rising geo-economic competition and unprecedented pressure on the rules-based multinational order, the EU must respond swiftly to emerging global challenges in order to decisively protect and defend European values and interests. While the unanimity rule in Common Foreign and Security Policy will remain the broad norm, the Lisbon Treaty already provides for possibilities to strengthen the EU’s ability to speak with one voice on the international stage.

"I want our Union to become a stronger global actor. In order to have more weight in the world, we must be able to take foreign policy decisions quicker. This is why I want Member States to look at which foreign policy decisions could be moved from unanimity to qualified majority voting. The Treaty already provides for this, if all Member States agree to do it."

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the Union Address, 13 September 2017

Efficient, timely and credible responses by moving towards more qualified majority voting as foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty

The Treaty on the European Union (TEU) foresees the possibility to move from today's general rule of unanimity for the adoption of Common Foreign and Security Policy decisions to qualified majority voting. In fact, Article 31 (2) TEU already enables the Council to decide by qualified majority in certain predefined cases. The specific Common Foreign and Security Policy ‘passerelle clause’ in Article 31 (3) TEU empowers the European Council to further extend qualified majority voting in Common Foreign and Security Policy matters, if Member States unanimously agree to do so. Both Treaty provisions reflect the belief that an efficient, timely and credible Common Foreign and Security Policy might gradually move away from unanimity voting, at least in certain selected areas. So far, however, the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty has not been used.

The notion of vital and stated reasons of national policy is inherent to the sensitive area of foreign and security policy. This is fully acknowledged by the Common Foreign and Security Policy provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, as long as Member States do not abuse their veto power, in cases where no national strategic interests are at stake.