Mr. Van Rompuy was until recently a relatively unknown figure in European Politics, having only a year ago been elected as Prime Minister of Belgium. However, he has been widely praised as a consensus builder for his role in dealing with the internal issue of the division between Flemish Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia.

Baroness Ashton is also relatively unknown internationally having only taken over as Trade Commissioner from Peter Mandelson last year. Despite no direct background in foreign policy, she is regarded to have successfully led several high-level trade negotiations on behalf of the EU over the last year, especially with Korea.

As shown below, their appointments have been greeted by a mixture of opinions across Europe and the rest of the World. EU leaders have all expressed praise for the new appointments and both were elected unanimously. President Barack Obama also welcomed Mr. Van Rompuy and Baroness Ashton to their new roles, as did US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

However, opinion pieces from across Europe reveal concern about the low-key nature of the appointments and that neither will ‘stop the traffic in Beijing or Washington.’ For some it has been seen as a wasted opportunity to transform the EU into a political leader on a par with other global powers, such as the USA and China.

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- **EU Press**

  **EU chooses unknowns for new top jobs** (EU Observer)
  EU leaders have chosen Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy to be the first president of the European Council, while UK trade commissioner Catherine Ashton will become the bloc’s foreign policy chief.

  **EU selects Van Rompuy and Ashton** (EuropeanVoice)
  Belgian Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy is to be president of the European Council and European Commissioner Catherine Ashton is to be high representative for foreign policy. The two appointments were agreed unanimously at a meeting of the EU’s national government leaders in Brussels this evening.

  **The reluctant president** (EuropeanVoice)
  Herman Van Rompuy, Belgium’s reluctant prime minister, portrayed himself as Europe's reluctant president. “I have not sought this post or worked for it, but I assume it with conviction and enthusiasm,” he said.

- **UK Press**

  **Supremacy of the nation state wins out** (FT)
  The choice of two relative unknowns for the roles of EU president and foreign policy supremo, respectively, dismayed those who wanted to give Europe more clout on the world stage. “Minimalist,” was how Carl Bildt, Sweden’s foreign minister put it.
Gordon Brown abandons Tony Blair to snatch EU second prize (The Times)
A Belgian federalist and a former chairwoman of Hertfordshire Health Authority were ushered into Europe’s two grandest jobs last night as it stumbled on to the world stage.

European leaders choose the path of least resistance (The Independent)
Following a trade-off that managed to juggle the competing demands from Europe’s left and right political blocs, from the region’s big and small states and from those calling for a gender-balanced ticket, the victorious couple were formally anointed at a dinner of the European Union's 27 leaders.

Profiles: New appointees (BBC News)
The European Union has selected a new president to chair EU summits and represent the bloc on the world stage, as well as a new foreign policy chief. The way was cleared by the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by the Czech Republic.

• Other European Countries and the US Press.

A missed opportunity for Europe - EU’s decision sets an uncertain course (Deutsche Welle –Germany) (Opinion)
A missed opportunity for Europe. That is the sad result of this special meeting. The Lisbon Treaty, with its position of an 'European Union President', had offered the possibility for the EU to present a more effective face to the world. By selecting Herman Van Rompuy they didn’t use it.

E.U. picks first full-time president (The Washington Post)
Champions of European unity hoped their new president would be a continental George Washington, a brand name who could pull the European Union closer together and fulfill their dream of a strengthened role for Europe in world affairs.

• Analysis and comment

No obstacle too tough for new EU foreign chief (EU Business)
Catherine Ashton made a spectacular rise through British and European politics by becoming the consummate low-key negotiator.

US welcomes Europe’s two new faces (EU Observer)
US President Barack Obama has said the election of Herman Van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton to the helm of the EU would “strengthen” the bloc, but his words came as European media criticise their lack of weight on the international stage.