REMARKS

by High Representative Catherine Ashton on arrival at the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council

"Hello everyone,

I have called this extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council having been as you know at the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Pacific Islands Forum, in consultation with foreign Ministers from the EU but also in my discussions with Secretary of State John Kerry and other counterparts. We are going to discuss a number of issues this afternoon. Of course we will begin with the situation in Iraq. We are pleased to see there is Prime Minister-designate Haider Al-Abadi and we do hope that we will see greater political stability now in Iraq, as they face such challenges from ISIS, which is sweeping across parts of Northern and Western Iraq. Never forgetting the situation in Syria, by the way, but also the humanitarian challenges, and we will be joined by Kristalina Georgieva today from the Commission, who as you know has been very active in putting in additional support.

We will also consider the situation in Libya. I have just been in touch with Bernardino Leon, who as you know is my personal envoy and has now being appointed to my delight by Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to be the UN special envoy. The Secretary General and I spoke at length yesterday about the situation there. Bernardino is on his way now to try and find ways to first of all ensure the fighting stops and that a political solution is sought there.
We will consider too what has been happening in Gaza. Christian Berger, on my behalf, has been in the region, and we are supporting what the Egyptian government is trying to do to broker not just the short term ceasefire but also the longer term. The EU stands ready, as we have always done, to support the people in Gaza, to support trying to get the crossings open while ensuring the security of the Israeli people too and we continue to work with all sides, but our main efforts now are in supporting what’s happening with the Egyptian initiatives.

And then of course we will consider the situation in Eastern Ukraine. At the moment, we know what is going on at the borders with this humanitarian convoy. We continue all our efforts, as you have seen in the conversations that President Barroso has been having with President Putin and with President Poroshenko. We continue to try to find a way through this that will bring stability and security to Ukraine, respecting its territorial integrity.

So a busy agenda this afternoon. Thank you.”