Remarks by High Representative
Catherine Ashton ahead of
the Foreign Affairs Council, 21/03/11

Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, made the following remarks today on arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council:

"The big issues that will be discussed this morning are about Libya and the broader neighbourhood. Resolution 1973 is the backdrop against which we will now be looking at what more we can do in terms of economic sanctions, what more we can do for our planning to make sure that the EU as 27 is supportive. And the most important is humanitarian support. We have been working through the weekend to try and put together the kind of planning that will work with that. I have just spoken to Secretary-General Rasmussen who of course at NATO is busy looking at the planning that they are doing so that we are complementary in what we do. Everything that we are gearing towards is in support of the people of Libya."
The critical thing at the moment is the decision that was taken under the resolution 1973 to do everything that we can to try and support the people on the ground, the people in Libya. And that's why you've seen the group of countries who have come together. On Saturday in Paris, the Secretary-General of the UN was there, I was there, the Secretary-General of the Arab League was there as well as a number of countries willing to offer different kinds of support, and what you are seeing now is the implementation of that. My job is, as I say everywhere I can, the deep, long-term support for countries going through change for whatever reason, to support the people towards the freedom and democracy that they so clearly want. What you had from the meeting in Paris on Saturday was a communiqué that was signed up to by all the countries who were present and that included Germany. Now different Member States contribute in different ways. Today for the EU, our role is to look together as 27 at the humanitarian, economic and political issues and that's what we're doing. So there is unanimity about that.

The nature of Member States is precisely that countries determine what their involvement should be, and countries are involved in different ways, but the EU as 27 is very strong. We are looking at economic sanctions in line with the Security Council resolution and looking at support for the people of Libya, all of this is done in the context of wanting to support the people of Libya as much as we possibly can.

We will too of course focus on the wider neighbourhood: the constitutional amendment referendum in Egypt, what's happening in Bahrain – I've had an envoy there who is just returning now; he is just getting off the plane – and the broader questions of what we need to do to give them that long-term, deep support which is going to be so essential."