Remarks by the High Representative Catherine Ashton at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels, 18 July

Today we began our discussions with the **Middle East Peace Process** and I was able to debrief Member States on the discussions at the Quartet. From there we had an opportunity to talk about the issues that lie before us in the Middle East and especially my strong desire to see the two parties return as quickly as possible to talks and to get those moving as quickly as we possibly can.

We then talked about the report I have put before Member States on **CSDP**, Common Security and Defence Policy. This is a real opportunity to try and fulfil what the Lisbon Treaty is all about - which is to bring together the different ways in which Europe operates in the world and to put a framework around that.

I often give the example of what we are doing off the coast of Somalia in support of the World Food Programme. We are ensuring that 12 million people are able to get food, by protecting shipping against piracy and joining the international efforts to make sure that trade routes are kept open and people are kept safe.

That is part of a much bigger plan to try and support the development in Somalia, with all the challenges that we are well aware of, and to work collaboratively with other nations beyond the European Union, not least in those states that surround Somalia who are able to offer that kind of support.

I use that example to describe the work we need to do to make sure that our missions fit into a broader strategy and a broader plan as part of what Lisbon was all about, to make things fit together.
In that connection, this morning before the Council began, I went to see the new EU Situation Room which itself is bringing together different ways in which we monitor crisis, we support our missions and delegations. We have got a new and better operation and I am pleased to say at no extra cost, all being done within existing resources.

We also talked today about the Southern Neighbourhood and our growing concern regarding the situation in Syria. We all had hopes that the national dialogue could bring the opposition on board and lead to real and fulfilling conversations. That does not appear to have happened. As you know, we have continued to look at sanctions, the kind of pressure to put on Syria. We also had the Syrian ambassador come and see the EEAS last week because of our concerns of what was happening with embassies in Syria, not least the embassy of France.

We talked as well about Libya. We had the Contact Group meeting on Friday in Istanbul and the focus of that meeting was about how we deal with a post-conflict Libya, what we do on Day One and how we make sure that the international community works together.

For my part I have been engaged in working with the United Nations, the African Union, the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference - what we call the Cairo Group - to try and develop that work. Last week I also had conversations in Washington with the United States and with Turkey.

This is all under the umbrella of the United Nations and the Special Representative al-Khatib. We want to make sure that the UN, in pursuit of Resolution 1973, is making headway in thinking through the planning that will need to take place. And that builds on my visit to Benghazi and the opening of the EU office there.

Then we talked about the importance of stability in Egypt and Tunisia and the need to move forward on both the political side, helping to support the elections, helping to support the building of the political process - what I keep calling 'deep democracy' - and also the economic issues that confront the neighbourhood, particularly in the context of the Neighbourhood Policy that I have put together with Stefan Füle, the Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy.

Over lunch, we talked about Afghanistan and Pakistan. I was pleased to invite Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen to join us for that discussion. This is part of the EU-NATO cooperation that goes on all the time. It was important to have him participating in a discussion on how the EU can move forward in support of the people of Afghanistan and support of the people of Pakistan.

You will know that that covers a number of different elements. We discussed the importance of our police mission in Afghanistan, the importance and significance of supporting the development of police service for civilian use in Afghanistan and development projects. Andris Piebalgs has just returned from the region and was able to update us on that. And on Pakistan, we discussed our continuous desire to see ways in which we can support them through trade and through the economy, so significant after the floods they suffered last year.