Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival to Gymnich, informal meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers¹

Sopot, Poland, 2 September 2011

In Sopot at the Gymnich, the informal meeting of the EU foreign ministers, we will focus on a number of issues. First of all, during our lunch discussion, we're going to talk about the relationships between the European Union and some of our strategic partners - countries with whom we have a strong relationship, but where I think we need to do more to enhance those relationships. Particular focus will be on India, Brazil and South Africa, and how we develop those relationships for the European Union of 27 for the future.

We're also going to talk about the Middle East Peace Process. You know I just came back from discussions with the leadership of the Palestinian authority, the Prime Minister of Israel and the King of Jordan, on how we move forward to get negotiations moving. My objective is the resumption of negotiations so we can actually get to a settlement.

The EU has a common position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders to which they may agree to change bits of land.

On the possible Palestinian move at the UN - there is not a resolution before us on which we should take a position. There are many discussions going on. Many discussions both with the Palestinian authorities itself, with President Abbas, with the Arab League and others. We are participating in all those discussions but there is not yet a text on which we should take a position.

¹ Check against delivery
My role is to support the parties to try and get the talks moving because we need a settlement. The Palestinians will have to decide what resolution they wish to put forward. Decisions about recognising statehood are for individual member states of the UN to decide. We don’t know whether the Palestinians would push for that. What the Palestinians are saying to us is that they value the strong political and economic support from the EU.

On Libya: last night we had a meeting in Paris which brought together the international community to focus our attention on supporting the people of Libya into the future, to build the country that they want. The team I sent is in Tripoli now there. We have the beginnings of the European Union delegation, we have people there, the European Union flag is there, in support of the people. And in my many discussions with Mr Jibril and Mr Jalil, we talked to them about the kind of support we can offer.

Tomorrow morning we'll discuss relations with our Eastern partners, with a special focus on what's happening in Ukraine and our concerns for Yulia Timoshenko who is on trial there. We will also discuss Belarus where, as you know, we've taken a very strong position on the need to make sure that political prisoners are restored to freedom and rehabilitated properly and that that country considers its relationship with the European Union.

On Syria sanctions: As you know the PSC Committee, the 27 Ambassadors on behalf of the ministers under our chairmanship have been looking at what more we can do in terms of the political and economic pressure in Syria. Every time they meet, there is a conversation about what more can be done. And you know the commitment that we have and over the summer I was working on with the 27 namely to a common position on Syria about what should now happen: the regime needs to stop the killings now.

And of course during the Gymnich we also get the opportunity to talk more informally with each other.