Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival to the Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg, 10 October 2011

Today we are going to start with discussions on Ukraine, to consider our reaction to the verdict we are expecting on Yulia Tymoshenko, probably tomorrow. I am sure that ministers will want to think very carefully about our relationship and the messages we want to send to President Yanukovych.

We will also be discussing Belarus; you know our continuing concern to see all those imprisoned released and rehabilitated and our continuing desire to keep in touch with the people of Belarus.

Inevitably events in the last 24 hours in Egypt and Tunisia will also be a core part of our discussions as we think about North Africa; and what has been happening in Libya this morning, with the fighting in Sirte.

Freedom of expression and belief is absolutely fundamental to human rights as part of the core values we all stand for and we will be making sure that we make statements today and that it will be part of our discussions.

We have made it clear that we really do expect that Egypt will move towards its elections with a desire to see all people part of those elections and to protect the people whoever they are, wherever they come from, whatever belief and faith they have. That is a message we have repeated consistently. I think I have been to Egypt seven times and we have made that point clear; I have made that point to the Prime Minister, to other ministers, and I think it is really important that they do that. Egypt needs to move forward politically and economically against the backdrop of recognizing that what happened in the Arab Spring needs to be turned into a real democracy in a country where people can be proud and recognize their human rights.
We'll also be discussing Syria. You know that we've been consistent in wanting to see significant changes in Syria; the number of people who have died there is terrible. The continued approach of the government to repression is awful. We've been working closely with our colleagues in the UN Security Council and of course with Turkey in trying to put the pressure on. But we need to find out more and decide what we are going to do.

We also will want to think carefully about Iran this afternoon. As you probably know, in New York I met with what we call the E3+3 to consider further the issues of nuclear weapons in Iran. We will also discuss our growing concern about the human rights situation there.

And then finally the Middle East Peace Process; over lunch a chance to reflect on developments in New York. As you probably I know I held the meeting with the Quartet envoys yesterday in Brussels. The important thing now is to get people together if we can. We need to discuss a timeframe. I met with President Abbas last week and I will be talking with Prime Minister Netanyahu later today and again with President Abbas, to work with them to try and get those talks to be meaningful and to reach the solution.