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

This morning's Foreign Affairs Council comes on the back of a very important dinner last night where we discussed our relationships with Russia.

It's particularly relevant because this week I'll be travelling to the Southern Caucasus, and ending my trip in my formal dialogue with Minister Lavrov in Moscow.

And then today we've got a number of key issues to discuss.

I've already mentioned Iran, and the Foreign Ministers will have to decide what position we should take together, following the IAEA report. I don't have to tell you how concerned I am and how concerned I'm sure they will all be about the situation. We'll have to decide then what we should do in order to make it clear that this is completely unacceptable.

As you know, I've written to Mr Jalili asking for Iran to consider another set of negotiations: but to do so absolutely in the spirit we proposed when we met in Istanbul. I reminded him, this was a few weeks ago, that we have put some proposals on the table and that we hope that Iran will come and actually discuss those proposals. I still await his response.

You know that we're mandated in what's called the E3+3 to try to get the negotiations moving, and we work very hard on that, and this will also form part of my dialogue when I meet with the Russian Foreign Minister later in the week.

The situation in Syria is still causing enormous concern. I spoke last night with Nabil El-Araby, the Secretary General of the Arab League, and expressed our commitment to working closely with them.
We expressed our concern about the situation for civilians in Syria, of whom 3,500 have lost their lives, and our commitment to work with the Arab League and multilaterally to try and get solutions to what's happening in Syria. I hope the President is finally going to listen to his people.

Mr. El-Araby has been in touch with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon specifically to ask for advice and help on how things could be done to protect civilians. He's also asked us if there are ideas that we have and we will discuss that today. It's important that we work closely and collaboratively to find ways of supporting for example those NGOs on the ground who are doing such a great job.

You ask me if Syria is comparable with Libya. I don't think it's the same situation: no two countries are the same. It's very obvious to me that we have to work very closely with Nabil El-Araby. The Arab League has taken a strong position and it's making clear to Syria what needs to happen.

You know too that I was in Libya on Saturday and I had the opportunity to meet with the new Prime Minister and with Chairman Jalil. It was very interesting to see the direction for that country and how much progress has been made, day by day, to try and sort some of the problems.

And we'll be also looking at what's going on post-election in Tunisia, and then looking too at the Horn of Africa.

I was recently able to convene a meeting of about 20 Ministers concerned with the issue of piracy off Somalia, and to discuss the need to support countries like Kenya, which is suffering in term of its economy because of what's been happening there.

And we'll talk too about Afghanistan as we prepare for the Bonn conference.