Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival to FAC, Brussels, 23 April 2012

"Good morning everyone.

We’ll begin our discussions on Burma/Myanmar, where we will be suspending the sanctions apart from the arms embargo, and looking forward to working with Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Thein on the future of that country.

I will be travelling to Burma later this week to deliver the messages from this Council and to open the European Union office there.

We are watching carefully developments today with the Parliament of course but our objective is to help support the progress that has been made to become irreversible.

We will talk too about Afghanistan, with a series of important meetings coming up on Afghanistan, beginning in Chicago with the NATO Summit which I will attend, and where we'll be looking to see how we make sure that there is the strength of support into the future for the people of Afghanistan.

For us that means looking at our development priorities, it means support for the police work that we're doing there and of course we want to make sure that the women of Afghanistan play their rightful role in that society.

We will discuss three African countries that are of great concern today.

In Mali, we are seeing a fragile situation. I've spoken to President Ouattara who is currently President of ECOWAS to offer our support and help to make sure that there is movement forward.

We've condemned the coup in Guinea Bissau and there will be discussions on that today.
The situation in Sudan and South Sudan is really worrying. I know we've seen the withdrawal of forces but nonetheless this is a very difficult situation and one where we've been urging both sides to try and find a way through this in order that both countries can develop and prosper.

Syria is never far from our discussions, and is a cause for continuing concern. We underline our support for Kofi Annan's proposals, not just the ceasefire but the other elements of the six point plan.

We will also underline our desire to continue to support the humanitarian side. This means not just the people in Syria, where we still have our delegation open, but also the neighbouring countries, especially Turkey and Jordan but thinking too about Lebanon and Iraq.

What we've also been doing in the last weeks is to put together a crisis platform, which brings together the different services of the European Union to look at what support we can offer to the UN for the implementation of the Annan plan. Obviously we have to wait and see what requests are made of us but the planning has been done with the military committee and with the humanitarian support people and so on to see the different elements of what we can do.

I think the situation is still very dangerous. You will have seen there have been attacks and we don't have a proper ceasefire. There are observers now on the ground and I hope that their presence will make a difference. But we have to keep moving on this and supporting the approach that Kofi Annan has taken. We've seen some solid resolutions in the Security Council unanimously adopted which is a change, and that's the way we have to go.

I will take the opportunity as well to update ministers on the talks in Istanbul with Iran last weekend.

On Argentina, I sent a pretty strong message at the European Parliament last week and I know that the Spanish Foreign Minister will be raising the issue again.

I made it clear that the EU is supporting the position which says very clearly that it's in the interest of Argentina as well as in the interest of the European and global economy that we don't end up in a position where you are destroying direct investment from overseas. And of course their international obligations must be respected. That's our very clear position."