Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council,
Luxembourg, 15 October 2012

Good morning everyone.

Just to say first of all that we had an extremely good dinner last evening with Foreign Minister
Lavrov, who came to join the Foreign Affairs Council to discuss the bilateral relationship between
the European Union and the Russian Federation and also to talk about some of the foreign
policy issues that will dominate our agenda today.

We discussed - and we'll focus on today - the situation in Mali, where we are concerned about
what's happening and the deterioration of the situation for the people. We are delighted that Mr
Prodi has been invited to perform the function of UN envoy. He is someone that we know well and
who we're looking forward to working with.

We will of course continue to discuss the issue of Syria and our concerns for conditions there, and
this was also of course a large part of our conversation with Foreign Minister Lavrov last evening.

The situation in Syria is just tragic at every possible level. There are families who've been killed,
there are children without parents, there are children who are dead and injured, there are people who
are traumatized and will be for years to come. All of us who witnessed the terrible devastation in
places like Aleppo, these beautiful cities that are now in rubble, know that not only do we have a
terrible tragedy now but we have an awful lot of work we need to do together to help reconstruct
this country. That is one of the commitments that we make, to work together with the international
community and begin to think about giving the people a sustainable future, economically and in
every possible way.

We've been offering support for the refugees in Turkey for some time and I've been in touch
with Ahmet Davutoglu on a regular basis to discuss this with him.
We look to the United Nations, to the Security Council, to provide strong leadership and I'm disappointed as indeed many members are that they've been unable to do that. But what is also clear is that there is huge support for Mr Brahimi, the new Special Representative for the UN for the Arab League and the work that he's undertaking to do. What I hear from Mr Lavrov is that he is absolutely determined to support him. So we're hoping that in the course of the next days, as Mr Brahimi reports back to the Security Council on his recent visit, that he will provide his ideas for how best we can move forward. With Minister Lavrov, we talked about the need for us all to work together, through the Security Council.

We will also discuss how we move forward with the opposition parties who we urge as you know to get together to represent all of the country and to really support the people. All of that is going to be part of trying to find a solution quickly.

Inevitably too we will discuss Iran. We're looking today at additional measures, but I continue as you know to make every effort to explore the potential for Iran to make the decision on an entirely peaceful civil nuclear programme.

We keep our sanctions regimes under review wherever we have sanctions. It's very important for two reasons. One is because circumstances change, and secondly in order to keep up the pressure. And it's very important that Iran is sent a very strong signal from this European Union Foreign Affairs Council and from the Member States that we want to see a negotiated agreement through this discussion with the E3+3. We will continue to keep up the pressure, and that's important. It's important because it's quite clearly having an effect.

We have to continue with the twin track approach: pressure to persuade Iran to come to the table, and the offers that we make about how we will release that pressure in return for Iran complying with international obligations. That's what the twin track approach is about and you need that.

I absolutely do think that there is room for negotiation. And I hope that we will be able to move forward soon in our discussions with Iran. I hope that Iran will be considering very carefully the proposals that we've already put on the table. As you know I had dinner with Dr Jalili in Istanbul two or three weeks ago to talk informally about moving forward. I hope that he will see our seriousness about finding a negotiated way through.

And of course we will look to our Eastern Neighbourhood. We believe that the elections in Belarus were a missed opportunity; we continue with our measures, and we still believe that there should be proper release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners. And we'll be discussing the elections in Georgia. I've already spoken to Mr Ivanishvili and to Mr Saakashvili, and we expect them to work together and to continue the strong relationship with the European Union. Both tell me that they're firmly committed to doing so.

And then finally I will be next weekend heading off to the Middle East to visit Jordan, Lebanon and to meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu and with President Abbas. So there will also be a discussion to inform of my visit before I leave at the weekend.