Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton ahead of her meeting with the President of Israel, Shimon Peres

Mr. President, I thank you for your kind words on the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to the European Union this year.

As you rightly say, Europe has through its history learnt that cooperation and collaboration is the best way forward, even when times are tough. And I believe that the Nobel committee wanted to recognize that very fact.

We live in challenging times now, and there will be challenging times ahead. But I think that the coming together of the 27 countries – and soon to be 28 - is very significant. And I hope we have something to offer to the world and I believe this point is being recognized.

We know about tragedy, we know about finding a way through. We now that collaboration, cooperation, negotiation, finding alternative ways of achieving objectives is the best way.

I thank you, too, because I know that you have supported what we are trying to do with Iran, through negotiations. You also recognise the work that the EU has done on sanctions: the twin track approach whereby we keep up the pressure in order to persuade Iran to come and talk with us and to determine the path to the future in a way that will bring greater security to the region, greater security to the world.

These are very challenging times indeed. I have been this week in Jordan visiting refugees from Syria. I have been to Lebanon to talk with the authorities about the importance of not allowing a vacuum – we would like to see that President Sulaiman pushes forward with the national dialogue and finds a way through.
And I am here to talk with you, Mr. President, and with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister about the bilateral relationship. May I say that I am pleased about yesterday's decision by the European Parliament on the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of industrial products (ACAA) which will benefit the pharmaceutical industry both here and in Europe.

We are also discussing the issues of the greatest concern which affect this region, and we of course continue to look for a two-state solution. The changes across the Arab world make the need for progress on the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. Heeding the aspirations of the people in the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood and those of Israelis for security is a crucial element for lasting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Finally, Mr. President, I arrived to Israel at the time when the campaign for January elections is beginning. I wish everyone involved all the best over the coming weeks.