Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels, 19 November 2012

It's a very busy day today with many issues.

We will begin as you know this morning with a meeting of Ministers of Defence. We spend 200 billion Euros in the European Union between us all on defence and one of my objectives is to make sure we have the opportunity to make sure we spend as effectively as possible. We do that by looking at something called pooling and sharing. This is the chance to look at research and development, how do we ensure that the resources we've got are used to best effect and we do that in conjunction with our colleagues in NATO: the Secretary General of NATO will join us for our debates too, which are really important.

Over lunch we'll bring in Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers together, all of them, to discuss the situation in Mali. We will consider how we can best within the comprehensive approach - which is the work that we do across the many different elements of EU action, including humanitarian support and the development of the country - help to train and ensure that there is the capacity to deal with security issues, which is so vital to the people.

This afternoon there is a very packed agenda. The Foreign Ministers will focus primarily on three things.

First of all the unfolding situation in Gaza. I've been in touch and stayed in touch with the Prime Minister of Israel and with the Arab League and with Arab Nations. I'm very concerned about the loss of life, but I've also been saying consistently for a long time that we need to find a long-term solution to Gaza. I've been there three times and we have to find a way to prevent the kind of violent rocket attacks that we've seen, and also to bring some security and peace to the people of that region. It fits absolutely into what the EU has consistently said about the two-state solution.
Of course Syria is never far from our thoughts. The violence continues there. I met with Mr. Al-Khatib last week who is the newly appointed head of the opposition groups that met together in Doha. We will be re-discussing today how to approach our relationship with them, but I had a long meeting with him to talk about the need for a political process for the future of the country. Assad must go, but there needs to be a process that will come into being to take his place and that will lead the people into the future in the way that they would wish. Meanwhile we are horrified by what's happening there.

And then the third issue is what is happening in the DRC and where M23 as you know are very close to the city of Goma. I've been in contact with our Delegation on this at the weekend and we will be talking with leaders in the region to express our concern and to try and find a way to continue to develop the relationship in such a way that we don't see the retreat from the agreements that have been made. This is again a really important issue for us.