Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton before the Foreign Affairs Council

Good morning everyone.

Today there will be a number of different issues at the Foreign Affairs Council. I'd like to highlight three.

The first is of course the continuing concern we have about the situation in Mali. We will discuss out efforts in support of France and we will launch our training mission today. That is going to be of enormous importance in support of the Malian army. We will also look at continuing the work that Commissioner Piebalgs has been doing to assure that humanitarian aid and development aid is going to reach the Malian people as swiftly as possible as part of the broader comprehensive approach on the Sahel.

We will be thinking ahead to the Summit in Vilnius later this year where the leaders of the Eastern Partnership countries will come together with the EU. This will be an opportunity to deepen and strengthen our relationship with them.

Of course, Syria is very high on our agenda again. We will be looking today at what more we can do to support the people of Syria. This is an issue of a growing concern for us and in the European Council, and that will be reflected in our discussions.

We are also looking to support what Mr Brahimi is trying to do, which has been to work with the Security Council Members and to try and find a political way forward.

You have seen that Sheikh Moaz al-Khatib is talking about the need to find a political roadmap in Syria, including his willingness to talk to people from the regime who are not part of the on-going action against the civilian population. We are supporting all the efforts of the coalition to try and find a way to stop the fighting, to bring peace and to find a way through.
I am sure there will be an agreement on restrictive measures on Syria. The question we have to debate is to ensure that we have got the right format.

Today we will also hear from the Bulgarian Foreign Minister (on the Burgas attack). He has asked to make a statement on the ongoing situation. As I have said we have to look very carefully at what he says and what the issues now are and that would form the basis for discussion at FAC.