"Defending national interests, preventing conflict"
Speech delivered by High Representative Catherine Ashton
at the Shangri-La Dialogue

It is a pleasure to be here – for the first time - at the Shangri-La Dialogue, the 12th Asia Security Forum organised by the International Institute for Security Studies (ISS). The fact that I am here send a very strong message of the real interest of the EU in and commitment to Asian security issues. That is why I will also be attending next month's ASEAN Regional Forum in Brunei.

We believe we have a dual contribution to make to security in the region and beyond: first by offering to be a true long-term partner on security issues and second by being an effective and innovative one, through our ability to implement a comprehensive approach which is particularly suited to the new challenges we all face.

Other speakers have already indicated and everyone in this room is aware that this century poses new security challenges that affect us all, everywhere in the world. We can only deal with them if we work together. So for us working with many Asian countries is an opportunity for cooperation and strong partnership to tackle common problems.

Both the EU and Asia share the objective of securing peace and prosperity in our regions and beyond. We are partners facing global problems such as non-proliferation; terrorism and violent extremism; and we also jointly face the threats of climate change and energy security.

Non-proliferation is a key challenge for us all. I am as you know mandated by the UN Security Council to lead the negotiations with Iran on its nuclear programme on behalf of the E3+3 group in order to try and build confidence for the international community in the nature of the Iranian programme.

When I look at this region, I see the DPRK nuclear tests as a big challenge to the global non-proliferation regime and a violation of the DPRK's international obligations not to produce or test nuclear weapons. We are working with our partners to build a firm and unified response aimed at demonstrating to the DPRK that there are consequences for its continued violations.
Terrorism and extremism pose a threat to our peaceful co-existence. We have a shared interest in working together to prevent it in all of its forms. The spread of terrorism and extremism are the negative sides of globalisation: we need to be equally global in our work to counter these threats, be that through police training in Afghanistan or support to justice reform in Pakistan. Cyber attacks are not just a military threat. They can affect our daily lives by targeting critical infrastructure such as energy grids or hospitals.

Climate change poses a growing and imminent risk to us all. If this leads to parts of our continents becoming uninhabitable as a result of severe droughts or floods, the effects will be disastrous. And of course greater prosperity for all of us depends on our ability to secure energy resources, despite increasing scarcity while at the same time avoiding this becoming a source of conflict.

We all face the same threats. Today I am here to reinforce our deep commitment to promoting global security and prosperity, not as an Asian power, but an Asian partner. We already have a partnership but I believe that we can do much more to deepen our cooperation even further.

Our commitment to security and stability in Asia is for the long term. We will continue to be an active and constructive member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Last year we signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). We are now looking forward to the prospect of joining the East Asia Summit.

The new-generation of partnership and cooperation agreements which we have recently concluded with Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and a few weeks ago with Mongolia and are concluding with Singapore provide us with an ambitious framework for cooperation in fighting terrorism, human trafficking, and countering proliferation. Talks are underway to have similar agreements with Brunei, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand.

Another good example of our partnership is our work on disaster prevention and response with ASEAN and individual countries. We have provided €52.6 million to help the victims of natural disasters. We are currently establishing a regional network of information-sharing and early warning systems for emergency situations with ASEAN. We are supporting the ASEAN centre for humanitarian response. We have recently participated with more than 60 people in disaster and relief exercises with ASEAN and other countries under the ARF.

We also work together on civilian and military operations - we have concluded a framework agreement with New Zealand and hope to sign soon with Australia and South Korea for participation in EU-led missions. We look forward to further participation in worldwide missions from all our partners in the Asia-Pacific. So our partnership on the full range of security challenges is strong and growing which brings me to why the EU is now an even more effective and innovative partner.

Our strength lies in our ability to respond to a crisis with a wide range of tools and instruments, short and long term, humanitarian and development, security and political. We call this the comprehensive approach, an approach that we believe is particularly suited to tackling the new security challenges we face today. For us the comprehensive approach implies combining hard and soft power to achieve lasting security and prosperity. This approach, we believe, makes us a unique global partner for Asia on security issues.
It comes from the changes that we made by the EU Lisbon Treaty which created my job by combining the jobs previously done by three people and allowed me to create the European External Action Service. This new service is more than a foreign ministry – it combines elements of a development and of a defence ministry. It is this blend of competencies that allows the EU to deal not only with the symptoms of a crisis or security problem but also with the underlying causes. Our approach combines diplomacy, development and defence assets.

A good example of this in action and one that is particularly relevant to Asia is the threat posed by maritime piracy. As many of you will know, for several years now, the EU has been deeply engaged in fighting piracy at the Horn of Africa.

Our actions off the coast of Somalia are particularly relevant to our Asian partners for a number of reasons. First of all, seafarers from Asian countries pay the highest price: of the 54 hostages currently being held by pirates, 53 are nationals from Asian countries. Secondly, piracy is a particular challenge in this region and our success at the Horn of Africa and the great cooperation we’ve enjoyed with Asian partners can make a real contribution to developing a regional approach to tackling piracy in Asia.

When I took over my role, the EU response to this threat was fragmented. We had a naval mission of 8 warships, 3 maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft and 4 detachments for protection of World Food Program shipping catching pirates off the Horn, but this was not linked into our development policy, rule of law support or any kind of regional strategy. We were dealing with a symptom, but not dealing with the underlying causes.

Today our naval mission operates within the framework of an EU comprehensive strategy towards the Horn of Africa which includes economic and development assistance to the Somali Government, rule of law support to other countries in the region, transfer agreements for the detention and prosecution of pirates, a counter terrorism strategy aimed at combating extremism, a military training mission and a land-based counter piracy mission. The naval mission has involved 21 EU Member States and 2,000 personnel. And we have also been able to count on the excellent cooperation with the navies of many countries from Asia (Australia, China, India, Japan, Pakistan, and South Korea) with which we conduct and coordinate joint escorts and exchange information on the ground.

As part of the broader EU Horn of Africa strategy this operation has shown impressive results: In the last two years, piracy off the coast of Somalia has decreased by 95%. The mission has detained and transferred 149 suspected pirates to judicial authorities for prosecution and conviction through a network of agreements with the coastal countries. €37 million has been targeted at strengthening the legal systems. I have appointed a special representative to oversee the implementation of the strategy and engage with the authorities locally to ensure our solutions are tailor-made to the needs on the ground.

We have also made available significant development aid: € 504 million for education to prevent young people from engaging in piracy, for the reform of governance & the rule of law as well as an additional € 242 million in humanitarian aid to help those most affected by the crisis.

The comprehensive approach is not only about tackling crises. It is also about bringing the full support of the EU in support of transitions helping to reinforce security and stability.
A number of colleagues have already mentioned the situation and change in Myanmar/Burma. We have just lifted sanctions and before the end of the year, I will travel to the country to lead a "Task-Force" that can give crucial support to the transition process. This is the concept that I developed and describe it as "politics meets economics". It brings together all EU resources and the different people who can offer additional support, including the private sector - in support democratic transition. We have been working with countries in our region - Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan. In Burma/Myanmar we are looking to support the leadership, President U Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, to ensure a successful transition. We are also the main international backers of the Peace Centre in Yangon and we are contributing to enhancing their crisis response system through the establishment of a Crisis Response Centre.

In conclusion, in a world where we face multiple and continually evolving security threats, building strong partnerships between like-minded regions has never been more important. The EU is a true Asian partner – our interest is not in projecting power but in empowering. The EU's unique comprehensive approach also makes us a highly effective partner. Together we can make the world a safer place. Thank you!