

Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on Europe Day – 9 May 2012



High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice-President of the European Commission

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, made today the following statement:

Today is the 62nd anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.

Every year we celebrate Europe Day by looking back at the history of European integration and the things we have accomplished together.

But it should also be an opportunity to look forward.

We read a lot in the press about the financial crisis and the economic problems we are facing. But the basis of the European economy remains strong. And the common values that bring us together are more important than ever.

The coming year will be crucial for Europe's recovery – and for Europe's future. Not only the steps we take internally in the European Union on the economy and with Croatia joining in July.

But also how we engage globally.

Europe has always been outward looking and open. We have consistently influenced the way the world thinks – about trade, the environment, climate change, the death penalty, the International Criminal Court, and many other important issues.

I am convinced that Europe must remain actively engaged around the world. And equally that our international work can help to underpin our economic recovery.

There has been a lot of progress since we marked Schuman Day last year.

- We are building up the European External Action Service, including a fully joined up Crisis management system so that we can deliver comprehensive solutions on the ground, be it in Libya or Somalia or Afghanistan.

I have travelled to many countries and regions – visiting every continent including a striking trip to the Arctic.

Everywhere I go, I take a message on behalf of Europe, about 27 countries working together to help solve problems.

Everywhere I go, I hear that others from outside Europe want to work with a Europe that is active and committed.

So that is what I intend to do next.

- We will continue to focus on helping the countries in our neighbourhood – be it in the East or South – to become stable and well-governed, with a strong economy and democratic institutions.

- We will re-energise our partnership with Asia by stepping up our collaboration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); by supporting the amazing changes taking place in Burma, by deepening our work with India especially on security issues and by strengthening our strategic dialogue with China.

- With Latin America including Brazil there is important joint work to do and much unrealised potential, with the Latin American Caribbean Summit coming up and with a relationship that is founded on shared values.

- We must and we will deepen our links in Africa. We will expand the anti-piracy work we are doing in the Horn of Africa, and take forward the work under Sahel and Horn of Africa strategies. These strategies are great examples of how the European Union after Lisbon can work in a more joined up and creative way.

- And we will continue to work with our Strategic Partners

In short, we will continue to do what the framers of the Lisbon Treaty -- and long before them, Robert Schuman -- intended; for Europe to play an active role in solving global problems.

There is much we have achieved in the past year; but even more to be done.