



Washington, 06 May 2014
140507/01

R E M A R K S

**by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following her meeting
with US Secretary of State John Kerry**

"Thank you very much, Secretary Kerry, or John, as I would prefer. Thank you for your good wishes for Europe Day. I held a reception in New York last night, and it was my great pleasure to be able to see the Empire State Building lit up in the colours of the European Union of blue and yellow. It is a recognition of this incredibly important transatlantic partnership that every nation of the European Union values so highly, and for which I thank you, your predecessors, and all of your colleagues for the work that has gone on to develop it to the point where I think we are very much joined up in our thinking.

As you've said, we've talked about a range of issues. We talk a lot in between these meetings, so we cover a huge number of current concerns. And I will just pick up on the back of some of this news. You've said two or three of them, of which Ukraine is inevitably the highest on our agenda, and the latest news of the great concern that we have from the illegal actions by armed separatist groups is, of course, at the foremost of our attention. We want to see Russia join in in the call to see an immediate end to these actions, and that is very much, as you've said, in line with the discussions we had in Geneva, where we talked practically for seven hours. We talked about what this meant. There was no vagueness. There was absolute clarity in what we were trying to do – to try and find ways to begin the de-escalation. And we will continue, as the European Union, to engage fully in seeking a political

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solution and to stay fully behind what we said in Geneva and to find ways that we can see the implementation done by everyone.

We know, too, that Ukraine has the right to defend its territorial integrity. We understand the international obligations that it has, and we work closely with them. And as you have indicated, they have done a lot from the beginning after leaving Geneva at the end of that day to try and implement what was agreed.

I pay tribute, like you, to the OSCE, and I join the Chief Monitor of the Special Mission, who's called upon all sides to exercise maximum restraint, to avoid bloodshed, and to solve differences peacefully. You all know that on the 28th of April we took the decision to extend the number of people subject to targeted sanctions for actions that undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence. Any further steps that destabilize the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional and far-reaching consequences for our relations in a broad range of areas.

Like you, too, we are focused on the elections and the importance of free and fair presidential elections. This is a really important step in the stabilization of Ukraine. It's about democracy. It's an opportunity, too, for there to be a legitimate and broad debate on the future of Ukraine and to engage with people who do want to talk about how that future should be – peacefully working together, and to take this opportunity to be able to do that. We, of course, will continue as well with our assistance package, which, as you know, will bring in overall support of about 11 billion euros over time.

I want, as well, to mention the terrible escalation of violence in South Sudan and to pay tribute to your visit. I already know from our Special Representative in the region and from people from the countries concerned that your visit was extremely timely and your efforts were very well recognized. So may I pay tribute to you for that, as well as many, many other things.

I'm worried that this country is on the brink of what could be a civil war, ethnically motivated. And the prospects of famine and the humanitarian disaster – they're really looming large now, so we need to work together. We need to work to ensure that the leaders in South Sudan really do take the action that you've identified they need to. And when the meeting takes place on Friday, they really have got to now try and put aside personal differences and try and change the atmosphere and to try and prevent any further offenses and to respect the cessation of hostilities.

We're actively considering the targeted sanctions that you've described. As you know, the Foreign Affairs Council, we're meeting on Monday, and that's the forum where I am President, to try and look at all of these issues and see how we go forward. So we need to work very closely in good cooperation with you and with others and to make sure that we put as much energy as possible into trying to prevent what, as I said, could be a disaster.

Like you, our thoughts are with the parents of the Nigerian girls and with the girls themselves. These are the future of the country. They are teachers, dancers, politicians, they are scientists, they are mothers. They are women in the making, who have a right to play

their full part in their society. And what has happened to them is devastating for all of us, and we must do, like you, everything possible to try and reunite them with their families and to prevent this ever, ever happening again.

But I want to end, if I might, by also reiterating my full support for everything that you have done in the Middle East. Your efforts are not, by any means, over yet. I know that. And I know that this has been a difficult time. But I do think that you have made tremendous progress and the European Union stands absolutely beside you as you continue your efforts and remains committed to supporting you in every way possible.

My final thought is on Iran. We will, of course, next week try and take this process forward. And we're all interested in making sure that if we can get an agreement it's the best agreement.

Thank you!"
