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S P E E C H

Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the Commemoration Ceremony for those fallen in the line of duty Brussels, 21 October 2014

" Mister President, Excellences, dear colleagues,

Thank you for joining me at today's commemoration ceremony. I would not have wanted to leave office, in a few days from now, without having paid tribute to those colleagues who lost their lives in the line of duty during my mandate.

Today's ceremony is therefore first and foremost a moment to remember three outstanding individuals. But this ceremony is also a reminder of the demanding and dangerous conditions under which our colleagues in delegations, missions and operations all over the world serve the European cause on a daily basis. Conditions that seem to become constantly more demanding and dangerous.

Even the most superficial glimpse at the daily news shows us that we are living through turbulent times. At our borders and in the wider neighbourhood we are confronted with military threats, civil war and sectarian strife. Failed states, organised crime and the proliferation of weapons are posing security threats to our societies. Not to speak of terrorist attacks and natural disasters that can strike anywhere anytime.

The European External Action Service was built to help us to respond to these challenges. We are equipped with a wide range of tools to tackle these risks. But none of them could be

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effective without presence on the ground. Inevitably, this also means that our work takes us into conflict zones, disaster sights and emergency situations.

The courageous men and women in our missions, delegations and field offices are the backbone of our endeavour to promote security, democracy, justice and respect for human rights. It takes a rare and special person to volunteer for this kind of work, which is both challenging and full of risks.

Today we remember three exceptional individuals who have paid the ultimate price for their courage and determination to serve the European Union.

We remember Pilar, a member of our EU Delegation in Haiti, who died when a UN building collapsed during the terrible earthquake in 2010. Pilar was well known by her colleagues for her huge commitment to development policy. She dedicated over 20 years of service to the EU. In her we have lost a strong believer in a more equal and fairer world. We will never forget her.

Today we also remember Audrius, who worked for our EU Rule of Law mission in Kosovo, which plays a crucial part in the EU's work to promote peace and stability in the Western Balkans. Audrius was murdered in a terrible attack in northern Kosovo in September 2013; he is survived by his wife and two sons. Our thoughts are with them today. It was heartening to see how the entire EULEX mission poured themselves into honoring the life and work of Audrius, a testament to how much this universally liked and dedicated colleague will be missed.

And we remember Mette, who worked for the EU Police mission in Afghanistan to support the Afghans in taking responsibility for law and order in their country. It was the second time that Mette came to Afghanistan, a country she loved deeply. Mette was killed in a terrible terrorist attack on civilians this January in Kabul. In her we have lost a bright and committed colleague and Afghanistan has lost a warm friend. Today our thoughts are also with Mette's family.

Pilar, Audrius and Mette came from different countries, different backgrounds and different walks of life, yet they all contributed to a common goal. Whether in Kabul, Port au Prince, or Zvečan, they were fully dedicated to improving the lives of local populations as well as of EU citizens. The many tributes that were paid to them locally are testament to how much their work was appreciated and the love and respect that was felt for them.

The stone we have placed in the heart of our Headquarter building also stands for all those who have lost their lives in the service of the EU before our service was created and for those who contributed to our work as partners or external experts.

It is hard and painful to acknowledge that working for a safer and more peaceful future can incur the loss of precious lives. Remembering the tragic loss of Pilar, Audrius and Mette fills me with deep sadness. At the same time, I am also filled with admiration and respect for their dedication to this important cause."