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S P E E C H

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the latest developments in the common foreign, security and defence policy

"Thank you very much Mr President

Can I begin by thanking Elmar Brok for his comments and by thanking the Rapporteurs for their reports that have been put before the Parliament today. I think it's very fitting after the Lisbon Treaty that when we talk about a comprehensive approach, we use this opportunity to discuss CFSP and CSDP together in one debate.

It is our ability to use both actions at the same time, to link them with the work we do, with development and other Commission policies, that is, I think, a key factor in the unique way in which the EU operates internationally.

Honourable Members, we have said many times that over the course of my time in office I have had three broad priorities: to set up the service, to strengthen relations with and to effect lasting change in our Neighbourhood, and to deepen and strengthen our relations with our Strategic Partners.

All of these are covered in the reports. Of course I cannot cover every aspect of the report or indeed the whole world in the time available in the way that Mr Brok's report does. Nor can I cover CSDP in the depth of Ms Koppa's.

But I will focus, if I might, on a limited number of areas. But in reassurance to this House, it doesn't mean that I do not consider all of the areas covered in the reports to be of enormous importance.

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I want to say a little bit about the EEAS. Because it was with the strong support of this House that we have got a functioning 21st Century EU External Action Service. It represents and projects Europe's policies and values across the world. When I was writing the EEAS Review earlier this year I was struck by just how much we had achieved – against the odds in many cases - and the solid basis we have now laid for the future.

The network of 141 Delegations, the professional staff in Brussels with global expertise. I want to pay tribute to all of them. I believe we have the best of the Commission, Council Secretariat and Member States combined together and soon we will also have the best from the European Parliament.

This allows us to collectively be represented and in today's world to show that we are better when we operate together. I have said many times that that doesn't mean that we take away from the role of national diplomacy, but rather as acknowledged by all the EU member states, there are things that we can do together that we cannot do alone.

We are particularly well placed to influence events and promote stability and democracy in our Neighbourhood, both South and East. I have said it many times, we should be judged by the effectiveness of what we can achieve in our own neighbourhood. What we do and how we work with the people and countries around us is crucial for them but it's also extremely important for our own economic and security interests.

In the South, we have seen a dramatic change. And our response to these events has been designed to strengthen the move towards a positive change and to embed deep and lasting democracy.

Political and economic support has been targeted to incentivise reform, to promote inclusiveness – particularly for the role of women and young people – and to mobilise all forces in society including civil society and the private sector.

As recognised in your report, I developed the idea of task forces to bring together European institutions, International Financial Institutions and the private sector to develop tailor-made solutions to each country. Not just on economics but also to give support to civil society, to human rights groups, to help them develop the institutions that will enable deep democracy to take root - democracy that goes beyond elections, based on institutions, rule of law and a society that gives equal chances to everyone.

That approach has been important in our cooperation with Tunisia and Jordan. And of course I would highlight how much more we need to do in Libya. Colleagues will know that I have been in contact with the Prime Minister of Libya in New York and beyond but there is much that our missions are currently engaged in, in order to try and bring stability and security to that country.

A lot of my time in the last months has been spent in Egypt, where I believe we have a unique role. We have built a strong reputation, we are a trusted interlocutor and I remain able to speak with all sides in Egypt to provide the constant message that an inclusive

process is the best guarantee of future stability in Egypt and that stability is required if we are able to deal with the country's political and economic problems.

This is not only a message to give to the political leaders but in my last visit I also met with the Grand Imam and the Coptic Pope. I talked to them too from the religious perspective. Many honourable members have been concerned about what is happening to Christians in Egypt, so my engagement with the Coptic Pope was especially important in delivering those messages directly from you to him.

I should mention as well, in thinking of our Neighbourhood, the work that is currently going on in the Middle East Peace Process, the strong collaboration I have with US Secretary of State Kerry, and the work that we do engaging directly both parties in support of these negotiations. We know our objective, to find the lasting solution to this conflict based on two states. Tomorrow President Abbas will visit me in Brussels. He and I will discuss progress. We will continue as well to engage with the team that is putting together the economic programme that can help to bring a long term economic solution to the challenges on the West Bank and beyond. And the Honourable Members will know that Gaza and the issues and problems there are never far from my thoughts, and are also a large part of the work in which we are engaged.

We are also of course looking now to support the process that will bring us to what we call Geneva 2. And the prospect of bringing together those from inside and outside Syria in support of a process that will try and bring cease-fires and eventually a lasting peace. Honourable Members, you will know too that we continue to engage with Syria. I recently sent a mission from Brussels into Damascus to meet with many of the groups that we have continued to work with.

The reports from that mission were alarming, as they addressed what is happening in terms of malnutrition of the people in the country and what needs to happen to help undo the terrible destruction that is taking place within the city. We will continue to do all we can to push forward but I say now to all of the members that we need to be engaged for the long term with Syria if we are to support the country into the future. And that means remaining the largest donor to deal with this humanitarian emergency. Already, some 2 billion of euros of humanitarian, development and stabilisation assistance has gone to Syria and to its neighbours and we still need to continue to do more.

We are also working with the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) to try to improve their capacity to operate, and working as I've already identified with a wide range of those engaged directly on the ground in Syria in trying to support the future. And we want too to continue to support OPCW as it seeks to deal with chemical weapons in Syria. We have provided logistical support, the vehicles that they've been using, and I've been in touch with the Secretary General to make it clear that we will continue to help in any way that we can.

But I want also to talk about what is happening in our Eastern Neighbourhood. All the members I know are very focused on the Vilnius summit that will take place next month. Our aim is a common future that will ensure prosperity, security and guarantee long term stability. To bring our partners as close as possible to the European Union. In New York

together with my colleague Stefan Füle we hosted a meeting with the six Eastern Partnership countries to take stock of progress towards signing or initialling Association Agreements. This was an opportunity to reiterate the need to implement all necessary reforms and to meet the benchmarks.

In recent days I've met with the foreign minister of Armenia and with the Ukraine again to make clear what needs to happen. Especially with Ukraine we made absolutely clear that we see the delivery of three issues as crucial signals of Ukraine's determination: improved legislation on the electoral process, a move to adopt ambitious reforms of the General Prosecutor's Office and of course to deal with the issue of selective justice. We need to see definitive progress in the case of Yulia Tymoshenko – and I want to welcome and fully support the efforts of Mr Cox and Mr Kwasniewski and to pay tribute for the number of visits and the work that they are doing.

Elsewhere, we've also continued to engage with Serbia and Kosovo. I've met with the leaders for the 17th time in recent days as we are preparing for the elections on the 3rd of November. And we continue to deal with the issues as they are raised, working closely on the election with the OSCE and I want to thank them for the work they are doing. We've come a really long way in a really short time and I hope that after the elections we will be able to sit down in our meeting which will take place three days later to work toward the next stages of the agreement. I have to put tribute to the leadership in Pristina and in Belgrade and for their courage in wanting to move forward in the way that they have.

I've spoken as well many times about what I call the Comprehensive Approach and this is really fundamental to answering at least part of the question that Mr Brok raised when he opened this debate, because this is about how we do things differently in the future than how we did in the past and what makes what the European Union does together unique. This means being able to bring together all of the different elements that we have at our disposal with our missions, with the military and civilian through the development work we do, the political engagement at all levels, our security engagement, our work with civil society, the underpinning of our core values such as rule of law, human rights and justice. All brought to bear on some of the greatest challenges that exist in the world today. And I think these are important and significant ways in which we are distinct, we are unique. This is increasingly recognised across the world, but I would argue that we are at the beginning of what can be and what we'll be in the years to come.

We've especially talked about this in a context of countries that are going through transition. It was a great joy to be here yesterday to see Aung San Suu Kyi finally receive the Sakharov prize and in three week time I will meet her again as we go to the Task Force that we have arranged in Myanmar/Burma. This country is on the journey of reform but it needs to deal with a legacy of conflict, poverty and oppression and weak institutions and it will take time. We are engaging to demonstrate the long term commitment of the EU in order to support that journey and to continue to say to all those who are in a position of responsibility that there is much they need to do, that there can't be complacency and the country has to continue to move forward. There have been good beginnings but by no means enough yet.

We are also importantly developing and strengthening our relations with Asia. I am very pleased in the last eighteen months with the positive momentum we have seen in EU-ASEAN relations. We have redirected from one focus on trade and development to a much more strategic partnership for the future and I will visit next week the region for the third time in seven months.

When I co-chair the next EU – ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting that will take place in March I want us to be able to demonstrate that both sides see the strategic case for investment and this real partnership for the future.

I want to say something about the terrible event that took place at the Westgate Shopping centre in Nairobi and to express again our horror about what happened there. What is happening in nearby Somalia, which has a direct effect on this, is really significant, as a country moves from failure to being able to show the beginnings of re-gaining its capacity to operate as a state. And I was really pleased to co-host with the President of Somalia the Brussels Conference which was a milestone in our efforts to re-construct a peaceful state, a federal state, and the willingness of the international community to support it. It wasn't just, Honorable Members, about raising money. It was identifying with Somalia the benchmarks, the milestones, the issues upon which we can engage directly with them. Together with our colleagues, countries across the world, to try and help to ensure success at every level.

We also have 3 CSDP missions operating there. The New Deal Compact that we did in Brussels gives us a framework to help with reconstruction, to really ensure that we're able to develop and support. 1.8 billion euros were pledged, as I've indicated, but much more than that. Real commitment for the long term. Of course that is only one country in Africa where we're active.

We are supporting efforts to combat insecurity, terrorism and organised crime in West and Central Africa, and reducing tensions in the Great Lakes. In Mali we continue to work with many, including ECOWAS, in order to support MINUSMA. Our efforts are part of that broader Strategy for the Sahel, to ensure security and across those countries. And it's part of a broader concept we have to support peace-building in different parts of Africa, including Sudan and South Sudan. And in the Central African Republic where we're working to support the transition process and the restoration of the rule of law.

We will have the African Union/EU summit in April, and this will be a real opportunity to set a stronger forward looking agenda for our relations with the African Union. Something that Madame Zuma and I have discussed many times and which I hope will turn into a reality in the months between now and April to make it the most successful summit ever.

This is also true in our relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a region that is increasingly influential in world affairs. Last January we had the successful EU-CELAC Summit in Santiago, an opportunity to reinforce the partnership and to set the agenda for our work for the coming years. In the Caribbean too, we've commissioned and put together a Joint Strategy that emphasises that our relations are more than, important although they are, traditional development cooperation and trade. Again it is important to develop these strategic relations with regions across the world that move from a traditional relationship to the forward looking strategic political partnership. I fully agree with what Mr Brok has said

that we need to operate in a world in which we forge strong partnerships with our Strategic allies such as the US, Brazil, India, China and Russia and with international and regional organisations.

I have invested – and I'll continue to do so – a lot of time in those key relationships, with those strategic partners across the world, not just because they matter bilaterally, but also because they matter in terms of what we're able to do in influencing and dealing with some of the issues that face us, not just far away but actually also in our own neighbourhood. I agree too that the relationship with the United States is vital there. That partnership is essential for us and I would say for them as well. And I believe too that signing the TTIP would make the relationship even stronger.

I also want to welcome the strong emphasis in the report on universal values. This needs to be always at the core of our work, central to helping achieve peace and prosperity, promoting deep democracy, underpinned by human rights, ensuring that the roots of democratic freedoms are well established and cannot be removed. And our election observation missions, they have vital part in doing that. We have seven on-going missions right now, and five completed already this year.

Our promotion and protection of human rights is at the centre of our policy. Developing the range of instruments that we've got. The Strategic Framework and Action Plan on human rights and democracy is designed to be the guiding reference for our action. We have also established guidelines on the promotion and protection of the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. Let me once again stress that this is integral to our human rights efforts and a central aspect of engagement with all our partners.

But as the report states, we need to work together to improve our effectiveness. I was pleased to appoint the first ever Special Representative for Human Rights. He has made an outstanding contribution, and I want to thank him and this Parliament for your proactive role and support and co-operation.

I want to say something now on CSDP too in the context of the unique contribution it brings. It is an important and integral part of the EU's policy options. We have strong relationships with the UN, NATO and with the African Union. We have got considerable operational expertise: 30 missions on three continents over the last 15 years, changing the fortunes of people and countries, protecting and promoting our values.

We currently deploy more than 7,000 civilian and military personnel and that is producing a result. Our maritime operation ATALANTA has drastically reduced the problem of piracy off the Somali coast. Security in Somalia has greatly improved thanks to the training provided by our mission to 3,000 Somali recruits and the EU funding of AMISOM. In Afghanistan, our police mission has trained 5,000 Afghan police officers, and EULEX Kosovo plays a key part in accompanying the implementation of the recent Belgrade-Pristina agreement.

Honourable members will know that the European Council of last December asked me to develop proposals and actions to further strengthen CSDP. In July, I presented my interim

report and on the basis of the discussions that took place from that I issued a final report on 11 October. That contains a range of proposals and actions in line with that mandate. I have shared this report with the parliament.

There is no question that the changing geostrategic context, rising security challenges, and the continuing squeeze on national defence budgets, seen in the light of increased spending in other parts of the world, makes this strategic debate at the December European Council a real priority. I believe that leaders must address the crucial question of the political will to develop and deploy capabilities.

Between 2005 and 2010, European defence spending declined by almost 10%, and it is forecast to decline by a similar amount over the last three years. Global growth is predicted to rise by 6.8% in the years 2011 to 2015 – as we see accelerated defence spending in emerging markets and in Russia and in China. In 2012, Asian defence spending overtook Europe's for the first time. We know too that the US is expected to make changes in the region of at least 10%.

This points, I would argue, to more European inter-dependence. We have to do more together, we have to identify ways of using the €200 billion we spend on defence each year more effectively. Developing and enhancing cooperation and common approaches.

And when I look at the work of the Commission in their document in July, "Towards a more competitive and efficient defence and security sector", as the Vice President of the Commission, we try there to set out the importance of working together, and to see the joined-up and coherent effort. And I want to thank Michel Barnier and his team, and Antonio Tajani for the work that they have done.

We know the defence industry is a driver for jobs, growth and innovation, with a €96 billion turnover in 2012. It brings a major contribution to the wider economy, directly employs 400,000 highly-skilled people, and generates nearly 960,000 indirect jobs.

The message of my report is clear: we need to be able to act through CSDP, as a security provider in the neighbourhood and at the international level to protect our interests and project our values. Member States' commitment to this is required.

I hope we will see a successful European Council where leaders can come together and make the decisions that can drive this further forward for the future.

Honourable members, thank you for listening to what has been quite a long speech covering this report. I want to thank again the rapporteurs for the work that they have done and thank you for listening."