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Remarks by HR Catherine Ashton, at the Munich Security Conference

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission gave today the following speech at the Munich Security Conference:

"I am delighted to be at this year's Munich Security Conference.

There are many conferences these days on European or global security. But the Munich Security Conference has a special place.

I know many of you have been coming here for a great many years. For me, however, this is the first time.

I would therefore like to begin by thanking Wolfgang Ischinger for giving me the opportunity to sketch out some ideas about how we as the European Union see the main security challenges. And what our approach is in terms of policy response.

As you all know this is an important moment in Europe's history. With the Lisbon Treaty in force, we have an opportunity to deliver a step change in European foreign policy.

Ours is a world of growing complexity with many threats and challenges, including fragile states, terrorism, organised crime, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyber security.

Wider issues also affect the security of our citizens: energy, climate change and the competition for natural resources, illegal migration and human trafficking.

Many of these threats are inter-linked. We have to identify the linkages and then frame and implement comprehensive strategies. We must mobilise all our levers of influence – political, economic, plus civil and military crisis management tools – in support of a single political strategy.

The development - security nexus is just one example. There cannot be sustainable development without peace and security. And without development and poverty eradication there will be no sustainable peace.

P R E S S

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We also know that internal and external challenges are inter-connected. Take illegal migration or terrorism. Neither is a purely internal or external issue.

For us in Europe there can be only a collective response, and Lisbon will help us to do so. The creation of the European External Action Service is important to promote exactly the kind of joined up thinking and action we need.

This is not just a bureaucratic exercise. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build something new. My aim and ambition is for a service fit to tackle the problems of the 21st century. One that adds real value to what our EU member-states are already doing. And that forms an integrated platform to project our values and interests in a fast-changing world.

The Lisbon Treaty promises a step change, but the EU is already taking action in many crisis zones.

We have responded in record time to the terrible earthquake in Haiti: with a significant humanitarian effort on the ground; with elements, such as formed police units, to help MINUSTAH maintain security; and with a commitment to stay engaged for the long-term.

We are also stepping up our engagement in Afghanistan. The aim is clear: to help Afghans take greater responsibility for the security and development of their country. That was the main message from the London conference.

The EU is doing what we do best: working with the government to rebuild a functioning Afghan state. Afghan ownership requires capable Afghan institutions, whether to ensure regional economic development or cement the rule of law.

Our work on police training and justice reform may be discrete, but it is essential for long-term sustainable security that Afghanistan needs.

This same philosophy applies to our actions in the Middle East. We are working on the diplomatic front to get negotiations started. We are also supporting the Palestinians to build a state for the future and to strengthen their capacities in the area of police and broader security.

In Somalia, the EU is working actively to promote stability on shore and to tackle the threat of piracy off shore. Just yesterday there was the successful rescue of a Slovenian owned vessel from pirates, due to the joint efforts of EU forces, together with Indian and Russian warships.

Along with our naval force ATALANTA, work is underway on a small, targeted military training mission to support the Somali government.

We know that we in the EU have primary responsibility for our neighbourhood. This is important in itself but our wider international credibility also depends on the work we do with our neighbours.

This means promoting genuine political reform in the Western Balkans and making sure the whole region succeeds on its path of eventual integration into the EU. Progress on this path depends on the pace of reforms at home. And the reality is that some countries are advancing faster than others.

Beyond the Balkans, the EU should play an active role in Ukraine. We want the will of the Ukrainian people to be expressed at the polls tomorrow. And we want to work with Ukraine to make a big push on political and economic reforms in the country, something that is also in the EU's interest.

Then there is Georgia. It is a fact that it is the EU that is presently the main actor on the ground, with a monitoring mission, a full package of support and cooperation and the potential for a deeper political relationship. We will remain engaged and are fully committed to territorial integrity.

I hope by now you get my point. The days when EU foreign policy could be dismissed as all talk and no action are long over.

To date, we have deployed 23 missions under what is now called the Common Security and Defence Policy. These missions are innovative, tailor-made solutions, mixing civil with military components. This is precisely what the EU's added value is – and what the complex security challenges of our world require.

Of course there is a lot more work to be done. We must develop extra capabilities for modern crisis management. We need to ensure that we have the right tools, people and systems in place – so that we can respond quickly and more effectively.

Whenever we decide to act, there are two imperatives.

First we must be clear on what the political strategy is – and ensure that means and aims are aligned.

Second, we should always use a wide prism. None of the threats we face is purely military in nature. We should always mobilise the full range of tools at our disposal.

But even if we have all our policies lined up and the political will to act, Europe alone will not be able to solve the problems I mentioned. In a world of deep inter-dependence where threats are global, everybody needs partners.

You also need an effective system of rules and institutions. Global governance is an overused phrase but a vital concept. In many respects the existing system is under pressure – both in terms of effectiveness and legitimacy – just when we need it most.

A key example is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The NPT has served us well. But it is under pressure. We have to take clear action against those that are not in compliance with the treaty but also provide access to civil nuclear technology to those who want it with proper safeguards. The upcoming Review Conference must be a success.

I welcome that the Iranian Foreign Minister came to this conference. Iran must now respond to the Director-General of the IAEA on the question of the refuelling the Tehran research reactor. There is a proposal on the table which is a creative attempt to build confidence with Iran by practical co-operation in the nuclear area. I pay tribute to the imaginative policies of the Obama Administration towards Iran – policies which have so far gone without adequate response. The Tehran research reactor proposals are intended to build confidence – badly needed. Years of talks by my predecessor Javier Solana and his colleagues took place against the backdrop of clandestine work continuing – contrary to the rules of the safeguards system by which we are all bound.

There is a need to restore confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's programme. This must be done by dialogue. I agree with the Chinese Foreign Minister that possibilities of dialogue are not exhausted. But dialogue takes two. And I am ready to engage on meaningful, productive talks that deal directly with the issues that trouble us.

A strong United Nations is at the heart of the international system. EU-UN co-operation includes many success stories, on crisis management, but also on development, human rights, climate change and beyond.

Indeed, we work closely with many organisations. With NATO in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo) and Afghanistan. With the African Union in Somalia. And with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the Balkans and Georgia.

We also see the OSCE as the primary place for discussions on the Russian initiative for a European Security Treaty. We are open to discussing any idea that could enhance European security.

Not all is well on our continent. Distrust lingers. Some conflicts are far from "frozen". Some treaties, for instance on conventional weapons are not functioning as they should. And many new security challenges loom.

In all this it is important that we anchor our discussions. There are a number of principles and commitments we have commonly agreed:

- that we do it together - the US, Europe and Russia;*
- that we agree on the non-use of violence to settle political disputes;*
- that states are free to join the security alliance they wish;*
- and that we uphold our comprehensive approach to security, including respect for human rights.*

Lastly, I intend to invest a lot in strengthening partnerships across the world: China, India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia.

For too long we have seen these countries mainly through an economic prism. But it is clear that they are major political and security players too, with increasing political clout. Our mental map has to adjust – and fast.

My sense is that the European response should be more generous – in making space at the top tables of global politics. Early on, when strategies are formed, not just when resources are needed for implementation.

But we should also be demanding. Rights and responsibility go hand in hand. The rising powers have a big stake in upholding global security. And it is appropriate that we ask for a fair contribution from their side to provide what are global public goods.

Let me say in closing that the security agenda we face is large and complex. There must be collective action. We in Europe can and should play our part. It is what European citizens want. And it is what partners around the world expect. It is partly my job to ensure that "supplies" meet that "demand".

Thank you very much."