EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 5 March 2012
A 99/12

Catherine Ashton to visit northern Finland, Sweden and Norway to highlight importance of an enhanced EU policy towards the Arctic

Brussels, 05 March 2012 - Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, travels to the Arctic region this week for high level talks with leaders from Finland, Sweden and Norway. Developments in the Arctic are of even more strategic, economic and environmental interest for the European Union now than when the first Communication on the region was issued in 2008. The High Representative's visit will feed in to preparation of a follow-up document, due to be adopted this spring. She will reaffirm the EU's interest in the Arctic region and discuss the EU's application for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council.

Before her visit, Catherine Ashton said: "The EU already makes a valuable financial and political contribution to Arctic cooperation through research and working with our neighbours on transport, energy, maritime safety and environmental issues. In developing our EU policy towards the Arctic, we want to listen to and learn from those who know the region best. I am convinced the EU can play an even more positive role in the future. We want to do all we can to contribute to productive cooperation in the region."

On Tuesday, 6 March, the High Representative will meet the Finnish President Sauli Niinistö, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen, Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja and Development Minister Heidi Hautala. She will also meet with the President of the Sámi Parliament, Klemetti Näkkäläjärvi. She will address a Seminar at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland.

On Wednesday, 7 March, she will visit the LKAB mine in Kiruna, Sweden, together with Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, and also visit the Esrange Satellite Station, before flying to Svalbard in Norway to visit the University Centre together with Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Störe.

On Thursday, 8 March, the High Representative will visit the Kongsvegen glacier and weather station. She will be the keynote speaker at the annual national conference on Europe in Oslo.

Photo/video material will be provided by Europe by Satellite.

P R E S S

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