



EUROPEAN UNION

**Brussels, 23 May 2011
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Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival to the Foreign Affairs Council

"Today we have Foreign Affairs Council first with all foreign ministers and then later today with defence ministers.

The key issues for today's discussions of foreign ministers will be first of all to report back on my visit to Libya, to Benghazi yesterday. We will talk about the discussions I had with the National Transitional Council there.

Then we'll be discussing the key issues of the neighbourhood, particularly Syria and the very worrying situation there. You know there are further discussions and conclusions to be reached today in term of sanctions.

We'll also be expressing our concerns about what's happening in Yemen and the failure of President Saleh once again to sign and to take his country forward.

And then to look at the Middle East Peace Process in the light of President Obama's speech. I was in Washington last week in discussions with the White House and the State Department on this as well as many other questions.

And we'll also be looking forward to my trip later this week to Serbia and Kosovo and discussing Bosnia and the cancellation of the referendum there. And then finally a discussion on Belarus.

P R E S S

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I was yesterday in **Benghazi, Libya** as you know. The purpose of that visit was to open the office of the European Union. That is a place now where we can channel our resources and where we can make contact.

I saw people from civil society, I met young people, women's groups, people in the media. There are now 55 newspapers that have been opened in Benghazi in recent weeks.

They are beginning to move forward and looking at the future, looking at how they deal with health, with education, with the economy and so on.

People are saying that they've already moved into the future and started to push forward.

Of course there is still the big issue of Gaddafi. Our consistent position is that he should go and that those who want to see the future for Libya as a democracy, as a place where everybody can be respected, need to get together now and take that forward.

On **Syria**, I've already made it clear to the Foreign Minister that it's extremely important for Syria to exercise restraint.

The government needs to understand that people are asking by peaceful protests for the kind of reforms that the government had said they'd be interested in and they now ought to try and engage properly and do that.

And they should do it now because there are so many people who have died and been injured. It's a terrible tragedy.

On **Bahrain**, I spent some time with the King of Bahrain when I was recently in the Gulf.

And I said to him we have high expectations of what the Crown Prince's initiative can do and the need to have a dialogue with the people.

I believe they all understand what needs to be done. And the question now is to do it. The issues are about how to move forward with people who want to see change.

But I believe, if they really are determined, then the King and the Crown Prince could lead the process and I hope they do.

We have to look now at what we say to **Yemen**. I spoke to President Saleh some weeks ago. I said to him then he knew what to do to save his country. It's very obvious that he had good discussions with the opposition and that he knows how to take his country forward. The work of the GCC has been extraordinary and the United Arab Emirates are fully engaged. When I was in the Gulf recently we were discussing this, so he really does know what to do.

I want to talk with the GCC before I do anything further because it is important to understand exactly what the position is. But our ambassador on the ground has just been an observer to what's been happening, with the Americans he's been in the discussions and he and I will talk later on today.

On **Iran**, Dr Jalili wrote to me recently and unfortunately just reiterated to the old Iranian positions. We want them to move forward with the nuclear talks.

You know what my views are on Human rights in Iran. It's very important that we keep the pressure on for the people and try to stop them going ahead with executions, with the approach they take to their people.

On the **Middle East Peace Process**, the European Union has had a common position for long time which says that they should start the process on the basis of the 1967 borders with land swaps to reflect the changes that have happened on the ground.

We stand by the position that we've had consistently, first in December 2009 and then we reiterated again last year. And we believe that's a good place to begin the negotiations.

Most importantly we believe it's in Israel's real interest for the people of Israel and the people of Palestine to get those negotiations moving now.

At lunch, we will discuss the **EEAS**. This is not about changing the EEAS, despite whatever the newspapers want to write about us. What we wanted to do is to have a conversation with Foreign Ministers about how do we make the EEAS even better than it is, to ask them how they feel things work on the ground because with 135 delegations everyone's learning how collaborate better post-Lisbon.

In this time of economic austerity, we need to make sure that the services are focusing on the things that we all think are great priorities. It's going to be a good discussion and I'm looking forward to it."
