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## **Statement by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, following her talks with Koichiro Gemba, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan**

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission, made the following statement today:

*“My talks this evening with Foreign Minister Gemba have been friendly and productive. This reflects the like-mindedness and commonality of values which unite the European Union and Japan.*

*We had in-depth discussions about a wide range of challenges facing the international community: the Middle East Peace Process, the transition in North Africa, the situation on the Korean Peninsula, and the fight against piracy off the Horn of Africa. These are all issues where the EU and Japan are each making an important contribution, and where I see scope to work in closer partnership with Japan in the future. We also discussed the regional security situation. We agreed that security and stability in East Asia is a precondition for the region's continued economic success. We also noted the important contribution that multi-lateral mechanisms could have in ensuring this.*

*I also took the opportunity to reaffirm the EU's solidarity with the Japanese people as the country recovers from the terrible events of 11 March. I recalled the joint commitment made at the EU-Japan Summit last May to deepening cooperation in the field of nuclear safety and disaster management. The two sides have already stepped up cooperation on nuclear safety research and on radiation protection, and are discussing how to share experience on nuclear stress tests. The EU is also ready to look into possibilities for assisting in decontamination and decommissioning.*

## **P R E S S**

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FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 299 97 80 - [Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu](mailto:Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu)  
Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - [Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu](mailto:Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu)  
[COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu](mailto:COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu)  
[www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu)

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*We also reviewed progress in strengthening bilateral relations. At the last EU-Japan summit, Leaders decided to work towards negotiations for two parallel agreements covering the full spectrum of EU-Japan cooperation. Alongside a future Free Trade Agreement, they also called for an agreement to boost EU-Japan cooperation in other areas including foreign affairs and security. This agreement – which we call a Framework Agreement – would create a platform for closer cooperation on all issues of common interest beyond trade and investment, and help us to promote our common values together in our respective neighbourhoods and beyond. I want this Framework Agreement to be ambitious and substantive.*

*Officials were tasked by the summit to define the scope and level of ambition for these two agreements with a view to preparing the ground for the launch of negotiations. I stressed to Minister Gamba that the importance of this ongoing preparatory work should not be underestimated.*

*My goal is to pave the way for two high-quality agreements that upgrade our relations in a balanced and comprehensive way.”*

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