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Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on arrival at the informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers, Vilnius, 5 September 2013

"I would like to thank the Defence minister of Lithuania, who is our host today.

We brought together ministers of defence as we prepare for the European Council in December, to answer the challenge set by the Council last December, which asked us to pull together our work in support of the CSDP. We'll have the opportunity this afternoon to look at the interim report that I have produced and which focuses on a number of different issues, particularly how do we more effectively use the two hundred billion euros we spend each year on defence, how do we by collaboration get more "bang for our buck", how do we make sure that we work closely with our colleagues in NATO and make sure that our missions are as successful as possible.

We also have the commanders of our military missions operating in the Horn of Africa and Mali for example, and we will have the chance to talk with them. I point you to the Atalanta mission which I have talked about many times, in the Horn of Africa, where you see piracy has dropped by 93% directly as the result of our endeavours. And I am glad to welcome the Secretary General of NATO to further discuss how we can work better together, along with the European Defence Agency, to really try and get defence ministers to think in more detail about what we do to go forward, ready for what we hope will be a really successful summit where I'll present these ideas in December.

It's a very complicated thing when you think about the nature of defence in each country and how you actually work to develop a new strategy that allows you to pool and share. Those of you who know a lot about procurement will know that it's not that simple and that it's not a quick process. And many of the procurements for the future have been in the pipeline for a long time. What I really hope is that we will find that the Heads of State and Government give a big push in this sense because I think we need real strength of political will to push us further in the right direction, the direction I have long wanted to go."

P R E S S

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