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R E M A R K S

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, 17 March 2014

"Good morning.

At the Foreign Affairs Council this morning, not surprisingly top of our agenda will be the situation in Ukraine and looking at the results of the so-called referendum in Crimea. I don't have to remind any of you that it's illegal under the constitution of Ukraine and under international law. I call upon Russia yet again to meet with Ukrainian leaders and to start dialogue with them, and to try and move to de-escalation, as quickly as possible. We've seen no evidence of that.

You can't simply sit back and say this situation can be allowed to happen. So first of all we have to think very carefully about what the response ought to be and there should be a response. I said that at the emergency meeting I called last week and I say it again.

We're also trying to send the strongest possible signals to Russia in our work today and later this week with heads of state and government. And it's the signal of trying to ensure that they understand the seriousness of the situation, but also a signal that we do genuinely believe that there needs to be a dialogue, there needs to be a way through this that can actually lead to the territorial integrity of Ukraine being assured and good and strong relations with Russia for Ukraine and for the European Union. In the end Ukrainians want good a relationship with Russia, so does the European Union, so does the rest of the world.

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I'll also be briefing Ministers on my visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation in Sarajevo where we're trying to look at the broadest possible way of helping them economically and politically to move forward. This is a country that really does need leaders to show leadership and to move forward. I was hearing about 60% youth unemployment, and hearing about the situation from civil society and the reasons why people felt the need to demonstrate.

It's also a good opportunity for colleagues to discuss the Africa Summit which will take place next week, for which our preparations are nearly finalised.

And I'll be reporting on my visit to Iran and tonight flying to Vienna for the next round of the talks with Iran aiming at a comprehensive solution."
