



Brussels, 2 December 2009
A02/09

**Written statement, based on remarks to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the
European Parliament**

**Catherine Ashton,
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,
and Vice President of the European Commission**

**European Parliament, Brussels
2nd December 2009**

It is a great privilege to come before you today having been appointed as the first High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It is always an honour to address this house.

The Lisbon Treaty has now entered into force, and I was delighted to be able to join some Parliamentarians here yesterday to mark this momentous occasion. The Treaty gives us new possibilities and new opportunities, not least elevating further the importance of the European Parliament. It also offers us the chance of a stronger and more coherent voice on the world stage, which is why I am here today.

I accept this position and will do everything in my power to fulfil its promise. I will faithfully represent the Member States of the European Union and its citizens. I look forward to working with the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission, as well as the foreign ministers of the 27 member states. I will continue to work with my Colleagues in the Commission, of which I will be Vice-President. And I come before you in the European Parliament with the promise that I will work with you and communicate with you in an open and pragmatic manner.

I imagine that my appointment may have come as somewhat of a surprise to many of you – perhaps to all of you. It was quite a surprise for me too, but a very welcome one.

There has also been some talk of a lack of experience, and you might say that if you define experience very narrowly. However, I have never been someone who has considered things from a narrow perspective, and I have 28 years of experience of negotiation, of consensus-building and of advocacy.

My belief in the power of 'quiet diplomacy' is founded in a healthy respect for the challenges we all face in the world today. If there is one thing we have learned in this very difficult past year, it is that by building confidence in one another and working together, we keep our fate in our own hands. To do this, we need people who can listen as well as talk, who can learn as well as teach, and who can work behind the scenes as well as in the glare of the spotlight.

I have shown that I have those qualities throughout my career. I led significant changes in the British Health Service. I have been UK Minister for both Human Rights and Justice. As UK Justice Minister I participated in and chaired the Justice and Home Affairs Council and I know very well how difficult but important it is to manage national preferences on the road to a common European policy. I was made leader of the House of Lords in 2007 and took the Lisbon Treaty through that House.

As Trade Commissioner I have completed negotiations on the biggest trade agreement ever by the European Union, with South Korea, and done so during one of the most difficult periods the global economy has ever faced. I have solved some difficult trade problems, and have improved our trade relations with ACP countries.

I have also kept our positive trade relations with partners like the US and China firmly on track. This included for instance co-chairing the High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue with Chinese Vice-Premier Wang Qishan. I am proud to say that I have repaid the faith shown in me by this Parliament when I became Trade Commissioner just over a year ago.

I believe that all this is why the twenty-seven leaders in the European Council see me as the right person for this new role. I would like to take this opportunity to set out some ideas on how I see the position unfolding, and then listen to your views on the same.

The first thing I can promise is that as I move forward there will be continuity in EU foreign policy and in our dealings with our global partners. I must pay tribute to the tireless work over many years of both Javier Solana and Benita Ferrero-Waldner. They are a credit to the European Union. They have represented us and the values we hold dear, above all peace and prosperity, freedom and democracy, the rule of law and the universality and indivisibility of human rights.

Javier leaves the legacy of the CFSP and ESDP structures and operations he has built up over the past 10 years. Benita has built strong partnerships in the European neighbourhood, and deployed our financial and technical support effectively.

This past year I have been their colleague, travelling with them to summits with all our major strategic partners, and have seen the strength of the common voice of the European Union on the world stage.

The reputation of the European Union is a good one, based on our strong values. Our commitment to the multilateral system of global governance through the UN and other bodies is clear. We already speak with conviction and clarity on the major challenges that face us, be they climate change, poverty, conflict or terrorism. We are the biggest provider of humanitarian aid and project funding. We are a superpower economy with half a billion people, but are still accused of not punching our weight politically.

My job is to make our voice stronger and more unified still. As underlined in the European Security Strategy, the European Union should become a more capable, more coherent and more strategic global actor. I will build on the work that has gone before to achieve that goal.

There will be continuity also in the sense that I will immediately take up duties and commitments. Tonight I will travel to Madrid to meet with Foreign Minister Moratinos, in order to prepare for the Spanish Presidency. Tomorrow and Friday I will attend the gathering of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels. I have hit the ground running, but I am aware that this is a marathon, not a sprint.

There will also be continuity in our capacity to react in situations of crisis. Our security and defence policy is now a reality, and our capacity in the area of crisis-management is making a real difference on the ground. There is much to be proud of where there was only a common will ten years ago. We do not just make declarations, we act to monitor, to protect and to stabilise. With concrete results.

For instance, we have created a safe corridor from piracy in the Aden Gulf through the Atalanta operation. We are helping build stability and rule of law in the Balkans. We are helping keep the peace and diffuse tensions in Georgia. And we are training police officers in Afghanistan.

As High Representative I must help ensure consistency between different areas of our common foreign and security policy, and also with other policy areas. I must also give the right impulses for the future: I intend to fully use the right of initiative conferred to the High Representative by the Treaty to make proposals in the area of Common Foreign and Security policy. In doing so, I can maximise the synergies that arise from my two roles.

I will draw my authority in international negotiations from the European Council in which I will take part, and from the foreign affairs council composed of the EU foreign ministers, which I will chair from January. The council will deliberate, will determine views, with my support and input, and that will be the voice I will speak with.

I will equally be a member of the European Commission as Vice-President, drawing on its many resources and instruments. Having spent the past year there, I know that the College of Commissioners is one of the great assets of the European Union. The Commission proposes legislation on everything from the environment to the internal market, and does so as a group. Anyone who thinks that I will take my eye off the ball regarding Commission business is very much mistaken.

As High Representative I do not replace member states or the Commission, but rather ensure that we combine views and input in the best interests of Europe. My ambition is to help member states and the Commission, through dialogue, to upgrade their level of consensus on CFSP. I will do so proactively, and I will not settle for the lowest common denominator.

All this will only be possible if I am backed by a strong new service, one that will be the envy of the rest of the world. That is why setting up the External Action Service, which I will then head, will be my main priority for the coming weeks and months.

This is a huge challenge, and one that I relish. This is about building an efficient and coherent service based on a common culture of excellence. This will be a diplomatic network that will serve all of the European Union. The External Action Service will add value to what our member states already do, and in many areas can offer a 'one-stop shop' to those who want it and need it. It is a unique selling point for many of our partners, and I will make it my legacy and first priority to establish.

I am spoiled for choice in drawing on the talents and capabilities that already exist in the European Commission and the Council, as well as those in our 27 member states. I will call on all of these in creating a balanced service. We especially need joined-up thinking between the Council and the Commission, we need joined-up structures and process, and we need to establish this service quickly.

This is why I have decided to launch work immediately to create the new Service, the objective being to present a proposal so that the Council can take a decision by the end of April.

In order to make this work we will need the advice of this House. The European Parliament will be consulted on the new service, and I propose that this committee is debriefed regularly on the ongoing work. I want to engage in a close dialogue with you on this. The members of this committee and others in the Parliament travel widely in the world and that experience and perspective is invaluable.

I know you will want to ask me about some of the most difficult foreign policy issues that face us at this moment in time, and I will be happy to give you my views as far as I can at this moment.

Still, this is my second day on the job, and I have been clear that I need to increase my understanding of what we need to do and how to do it. That is why I intend to launch a review of our external policy in certain key areas, something I will be discussing further with foreign ministers.

This review will look at our existing policies such as those on the Middle East including Iran, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa, to make sure we are acting with all necessary coherence. We should also make sure we are joined up in our approach to strategic partners such as the US, Russia and China, and if necessary pull together various strands.

I believe that such a review will be a key first project that will focus minds and will bring together our various services, building on all the expertise that has been amassed. The goal would be to start delivering results from this exercise by early next year.

In terms of how I will work, there has been much talk of this new role representing both the Council and the Commission. This is important and indeed I see it as a great strength of the position that I can draw on both these institutions. Let me assure you that I have not forgotten my responsibilities to you in the European Parliament and the resource you represent.

Regarding relations with the Parliament, the Treaty is clear that I must keep you informed and I will consult you on the basic choices we face on the common foreign and security policy. We should have the closest relationship possible. The support of this parliament, but also of the national parliaments as well as our citizens is a key factor in the success of our external policy. This brings me to the final point I would like to make on the Lisbon Treaty and our legitimacy as a common actor moving forward.

The goal of the High Representative is to present a clearer and stronger voice to our international partners, but we must also explain clearly to our own citizens what we aim to achieve. I am mindful of the fact that there is still much work to be done here. As some commentators have put it, citizens were not dancing in the streets on entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Even our best efforts were unlikely to achieve that, but there is much we can do to improve understanding of our work, and I want to play my part in that.

This challenge will also require us all to work closer together to convey the message to our citizens that we are working in their interests on EU foreign policy. A foreign policy that will continue to be built on our basic values – democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights. We will be an active player on the global stage, not one that seeks the spotlight for the sake of it, but rather who lives by the words of Jean Monnet:

“Everybody is ambitious. The question is whether he is ambitious to be or ambitious to do.”

I am ambitious to do, and I hope and trust that you will judge me by what I do in this new role.
