High Representative Catherine Ashton visits Qatar

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, visited Qatar today for talks with Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani and Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al Thani.

The discussions centred on the political situation in the region, the Middle East Peace Process, and the importance of maintaining close ties between the EU and Qatar on all issues of common interest. Qatar is playing a valuable role in the region, including helping to resolve the crisis in Yemen as part of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Last week, it hosted the first meeting of the Contact Group on Libya. It is also playing key role in Sudan.

"We spoke at length about the extremely worrying situation in Syria," Catherine Ashton said. "I strongly condemn the continuing violence in Syria. Dialogue and reform are the only way to meet the legitimate concerns of the people. The Syrian authorities must put into practice their promise to end the state of emergency without delay. Human rights, including the right to demonstrate peacefully, must be respected and protected."

The HRVP took part in a Round Table Policy Debate on the 'EU's role in a Changing Middle East and North Africa' at the Doha Brookings Centre, where she set out her vision for the EU's role in its southern neighbourhood.

On Wednesday, the HRVP travels to Abu Dhabi, where she will co-chair the EU-GCC Ministerial meeting.