Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the press point with the President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik

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

"The European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina is tangible and we share your vision of its full membership in the EU. BiH is one of the countries in the enlargement process, which has been lately striving with many difficult issues.

The way towards full membership is hard, but we are ready to help.

This visit today is just one more proof that EU cares about BiH and its problems.

In this sense, opening a structured dialogue on the functioning and work of judiciary is a mechanism that the EU will activate as a response on these dilemmas. This is a defined institutional mechanism which tackles judicial issues in the enlargement countries.

We consider that any legitimate issues deserve serious analysis and adequate responses; therefore we are willing to engage.

Commissioner Stefan Füle is planning to chair the first meeting of the "SAA structured dialogue on Justice" to be held in Banja Luka.

Among others, the topics included in the provisional Agenda are the following: Judiciary reforms, Functioning of Judiciary Institutions at State, Entity and Cantonal levels and Brcko District (legal framework and coordination of competences).
Mr. President, you presented four particular concerns and we reassured then that those and many more issues will be discussed in the structured dialogue that presents a comprehensive overview of the whole judiciary.

At the end of the dialogue, the Commission will issue recommendations to address any urgent shortcomings.

Considering the centrality of Rule of law issues in the accession process, the urgent fulfillment of technical recommendations in the justice sectors will be a key priority in the overall strategy for the integration of BiH into the EU.

We are convinced that this dialogue will bring solutions to concrete problems and to re-establish this country on the EU path.

We warmly welcome your leadership, Mr. President, in accepting the dialogue. As I indicated the engagement of the EU can not be conditional. I expect you will stick to your commitments to remove the threat of the referendum and to review the conclusions.

Mr. President, you and I agree that the best way forward is a constructive dialogue. I intend to continue the dialogue."