Remarks by HRVP Catherine Ashton following the Foreign Affairs Council, 14 November 2011

Ladies and gentlemen.

Let me start with Syria.

I don't think it will be any surprise to you that the Foreign Ministers were very concerned about the situation in Syria. Some 3,500 people have been killed, many have been wounded, and many find themselves in prison. Last night I spoke with Nabil Al-Araby, the Secretary General of the Arab League. We work closely with them in their efforts to support civilians and in trying to find a political solution to this.

Of course we also discussed Libya.

I was there on Saturday as many of you know, in order to inaugurate the new EU Delegation building and also to meet with the new Prime Minister Al-Keib and with Chairman Jalil. I was also there to speak to a women's conference: in support of women in all of these countries which are undergoing change, who are part of the political and economic life of their community. A number of Foreign Ministers have also been actively engaged in visiting Libya, and we talked about the need to continue to offer our support.

We discussed Tunisia, too, after the elections.

All of this is part of our continuing work to act within our own neighbourhood. I said from the very beginning that Europe should be judged by our capacity to support our neighbourhood. There was a great deal of support for the proposals we put forward in Tunisia, to support them economically and politically in the future.
You'll know as well that last night we had a dinner to discuss our relationship with Russia. I'll be in Russia later this week for the formal ministerial meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov. Our discussion was a chance to look at Russia's accession into the World Trade Organization and also our continuing desire to engage with Russia on the international scene and of course in our domestic issues as they unfold.

We had a long discussion on the Horn of Africa strategy. This is a strategy to bring together the different ways in which Europe operates in that region to give greater effect to our desire to achieve a number of things.
- First of all to support the people of Somalia and the region and to recognize that many people are suffering from this terrible famine.
- That also means we have to support the World Food Programme and to continue our mission called Atalanta, which enables escorts of ships to provide an insurance that the food will actually arrive, by dealing with piracy in the region.
- It's also important in the general way in which we can help to support trade and shipping in that region.
- But building the peace on land and helping to develop the economy will provide the best way of dealing with issues of piracy, and working collaboratively with different countries from the region.
- I met recently when I was in Australia with over 20 Ministers from countries directly concerned with piracy, from India through to Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritius, Seychelles and so on. The Foreign Minister of Australia and I jointly chaired this. So it's an opportunity today to try and put that strategy firmly in place and for Foreign Ministers to endorse the approaches that we're taking.

We also discussed the Common Security and Defence Policy: how we make sure that the missions that we have are working to best effect. It gave us the opportunity to think about how we should be operating in the future.
There is a lot of desire to see the European Union provide support in places like Sahel, and of course in places like Libya, and appreciation of the work that we're doing in countries like Afghanistan to develop the police forces.
All of this is in great demand and we need to be able to respond in ways in which we recognize the financial situation of the European Union as well as the importance of defence to our Member States.
And then we discussed Iran and you'll see that we have conclusions on that, recognizing the importance of the Director General of the IAEA's report and the significance now of what the IAEA is saying about what Iran is seeking to do.
I reiterate what I've said many times before. We take a twin-track approach to this:
- it is important to try and get negotiations moving. I am still waiting for a reply to my letter to Dr Jalili of a few weeks ago.
- and the increasing of pressure through sanctions, as a way of ensuring that the Iranians realize that we're serious about wanting to have this issue resolved.
We received full support from the Foreign Ministers on that.

Thank you.