Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
at the joint press point with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister
Elmar Mammadyarov

Minister, can I begin by saying what a pleasure it is to meet you here in Baku.

We have had the opportunity to meet, of course, several times before and it is a great pleasure to see you again, but it is especially nice to be here.

And by seeing what you are doing with the airport and all the ongoing construction work, we can see the development of this country with our own eyes.

I have already congratulated you on the winning of Eurovision song contest this year and hosting the next one in 2012, but I also know what an important member of the Security Council of the United Nations Azerbaijan is going to be.

I was very keen to come here to develop further the bilateral relationship between the European Union and Azerbaijan and highlight the importance of making sure that our relationships are tailor-made to suit the needs of both.

Azerbaijan is an important partner of the European Union in terms of energy and I know that you have worked closely with my colleague, Commissioner Oettinger, to advance this issue.

You are also increasingly important player in this region and of course with the election as a non-permanent member of the Security Council also in the United Nations.
The Eastern Partnership is an important way in which we demonstrate the closeness of our relationship, building on the common values and aspirations that we hold for all our people.

For all my life the issues of human rights have been central to the way I approach the relationships that we have in the EU. With all the countries in the Eastern Partnership it's part of the core values that we hold. The minister knows well the position the EU and I hold in terms of these issues.

I hope my visit here today will be an opportunity to demonstrate the value that we place on this relationship and consider further in our meetings what more we can do to develop and deepen that relationship in the future.

We have also touched upon the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The European Union has a different role to the Minsk group who is responsible for trying to resolve this issue. I appointed a special representative to offer our support in some of the ways that the European Union can support the process; an example being confidence-building measures.

Briefly we have also discussed some foreign policy issues, among them Iran. As you know, on behalf of the E3+3 or the P5+1, I'm responsible for leading the negotiations with Iran, and we take a very clear double-track approach. We believe in trying to get the Iranians to negotiate and to respect their commitments on nuclear proliferation. And we're concerned about the latest report from the IAEA. When the 27 Foreign Ministers met yesterday, we discussed these issues. While we wish to see Iran honour its commitments and come to negotiate, we recognize we need to keep up the pressure. We will examine what further sanctions we should take.

And as I began, Minister, thank you so much for your hospitality in receiving me here.