Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Brunei, 27th April 2012

Your Royal Highness, thank you very much and may I begin by thanking his Majesty and your Royal Highness for your hospitality to myself, my delegation and to the members of the European Union who have very happily travelled to the Kingdom of Brunei to this very important occasion.

Can I pay tribute to you as well as ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan for the tremendous work that you have put in to make this meeting a success. I want to commend the Kingdom of Brunei as host and current ASEAN coordinator for relations with the EU and congratulate the Kingdom of Cambodia as the current chair of ASEAN as well.

Developing our relations with Asia across the board is a major strategic objective for the European Union. Put simply, your Royal Highness, Europe and Asia need each other.

The European Union has a strong stake in ASEAN’s success. We welcome the considerable progress made by the region towards its own integration goals. This will promote peace and prosperity and of course commercial and investment opportunities.

I believe we are natural partners, we share many interests and both have a role to play in better global governance.

The European Union wants to be an active and constructive player in Asian regionalism - including by taking part in the East Asia Summit. And we look forward to an early signature of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), now that the conditions have been met for the signature by the European Union and I have the authority to do so.

We have been a strong supporter of ASEAN integration and we celebrate this year the 40th anniversary of regular EU-ASEAN consultations and 35 years of official relations.
I am very happy to see at today’s meeting that there is an appetite to do more together. I welcome today’s decisions to boost our cooperation in maritime security, in crisis management, in human rights and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

We have also agreed an ambitious EU-ASEAN Plan of Action that will take us from 2013 to 2017 and that will strengthen our partnership.

I am also very happy to see rapid progress in the development of our trade and investment relations. ASEAN is our third trading partner in the world.

The EU is the largest investor in ASEAN and so we look forward to the conclusion of ambitious Free Trade Agreements with key partners, which will mean more growth and employment here and of course in Europe, too.

But as I began, your Royal Highness I wish to end by again thanking you, thanking his Majesty, thanking the people of Brunei and thanking the ASEAN Secretariat for the incredible work that has been done to put together what I hope is the beginning of the deepening and strengthening of our partnership. Thank you.