Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 25 June 2012¹

Let me just give you a little bit of the flavour of today's Foreign Affairs Council.

First of all can I congratulate Mohammed Morsi on his election as the President of Egypt and say that we will of course work with the Egyptian people and with him: we want to see an inclusive approach in Egypt. Our Special Representative Bernadino Leon has been in Egypt this past week and has had the opportunity for some early discussions.

We remember very well Tahrir Square, the young people, the people with great passion and pride who saw a different future for their country. It's now up to the President and of course the government that will follow, to ensure that that vision is realized. So I wish him well and I hope that we will see the kind of inclusivity that will be so critical for Egypt's future. I should add too that we recognize the huge economic challenges for Egypt and the European Union is ready to help support Egypt economically and politically in the future.

Syria, too, of course, will be on the agenda. As we look to see what more can be done I've had many phone calls with Kofi Annan trying to support his work, trying to consider how best we can support the people of Syria. The situation remains terrible on the ground. All of you who've been watching and some of you who have colleagues who've been reporting will know only too well just how difficult this is.

The Syrian opposition met in Brussels this weekend to try to create the circumstances where the opposition can be united. You know how important it is that the opposition is inclusive, that it represents the Syrian people and it's able to come up with its own plan, for the people to be able to move forward.

¹ Check against delivery
In our debate today on the developments in Syria we will also discuss the shooting down of the Turkish jet. I spoke with the Turkish Foreign Minister as I do often and he briefed me on the situation. We're very concerned about what's happened and very concerned for the families of the two pilots who are missing. We will also be looking to Turkey to be restrained in its response.

We'll also be talking about Pakistan, following my recent visit. We've engaged with Pakistan through a 5-year plan, economically and politically, to support the developments in Pakistan, which are enormously significant not just for the country itself but also for the whole region.

And I'll have the opportunity to report back on the E3+3 talks with Iran in Moscow. We are looking to the meeting of technical nuclear experts on the 3rd of July, to be able to see whether by explaining the proposals that we have put forward in more detail and looking at the issues that Iran has raised, we may be able to narrow what is an enormous gap at this stage.

In order to make sure that it's worth coming together again, it's important to have a look at the technical aspects because in responding to each other there are issues that need to be examined more carefully. Presumptions or assumptions that are made, assertions that are made, all need to be examined.

We're looking at all ways to achieve the objective of a negotiated agreement with Iran to tackle the uncertainty that exists around its nuclear programme. Depending on what happens in the technical meeting, Helga Schmid and Dr Bagheri, the two deputies, can be in touch, and Dr Jalili and I will be in touch to then decide how to move forward. It's my ambition that we move forward with negotiations. And that's why we moved to this procedure. We'll have to see what comes out of it.

I really want Iran to engage in this process: a process that looks specifically at building the confidence of the international community. This is not just about the E3+3 who are in the room, it's about a much broader collection of countries across the world who are concerned and want us to succeed in this negotiation.

On sanctions, there is no change in terms of how we're going forward on July the 1st. The sanctions that have been agreed will be implemented.

The choice is Iran's. I think I said that at the press conference in Moscow: it is now up to Iran to decide what it wishes to do.

And we will conclude the day with the Gulf Cooperation Council ministerial meeting which is an opportunity to discuss many aspects of what's happening in the region and to focus on Syria. Two things: one is bringing the opposition together and hoping that they can have an inclusive approach to support the people of Syria and can begin to think about the political process that needs to follow. And to also examine how to support Kofi Annan in his extremely difficult role. It's for him to decide how best to try and move forward and he's been in discussions with a number of the members of the Security Council, and of course Russia is included in that. When I was in Moscow last week and I spoke with Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, he and I talked not just about Iran but also about Syria.