Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following the 22nd EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting, Luxembourg, 25th June, 2012

Can I begin by welcoming you, your Royal Highness Prince Saud Al Faisal, and expressing my sincere condolences on the passing of Crown Prince Naif.

The European Union's relations with the Gulf countries are extremely important – and becoming more so. Today's meeting is a constructive and important one, at this crucial time.

The meeting we have just had has already shown us how important it is to strengthen the foundation for our dialogue on the issues we have discussed.

So we decided today we would take a step further, by asking our senior officials from the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council to draw up plans to help ensure our relationship becomes even more strategic, even more dynamic.

Our co-operation on Yemen has perhaps already provided a good example of the way forward.

Today we discussed a number of things and we have shown, for example, our joint interest in tackling the issue of piracy in Somalia and in the Horn of Africa.

We also recognised there is a clear need for us to consult and to co-operate whenever possible on global challenges such as non-proliferation and disarmament, counter-terrorism and climate change, both regionally, working together, and internationally.
We do appreciate, in the European Union, the work of the Gulf Cooperation Council in the fight against terrorism and we want to enhance our mutual co-operation on counter terrorism and on countering violent extremism, including at the United Nations level.

A deeper relationship also means an open one and means honest discussions on issues where we may of course have different perspectives. We did that today, and we will continue to do that in the future.

But on-going developments, in our region, in the Arab world and the Middle East, show the obvious value of closer dialogue between us.

Over dinner we will go into greater depth on some of these issues – we will discuss Syria, Iran, the Middle East Peace Process and other issues. And we know that we can count on the Gulf Cooperation Council's active engagement in helping to promote solutions and helping to bring an end to violence.

We must continue to work together, with increasing resolve, to address these challenges, which are our common concern. Your Royal Highness, I am convinced we shall do more – we can do more – in the months and years ahead.