Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following the signature of EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)

I am delighted to co-sign today, on behalf of the European Union, a new EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh.

We are committed to forging a broader and more mature partnership with Vietnam, for several reasons.

First of all, the European Union is fully committed to contributing to the peace, prosperity and stability of the Asia region and wishes to forge deep ties with the countries of the region. Vietnam is at the centre of many of the important shifts taking place in Asia. It is an active partner in ASEAN, which in turn is a key element in the stability and security of the region. Indeed in July, Vietnam will become the next coordinator inside ASEAN for relations with the European Union.

And of course, secondly, because Vietnam has a particularly dynamic economy. For these reasons, the scope for a strong partnership between us is huge.

The Agreement which we have signed today will take our relations to a new level.

It will broaden the scope of our bilateral collaboration in areas such as trade, the environment, sustainable development, energy, science and technology, migration, good governance and human rights.
There are many good common projects and initiatives where the European Union and Vietnam work well together.

For instance, Vietnam is a leading exporter of wood products to the European Union and we all know the importance of combating illegal logging and promoting sustainable forest management.

That is why we have engaged in the negotiation of an agreement that will ensure that sustainable timber products are being exported to the EU.

In the area of good governance, the European Union, together with some of our Member States, has supported the largest and most ambitious legal and judicial reform programme of its kind in Vietnam. It is a flagship programme that will help Vietnam strengthen the rule of law.

The point is that we want to strengthen this type of bilateral collaboration and make sure it is on a more robust footing.

And that is what this agreement that we signed today will enable us to do.

Minister, it is a great privilege to have you here in Brussels. I am sorry the weather does not compete with the weather that I hear of today in Vietnam, but I had the privilege of meeting you at the ASEAN meeting and it is a great thrill to be here. I know President Van Rompuy is looking forward to visiting in November and I look forward to following in his footsteps not long thereafter. But Minister, welcome and thank you.