Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council in
Luxembourg, 15 October 2012

We began today by talking about our growing concern about the situation in Mali, but were pleased to see the adoption of the Security Council Resolution.

The commitment of the EU is to work with the UN, African Union and ECOWAS in particular to prepare an intervention plan on behalf of the people of Mali, who have suffered greatly over recent months.

And with that in mind, the Council asked the EEAS to prepare a Crisis Management Concept for a possible mission particularly focusing how to help re-train and re-structure the Malian military, who must take the lead themselves in restoring legitimate government in the north.

There will be an important meeting in Bamako on 19 October which we will participate in.

I hope that what we will see in the future is a Malian Government with a credible Road Map for the restoration of democratic government and re-structuring the military, as a basis for future EU support.

This issue is urgent. We believe there is a real risk to the region if northern Mali remains an ungoverned space, free for terrorists and drug traffickers to operate in.

There was a discussion too about the latest deliberations on the Iranian nuclear programme. It remains a matter of great concern to all of us.

And we are determined to continue our twin-track approach.
We have always said that sanctions are not an end in themselves, but are aimed at applying pressure on the Iranian authorities to meet their international obligations and commitments. They are not aimed at the Iranian people.

We remain determined to achieve a diplomatic solution to the issue and hope that Iran will engage seriously with the proposals we have made.

Today we have significantly tightened our restrictive measures, targeting Iran's nuclear and ballistic programmes and the revenues of the Iranian government for these programmes.

You will find full details in the press release that has been issued.

We have also added 34 Iranian entities which provide financial support to the Iranian government to the asset freeze list and imposed an asset freeze and travel ban on one additional person involved in the Iranian nuclear programme.

Those names will be published tomorrow.

Of course a great deal of our time was in discussion on the horrific situation in Syria, reflecting our great concern about the deteriorating situation.

We agreed again that there must be an end to violence and a transition towards an all-inclusive, peaceful and democratic Syria.

That is why it is so important for us that the opposition works together on a common programme for the future of the country and why is vital that there is no further spill-over of the conflict to neighbouring countries. The recent attacks on Turkish territory from within Syria are totally unacceptable.

We are staying in close touch with Mr. Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative, and give him all our support as he works towards a new peace plan.

In the meantime, we will maintain our pressure on those responsible for the violence. We have added 28 people to the list of those subject to a travel ban and an asset freeze. Two additional entities were targeted with an asset freeze.

And that brings the total number subject to sanctions to 181 individuals and 54 entities.

We also tightened our arms restrictions in a number of ways so that for example, EU citizens and companies will be banned from involvement in Syrian military cooperation with third countries.

We also banned Syrian Arab Airlines from EU airports.

Again full details are available in a press release we issued earlier.

I was very pleased to say that ministers gave their enthusiastic support to the EU-Egypt Task Force which we are organising in Cairo in mid-November and for which preparations are now well underway.
I hope this will be a real contribution to the Egyptian economy and will be indicative of the close relations we have and will help us to build support around the new democracy. The Task Force will be preceded by the meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers with the Arab League Foreign Ministers which will also take place in Cairo.

Over lunch we discussed the most recent developments in Belarus and Georgia.

The parliamentary elections in Belarus were yet another missed opportunity to conduct elections in line with international standards. We are very concerned about increased acts of harassment and repression of civil society and political opposition as well as a diplomatic crisis with Sweden.

The development of our bilateral relations remains conditional on progress on Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Until then, our policy remains unchanged so we prolonged the restrictive measures for another year.

We want to see the release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners before our policy can be positively reassessed.

We want to see a democratic Belarus, playing its full part. We are ready to support any positive developments, but also react to any further deterioration. We reiterate again that the choice is with the authorities of Belarus.

In Georgia we welcome the conduct of recent elections – the first peaceful transition of power in Georgia's history.

The new PM with whom I have spoken will have to work with President Saakashvili for the good of the people. It's essential for Georgia's future that this period is calm and well-managed.

The EU's engagement is with Georgia as a whole and we are ready to help and support political cooperation and economic integration as well as greater mobility. We are also committed to helping Georgia uphold its territorial integrity.

And I announce that Štefan Füle and Helga Schmid will travel to Georgia later this week on my behalf to have discussions.

Finally, from here I will go to chair the meeting of the FAC with Development Ministers. This will have an orientation debate to prepare the post 2015 development framework and the follow-up to the Rio+20 Summit.

These will set the stage for a major international effort on global governance, poverty reduction, and sustainable development.

The preparatory process for the post-2015 global development framework has already begun and it is important that the EU and its member states continue to assume a leading and active role in this process.
The United Nations has convened a High Level Panel on the MDG review which is co-chaired by Commissioner Piebalgs who participates in this particular group and he will be sharing with the Ministers some highlights of this first meeting.

We will also be looking at the recent proposals made in the Commission Communication prepared with Andris Piebalgs and Štefan Füle to help achieve accountable government, political freedom, social justice and equity.