Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following her meeting with the President of Tajikistan

"I am very pleased to be here in Tajikistan today. I met with Foreign Minister Zarifi earlier this week in Bishkek during the EU-Central Asia Ministerial meeting, and today I had the privilege of talking to President Rahmon.

I came to the region to have discussions between the countries of Central Asia and the European Union and to have the chance to visit some countries bilaterally.

With the President today I was able to discuss the future of Afghanistan and the fact that we will remain engaged there after 2014. We discussed the importance of continuing to support the people of Afghanistan into the future.

We also discussed water and energy issues. We understand that these are key challenges for the countries in this region. The European Union realises very well that Tajikistan has critical energy needs, and we talked about the importance of the co-operation in this region to address those needs.

I made it clear that the European Union is very ready to help to provide solutions to Tajikistan's energy needs, especially in helping to support alternative solutions being identified for different ways for provision of energy. And in that context the President and I agreed that the work of the World Bank was very important.

We are also very keen to continue with our support for your economic reforms. We welcome Tajikistan's upcoming accession to WTO as a good basis for developing trade and investment.

I am really proud that over the past twenty years we have provided about 600 million € of support and assistance to Tajikistan. I am really pleased to have just signed an agreement that will enhance the competitiveness of Tajik agribusiness.
This programme with the value of 16 million € will help the development of agricultural sector in Tajikistan as well as the implementation of the Government's agenda for agricultural reform. It will be implemented in cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

I hope you will see the programme as a good example of our cooperation and continuing support into the future.

I also discussed with the President our continued support for the political reforms in Tajikistan, underlining the importance of the rule of law and the respect for human rights. I said to the President that it is very important to have a strong and vibrant civil society and to allow that civil society to grow and develop.

This is really important not just for the freedom of the people in this country, but also the rule of law and strong civil society help to attract foreign investment. And that means making sure that civil society organisations are not restricted in the work that they do. That means that organisations such as the young lawyers association “Amparo” and international organisations such as International Alert who do such great work are really important for this country.

Finally, it was a great privilege to be her and I am grateful to the President to spend such a long time with me. I hope it won't be long before I am back for a longer visit.

Thank you.”

**Background:** The EU and the Tajikistan signed an agreement today on supporting the development of the agri-business sector in Tajikistan. The Enhanced Competitiveness of Tajik Agribusiness Programme (ECTAP) builds on the success of earlier EU-funded programmes and aims to improve the competitiveness of agri-food companies in the Republic of Tajikistan along with the quality, diversity and marketing of their produce. It has a value of € 16 million and will be implemented in cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, supporting the implementation of the Tajik government’s agenda for agricultural reform.