Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, 10 December 2012

I will be briefing Ministers on the recent Dialogue between the Prime Minister of Serbia and the Prime Minister of Kosovo and I just want to say how pleased I am that on schedule two gates have opened this morning and as you know two further gates will open by the end of the year.

I just had a meeting with Mr. Al Khatib, who is leading the Coalition that has been put together among the opposition forces in Syria. This was my second meeting with him. He will be coming to join the Foreign Ministers this afternoon in order to brief them on what he is proposing in terms of a political process. As always I urged the need for inclusivity and underlined that the people of Syria can expect to see European Union support not just in these times of crisis but for the time it takes to help support and rebuild the country.

It's important that there has to be a political process alongside everything else. You have to get from here to the position where you have an inclusive chosen government in Syria, that the people can all feel proud of. Everyone who's been engaged with this, for instance Mr Brahimi and Mr Al Khatib, are all thinking about that. The main thing is that it needs to belong to all the people of Syria, that they need to feel it's theirs. We want to help, but it's their country.

It is important that we recognise the terrible things that have been happening in Syria and the responsibility that Assad has. We said from the very beginning that it is no place to be in a position of power in your country if you respond to peaceful demonstrations with the murder of your citizens.

Of course our thoughts are also with what's happening in Egypt. We're calling for a real inclusive dialogue, calling for de-escalation in tension, and I've been speaking with the Foreign Minister of Egypt. I'm really concerned that the people of Egypt should have a strong inclusive process to continue the democratic transition, to continue to achieve the peace and security that they need.
You know when I was in Egypt a few weeks ago I met with the President, and I met with some of the Opposition. We had the Task Force to demonstrate our commitment to the economic recovery in Egypt, and also to the political process, dialogue with civil society, issues that are so important like human rights and of course this broader question of inclusivity. We've been saying the same consistent message: we will support the people of Egypt through the transition and in any way that we can. But it also requires that dialogue to continue and for these issues to be dealt with effectively by all sides coming together to reach an agreement.

The people of Egypt and those who have been privileged to be elected in Egypt, and those who are privileged to be opposition leaders too, need to determine how best to take this forward. It's important that there be a Constitution in Egypt. It is as I've always described the greatest protection that people can have and it is important to see a political process that's moving forward. So I urge everyone to try and get together, and try and work through how to make this as effective as possible: it really matters. I always say that the road to democracy is a bumpy road but it really matters that people are engaged and continue to be engaged.

And today we will also agree on the support we're going to give for training the army in Mali, as part of our Sahel strategy to try and bring peace to that region.

This evening we will discuss the role of the European Union in terms of mediation and its support for countries going through conflicts.