Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following the Foreign Affairs Council, Brussels, 10 December 2012

We were pleased to welcome Mr Al Khatib, leader of the Syrian Opposition Coalition, for an in-depth discussion on the situation in the country.

We underlined to him how vital it is that the opposition is inclusive and works together on a programme for a credible political transition, to create a real alternative to the current regime.

We agreed in the FAC that the EU 'accepts the Coalition as legitimate representatives of the Syrian people'.

We continue to work and support the work of Special Envoy Brahimi and we are very concerned that the situation in the country is becoming worse every day. We have made consistently our demands for the end to this unacceptable violence.

We recognize that those responsible for violence and human rights abuses must be held accountable.

As we say in the Conclusions: 'The UN Security Council can refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court at any time'.

And we call on the UN Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in all aspects including this issue.

You will know that we have raised our serious concerns about the potential use of chemical weapons and we remind the regime that they will be held accountable.
We also condemn the recent limitations on the use of the internet in Syria. There must be unhindered access to all media.

Commissioner Georgieva reminded us that she has been visiting refugee camps recently as indeed I have done; that the winter weather is fast becoming a daily reality in Syria and we need to continue to increase our humanitarian aid to the people.

Today Commissioner Georgieva announced a further package of aid worth 30 million euros. That brings the combined EU and EU members states commitment for humanitarian aid to over 300 million euros.

We have also discussed the situation in Egypt and we very much regret the recent violence in Egypt and the deaths and injuries caused.

Ministers agreed that we need to see a de-escalation of the situation and an all-inclusive dialogue.

I have been in constant touch over the past days with the main political protagonists, not least Foreign Minister Amr.

We've been repeating the same consistent message: we will support the people of Egypt through the transition in any way that we can.

But that requires dialogue to continue and for all sides to come together to reach an agreement. And it requires a good and strong constitution.

It is vital that Egypt continues on its path to democratic transition. And we are there to help in that process.

We also discussed political developments in the Western Balkans.

I debriefed the ministers on the state of play in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina following the three high level meetings I have hosted.

I am happy that both sides have committed to the process in a very constructive way.

Today we also see concrete results: implementation of the IBM agreement with the first two gates operational as of this morning, with two more to follow by the end of the month.

This is a clear signal of the serious commitment of the two sides to the dialogue and commend the efforts they have put into seeing this happen, under difficult circumstances.

I also commend EULEX for the assistance it is providing to the two sides.
I hope people on the ground will benefit from the new set up. The implementation shows how much the two sides are able to achieve.

A lot more work remains to be done and great challenges lie ahead, but today we are more confident that it can be done.

I hope when they come back together in January we will see further progress.