Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton before the Foreign Affairs Council, 11 March 2013

"Good morning. Today's Foreign Affairs Council is going to focus on a number of key issues.

First of all, can I say how delighted I am to welcome Mr Brahimi to the Foreign Affairs Council. This is an opportunity of course for us to continue to talk with him about the challenges facing the people of Syria and the devastating situation that we now find in that country. I think Mr Brahimi is to be congratulated on the efforts that he's making to try and find a political solution. He's absolutely committed to try to find a political way through this. We need to see a political transition in Syria in order that the violence can stop and that we can see a new future for the people of that country.

We need to stop the killing, we need to stop the violence that is happening in Syria and to find a way in which the opposition can really move forward on a political solution. You have seen that Moaz al-Khatib has been talking about the need to find a transition to a different Syria. We have been very clear that Assad cannot stay. We've been saying that for a very long time: the devastating impact of his policies is obvious for all to see.

The second thing we need is to ensure that the aid we want to see people receive gets through, not just in Syria but of course in the countries surrounding Syria. You will know how many refugees are in Lebanon, what's happening on the border with Turkey, the number of refugees in Jordan and our concerns about Iraq.
I will also take the opportunity today to debrief on the Almaty talks with Iran, the E3+3 discussions, and to explain the next steps. We'll be going back to Almaty for another round of discussions in a couple of weeks' time.

We're also going to have a bigger discussion on Russia and our relationship with Russia, that looks forward to the European Council where I will be briefing them on what's been discussed here. We will look at Russia in a comprehensive way: the domestic situation, our relationship and of course the work we do on issues across the world.

And then finally a discussion about Japan, looking forward to the Summit with Japan, which the Presidents will be participating in, and reflecting on the need to strengthen our trade relationships with Japan.

Thank you. "