Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, 27 May 2013

Good morning everyone. It is obviously a very important Foreign Affairs Council today as always.

I will be reporting back on the meeting between Prime Minister Dacic and Prime Minister Thaci last week and the agreed implementation plan. Agreement was reached in both governments to support this plan and I wish them well in now taking this forward. I issued a statement on this as you know.

The focus of today's discussion will be on Syria. This is an opportunity for us to say again how much we are looking for a political solution, how important it is for the people of Syria that the fighting stops and a political process takes place. We've made our position on Assad very clear many times, we've made our position clear too on ensuring a good strong political process and we are supporting very much what Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov have been discussing which is the prospect of another meeting, some are calling it Geneva II. Having participated in the first Geneva process I believe it's important to give this a real chance by giving them our support in moving this forward.

We will be discussing what we do about the arms embargo, we will be discussing how we best support a political way forward and in doing so we take account of all that is going on on the ground and what's happening in the discussions to try and find a way forward for the opposition coalition. We're in touch with people across the opposition groups and we'll try to find a way forward. On the arms embargo specifically this will be an opportunity for member states to discuss how they want to go forward. You know there are strong views in favour of trying to find a way that Europe can demonstrate, not only that it is united but also that it has a good and strong position to take forward. And that means taking into account the views that have been expressed over these last days from different places but also for Member States themselves who've been having a lot of discussions domestically to see where we go forward. What I can tell you is that there will be a strong spirit of trying to find a good European solution.
I've divided today's discussion into two. The first opportunity will be for people to lay out their positions on how they feel we might go forward. There are different possibilities for what we do and we'll be looking at how we are going to participate in any Geneva II process and what the EU should be saying there. We'll be looking at how do we best support people, how do we best ensure that our humanitarian aid continues to get to the people and what do we do to try and help this process reach a conclusion that brings peace and security back to the people. And in that we'll have to look at where the positions might lie. I hesitate to tell you where I think we will end up because what I want to do is have that discussion this morning and then if necessary we will return to the subject this afternoon.

I will also be reporting back on my latest discussions with Dr Jalili, the Iranian chief negotiator, in Istanbul.

We had a long discussion over dinner in Istanbul. As you know he's a Presidential candidate so that affects of course many things. But after the elections seems to me the right time to think about another meeting. I think we have to wait and see how the elections turn out because depending on who's elected there may be differences.

We'll also talk about the Middle East Peace Process, the latest work that John Kerry has been doing, with which we've been fully engaged and of course our on-going support to a two state solution.

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