Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton
following the Foreign Affairs Council, 27 May 2013

"We had a long Foreign Affairs Council today. I'm going to focus on the main issue of our discussion - Syria. It wasn't the only issue, but the issue which is of greatest interest.

We had a long discussion about our concern to support the political process which is being led presently by the initiative from Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov to look forward to what's been widely described as Geneva II. Having attended Geneva I, I think we can assume that the elements they are looking to try to promote are to find a transitional process to first of all prevent further death and destruction in Syria and lead to the possibility of a safe and peaceful future. And we will do all we can to support initiatives in that direction. Secondly we've of course reaffirmed our commitment to humanitarian support for the people within Syria and also for the many displaced people currently outside of Syria in neighbouring countries.

We have expressed on many occasions our concern for those who are having to leave their homes but also for the populations who are willing and have found themselves hosts to large numbers of people who are coming across borders in search of refuge, safety and security. And in the course of our discussion we looked of course to the question of what we will do about the renewal of our restrictive measures and I'm going to read to you the declaration that accompanies the Council conclusions:

"The Council agreed the following elements on the renewal of the restrictive measures against Syria:

1) At the expiry of the current sanctions regime, the Council will adopt for a period of 12 months restrictive measures in the following fields, as specified in Council Decision 2012/739/CFSP:

– Export and import restrictions with the exception of arms and related material and equipment which might be used for internal repression;
– Restrictions on financing of certain enterprises;
– Restrictions on infrastructure projects;
– Restrictions of financial support for trade;
– Financial sector;
– Transport sector;
– Restrictions on admission;
– Freezing of funds and economic resources.

2) With regard to the possible export of arms to Syria, the Council took note of the commitment by Member States to proceed in their national policies as follows:

– the sale, supply, transfer or export of military equipment or of equipment which might be used for internal repression will be for the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces and intended for the protection of civilians;

– Member States shall require adequate safeguards against misuse of authorisations granted, in particular relevant information concerning the end-user and final destination of the delivery;

– Member States shall assess the export licence applications on a case-by-case basis, taking full account of the criteria set out in Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP of 8 December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment.

Member States will not proceed at this stage with the delivery of the equipment mentioned above.

The Council will review its position before 1 August 2013 on the basis of a report by the High Representative, after having consulted the UN Secretary General, on the developments related to the US-Russia initiative and on the engagement of the Syrian parties."

That's the end of the statement. Thank you."