EUROPEAN UNION

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Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton
following the Foreign Affairs Council

"First of all I wanted to reiterate how united we remain in our belief that the crisis in Syria needs a political process and needs to be solved through negotiations.

That is why huge efforts have been made to help, support and facilitate the planned 'Geneva II' peace conference.

We are also doing everything we can to continue to support the Syrian population and all those countries affected directly by the crisis. And you will know that I was in the region last week, meeting with ministers and also seeing some of the help that has been given to the refugees.

We have today adopted a paper which maps out the EU's comprehensive approach between the EEAS and the Commission on this. And you will have seen the additional 400 million euros in support of humanitarian, economic and development needs in Syria and in the neighbouring region. That takes the overall contribution from the EU and Member States to more than 1.25 billion euros so far.

We also looked at a paper we had prepared to evaluate the EU response to the Arab Spring.

We discussed the Middle East Peace Process, to reaffirm our commitment. We fully support the current efforts of the United States in support of the resumption of negotiations and we welcome very much their involvement and the engagement of Secretary Kerry. In my meetings last week in the region I reiterated the importance of these initiatives and of our support for them.

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We discussed the expectations for the Eastern Partnership summit in November in Vilnius and prepared for the ministerial meeting we will hold with our partners on 22 July, in the margins of the next Foreign Affairs Council.

We really want this to be a great and successful summit and are working closely with our partners to make sure it is one. Deepening our relationship depends on the efforts of our partners towards the respect of the common values on which the partnership is based.

I was pleased to welcome NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen to our lunch to discuss Afghanistan. This is a sign of the close and on-going constructive cooperation between the EU and NATO, in particular on Afghanistan.

At this crucial time for the future of Afghanistan, we want to enhance both EU-Member State coordination and coordination with the wider international community, including NATO.

A big priority over the coming months will be to ensure that the elections are transparent and inclusive. And we will also be looking to put in place the key elements of our future long-term cooperation.

Following my meeting with Prime Minister Dačić and Prime Minister Thaçi last week, I informed the foreign ministers today about the progress in the implementation of the agreements reached in the dialogue that I have been facilitating between the two sides.

This is of course in view of the discussion the General Affairs Council will hold tomorrow and the European Council later this week, where I will also participate.

To prepare this debate, I also sent a joint letter together with Commissioner Füle to update the Member States that concrete progress has been made towards visible and sustainable normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

And I particularly focused on two aspects of the progress. First the irreversibility, pointing out that the Serbs have closed down first police premises in the northern municipalities and have shared information with Kosovars. They have issued instructions about the stay on cases and have also begun to look at the cessation of payments of salaries.

And secondly, the qualitative improvement of relations where we now see two liaison officers working, one in Pristina and one in Belgrade, and, of course, the on-going implementation, where we have had about fifty people in the EEAS building working every day in five different working groups to move forward the implementation. I pay tribute to both Prime Ministers and their teams and look forward to the discussions in the Council and European Council later in the week.