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Catherine Ashton to co-chair EU-Gulf Cooperation Council Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting in Manama, Bahrain

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, will co-chair the EU-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Ministerial Meeting on Sunday 30 June in Manama, Bahrain.

During this 23rd session, Ministers will review the state of play of the EU-GCC relationship. Their discussions will focus on the strategic importance of strengthening ties between the EU and Gulf countries.

The two sides will exchange views on the situation in the region. The catastrophic situation in Syria and the increased sectarian tensions in Lebanon and Iraq as a spillover of the Syrian crisis will feature prominently in the discussions. The EU will shortly deploy a comprehensive package of assistance, with an additional €400M in humanitarian and non-humanitarian support for Syria and neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon and Jordan. The EU's objective remains to end the suffering of the Syrian people through a political settlement. The EU fully supports the so-called Geneva II process.

The Ministerial meeting will also be an occasion for ministers to exchange views on global issues of common concern such as piracy, counter terrorism, and the promotion of human rights, the rule of law and values of tolerance.

HRVP Catherine Ashton said: "I am delighted to have the opportunity to co-chair the EU-GCC ministerial meeting, and I look forward to having useful and constructive discussions as was the case in previous years. The GCC is an increasingly important partner, not least because our bilateral trade has increased by 45% since 2010 to reach €145 billion annually. The meeting comes just days after my visit to Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Israel and Palestine, and I look forward to exchanging views with our Gulf partners on the regional situation. We must continue to work together to address regional challenges of common concern, in particular the crisis in Syria. I am convinced of the need to intensify our cooperation in the months and years ahead."

P R E S S
The meeting will be attended by representatives of all 27 EU Member States – and by Croatia, which joins the EU on 1 July. It will be co-chaired by Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, as GCC Presidency, and will be attended by ministers from all six GCC Member States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) as well as by the Secretary-General of the GCC.

The HRVP will take part in the joint press conference following the EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, at 11:30 (local time) on Sunday 30 June.