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Opening Remarks at the first meeting of the EU-Jordan Task Force

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King Hussein Bin Talal Convention Centre at the Dead Sea,

Jordan, 22 February 2012

Prime Minister, Honourable colleagues, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today is an historic day in the long and friendly relationship between the EU and Jordan. As partners and neighbours we must face the future together.

I want to thank especially His Majesty King Abdullah and you, Prime Minister, for the hospitality and the commitment to work with us. I am extremely grateful also to you, Foreign Minister, and to members of the government. There has been wide involvement in the preparation of this task force. We have members of the European Parliament to whom I pay tribute for their work in the political process not just in Jordan but across the world and being good examples of democracy in action. I want to thank Bernardino Leon for his tireless efforts since I persuaded him to take on the role of setting up this task force that is today recognising the importance to the European Union of our relationship with Jordan. Thank you also goes to the Member States who are represented today by ambassadors, and whose ministers have been supportive of the efforts that we are making. And to the international financial institutions and especially to the business community and to all of you here in this hall an enormous welcome and an enormous thank you.

I also want to single out the representatives of political parties, civil society, and business representatives who I had their meetings yesterday. There were over a hundred representatives of business, there were 42 representatives of civil society organisations and over seventeen political parties. These are big numbers of people representing many others who come together in dialogue and discussion. These important sessions of yesterday will feed into our deliberations today.

As you have said my dear friend, Minister Judeh, this year it is the 10th anniversary of the Association Agreement the EU has with Jordan. And Jordan is indeed a special partner with a leading role in what we describe as a challenging environment. We work together to promote peace, stability and prosperity on the basis of the values we hold: the rule of law, human rights and social justice. The political context in which we operate is a world going through transition and change. In Jordan, the European Union, in our neighbourhood we see historic transformations taking place; opening new chapters in our world's progression and those overlapping political and economic shifts. In Europe we face economic challenges; in our neighbourhood we see the political and economic challenges at large. We have a region going through transformation and in many parts of our region we still see instability and unrest. I think today of the people of Syria so close to where we are now who are continuing to suffer.

This first Task Force is the expression of our mutual commitment in a time of change and I hope it will send a strong message. Jordan's success is our own success. We are fully committed to accompanying this country on its journey towards an inclusive and democratic society of social justice and economic prosperity that I know His Majesty, the government and the people wish to see. I believe that Jordan is engaged in a process of important political and economic reform, building on the foundations that are already in place. I believe that 2012 is the year when those transformations will take shape. But I say to you: this is your country, these are your reforms. The job of the European Union, my job, Bernardino's job, of those who are here today, is to help and support, but it is your country.

This Task Force demonstrates that support and encouragement and I wanted to mark the beginning of a new and deeper relationship that will help to ensure the kind of effective coordination by the EU and its Member States, as well as other European and international bodies. We invented the concept of Task Force to be able to bring together people from different parts of our political and economic life. I am a firm believer that my own role was created in order to bring together

economics and politics in support of transformation and change so that we are able to move forward with the values that we hold. Today we will have a political session where we will learn more from the political reforms already under way and the timeline for their implementation.

I describe quite often this concept of "deep" democracy: democracy is not just about an election. An election is an important moment in the democratic process, but the building of the political process, the institutions that guarantee democratic values and the ability to have the rule of law in open society, transparent administration, independent judiciary, entrepreneurs and civil society, all of that is about what I described as "deep" democracy.

I know too that Jordanians expect a great deal from their country, from their government and rightly so. It is their government's job to deliver for the people. But also many in the region and in the world look to Jordan. You have announced these important reforms, you follow a Jordanian model that we admire very much: change without chaos, change without instability, but irreversible - as her Majesty says - and deep. A model for the region, a democratic constitutional monarchy. It's a great challenge, and it will take a lot of work and support. I believe that this country has the political will and the ideas to be a great success and to achieve all it wishes to do.

A successful reform means that everybody has to get involved: government, politicians, civil society, young people, women, the international community, but also, crucially, businesses. Growth, jobs, investment and opportunities are essential to underpin the political reforms. That is why I am delighted that the private sector is so well represented today. Jordan has enormous potential, has fantastic entrepreneurial skills, it has great people, real opportunities and so the second session we have today will focus on that economic front - economics meets politics. And despite the economic context of the European Union back home, we will reinforce our support, we will make available additional financial assistance and step up all our instruments, with a special focus on closer trade and investment links and a dialogue on migration, mobility and security.

I hope this Task Force will convey to the Jordanian people a strong message of support and encouragement to move forward with the reforms efforts. The new Neighbourhood Strategy of the EU is based on differentiation and mutual accountability, more for more and a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. That is our shared objective. So as I began, thank you for the opportunity of being here and to realize something that can be a significant additional support to the work going on and the people of Jordan and I wish this Task Force, today and in the future, every possible success.