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## R E M A R K S

### by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following the Foreign Affairs Council 20 January 2014

Today is an important day in our efforts to build confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. In line with the Joint Plan of Action between the E3+3 and Iran, today marks the beginning of the six-month phase of initial confidence-building measures aimed at addressing concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme. I am pleased to say that Iran has implemented the nuclear-related measures set out in the agreement and we have adopted the necessary legislation to suspend certain sanctions for a period of six months. The suspension of these sanctions will enter into force today. Over the coming six months, proper implementation of the measures will be crucial. The International Atomic Energy Agency will play a crucial role in this and I am very grateful to Director General Amano and to his team. I want to thank everyone involved for all their hard work in putting together this agreement. It's an important first step, but more work will be needed to fully address the international community's concerns regarding the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian programme. We aim to start negotiations about a comprehensive solution with Iran in February. And I will meet with the Political Directors of the E3+3 tomorrow in Geneva.

We also discussed the situation in Syria. With the Geneva 2 meeting just two days away, we were united in our support for the efforts of Lakhdar Brahimi to end the suffering of the Syrian people. It is vital that everyone who attends Geneva 2 does so on the same basis - that the aim of the meeting is to implement the Geneva 1 communiqué. That means a genuine political transition to a democratic and inclusive Syria, which preserves the sovereignty, independence and unity of the country. We believe that participation of women in the peace process, that we hope will emerge from this week's conference, is a real priority. In the meantime, we continue to do all that we can to support the Syrian people through our humanitarian support.

We also discussed the latest events in Central African Republic, where the security and humanitarian situation remains very worrying. We have been fully mobilized since the beginning of the crisis to support the efforts of our African partners. Services of the External Action Service have been working hard since the European Council in December to put together a concept for an EU military operation to support the African Union, France and the international community in protecting the civilian population from further violence. Today, ministers agreed the Crisis Management Concept for this operation. It would work in the capital Bangui area, for up to 6 months, to assist existing international efforts in protection of the people. We will move forward with operational planning, under fast track procedures.

#### FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

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Shortly, a team from the EEAS will go to the region to ensure the closest possible coordination with our partners, in particular with the African Union. And I'm very pleased to say that additional support of 366 million euros was pledged at a meeting today organised by my colleague Kristalina Georgieva, the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid.

We also discussed Afghanistan and I want to pay tribute to the two colleagues working for our Police Mission in Afghanistan who lost their lives in Friday's attack on civilians in Kabul. Our thoughts go out to their families, to their friends, and to all those who lost loved ones in this attack. I also want to pay tribute to the courage and dedication of all our colleagues who work in Afghanistan to help the Afghan people have a better life. Today we discussed the priorities for our future engagement in the country and agreed that the focus should be on security, democracy, development, justice and human rights, in particular the rights of women and girls. We will be working to develop a strategy to be presented later in the year.

I wanted to cite one particular item that we added to the agenda because we were very worried about developments in Ukraine. We are very concerned by the legislation adopted by the Parliament last week, which significantly restricts the fundamental rights of citizens in Ukraine. And we urge the authorities to ensure that this legislation is reversed and brought into line with Ukraine's European and international commitments. We are also concerned about events over the weekend. It is absolutely vital that all sides engage in inclusive dialogue to find a democratic solution to this political crisis.

### **Questions and Answers**

#### *Question on Iran*

I think you talked about momentum, Laurence, and that's exactly what we need to do but we should build on the momentum that we have and start moving towards a significant dialogue and negotiation in the next few weeks. I have said we would like to begin that in February. We will be discussing with the E3+3 tomorrow the timeframe and of course talking with Iran about that. And it is important to keep that momentum and I would like to see it move swiftly towards trying to reach agreements. But I am very very mindful, and to take your second point, that there are many difficult issues to discuss. I am not going to say which one I think is the most difficult at this point and I don't think that you are expecting me doing that. But suffice to say that we have to first of all identify the different elements that we need to discuss and talk this through both within the E 3+3 but also of course with Iran. But I just want to make this point again, we should use the momentum we have got and try and deal with this issue properly, fully, comprehensively and do it in good time. And we will take the time that we need to achieve that.

#### *Question on Italian Marines in India*

Minister Bonino of course raised important issues and as you know we have been in touch with the authorities in India throughout the two years that this case has been unresolved. We continue to talk with our interlocutors in India about this, within the framework and guidance of the work that is going on by Italy itself. And we continue to hope that there will be a satisfactory resolution of this, and we hope that this will be resolved swiftly because this situation has been unresolved now for a very long time.

#### *Question on Iran and on Central African Republic*

I think the Joint Plan of Action says that exactly, who would do what over the course of the six months, so you can refer to that to look at exactly what would be done.

In terms of the discussion on Central African Republic, now that we have the concept agreed, Member States will be able to sit and work out the planning. I think some Member States – though I am not going to name them because they need to name themselves - have already indicated their willingness to be involved with this. Next comes the planning phase when the military planners can actually work out exactly who is needed and therefore that will have an impact on how Member States respond.

*Question on Syria*

When we think about the situation in Geneva II, the most important element as I have said is that all those who attend do so on the basis of the communiqué of Geneva I. And the most important aspect in terms of expectations is the whole question of how Lakhdar Brahimi takes forward his discussions which begin on the 24<sup>th</sup> between the different groups involved. I think the most important thing for us is to support the efforts that are being made to try and find ways to build confidence, to address the humanitarian crisis and the issues that face ordinary people in Syria. To look for a ceasefire if that is possible and to help to support the longer term plan that I am sure Lakhdar Brahimi is thinking about to try to get a lasting and future peace. And that is going to be extremely important. And I hope it will be the outcome from the meetings that we have this week in Geneva.

*Question on Ukraine*

The United States has been talking about what efforts it can make to support the situation for people in Ukraine. What I would say about the European Union is that you know from my visit there with Commissioner Füle that we continue to urge the government of Ukraine to consider that it has made its commitments to not just the European Union but also to the people. And in my long discussion with President Yanukovich, he and I have talked about his ambition to have an Association Agreement with the European Union to be able to make sure that he has strong and good relations with us and good relations of course with its neighbour Russia as well. And that is the approach that we should continue to take and we will come back to a broader discussion on the Eastern Partnership at the next Foreign Affairs Council. And that is very much the basis upon which we continue to go forward and you will see from the conclusions the strong urging that we have for the government to respond to this. And as always, we work closely with our colleagues in the US.

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