



Brussels, 18 November 2013
131118/01

R E M A R K S

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council

" Hello. Let me just start by giving you a flavour of the Foreign Affairs Council today.

First of all, I am pleased to see the preliminary results coming through from Mitrovica North, from yesterday's re-run of elections which went peacefully. And we look forward to hearing properly the exact nature of the results. But this is an important part of the moving forward of Serbia and Kosovo.

Our thoughts today are also turned to Libya and the deteriorating security situation there, which I have been watching all week-end, being in touch with our delegation and our staff here. And that will be a part of a broader discussion that we will have today on the Southern Mediterranean, a chance to review what is happening in Egypt, and to focus on issues, for example Syria and the countries directly affected by refugees, like Jordan, where we need to do as much as we possibly can to support them.

The unfolding tragedy of Syria is something that is always on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council. We're very concerned about the plight of the people, especially as winter is coming. The number of internally displaced people, the number of refugees, seeking shelter in other countries and increasingly moving beyond the neighbouring countries, is growing.

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We want to see a peace process. I said for the last two years that there has to be a way in which people sit down and find a solution that will bring a peaceful resolution to this conflict and we'll continue to work as hard as we possibly can to do that. We call it Geneva II because the principles were laid out at Geneva I conference. We need to get people back together as soon as possible and I know that the Russians and the Americans are working on this but I'll be also urging my colleagues to do the same.

On Egypt, let me first condemn the violence and killings in the last days. Secondly, we have seen some interesting developments in the country. We have seen the state of emergency changing. We have seen of course trials beginning and we have seen the potential perhaps for some form of reconciliation. I am hoping to receive the Deputy Prime Minister very soon. And we will have the chance to talk with him about what more we can do to support that. A mission I sent to Cairo has just returned so I am looking forward today to catching up with them. But we continue to stay very close to Egypt and to try and support the people of Egypt through this at times quite difficult transition.

We will also be looking at the migration issues. I went to the Justice and Home Affairs Council recently and discussed with my Italian colleagues a terrible situation they are dealing with; the tragedy of people being trafficked is just awful. It's incredible to think that people fleeing what they fear should end up in the hands of criminals who can put them in unseaworthy boats, send them off to sea and care nothing about whether they live or die. It's absolutely dreadful.

So what we need to look at are two things. One is how do we help people not to need to leave. Most people want to stay at home and they leave either because they feel there is a better life out there or because they feel they have no choice. So we need to work harder to try and deal with some of the underlying causes. And then secondly, how do we stop the traffickers. If people get as far as being put in a situation like this, how do we stop them and how do we try and deal with those who finally get to sea. So we'll be looking at that broad question with all Member States when we talk about the Southern Neighbourhood and I'll be asking Italian colleagues to lead with their thoughts and ideas.

I know as well that colleagues will want to hear more about what happened with the Iran talks. And as you know, I go back to Geneva tomorrow evening to begin the next discussions. The purpose of the talks I have with Iran are very very clear. On behalf of the Security Council, my role is to lead negotiations and discussions to ensure confidence in the entirely peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme.

Of course the Eastern Partnership Summit is coming up. Vilnius is really important to us. We bring together our colleagues and the Eastern Partnership countries, six very different countries, with which we have different relationships but which are very important to us. So today we'll take stock and we look forward to Vilnius, we look forward to seeing Ukraine there and to be able to, I hope, complete this part of the journey with them. They know what they have to deliver and they know that they have to finish and complete the work, the

benchmarks that we've given them. There are some elements currently in the parliament that they need to do but they also need to deal with the issue of selective justice and they know that that's going to be an extremely important issue.

And then finally, just to say that we will discuss Common Security and Defence issues. We have the Defence Ministers joining Foreign Ministers this afternoon to prepare for the December European Council which will be an important moment to reflect on our common security and defence, and for leaders to give us their views, their thoughts and even instructions on how we take this forward into the future.

Thank you. "
