



EUROPEAN UNION

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**Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton  
before the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (Gymnich),  
Cyprus, 7th September 2012**

First of all, can I say to Erato enormous thanks for hosting this very important Gymnich.

As you know, it is an opportunity for Foreign Ministers to meet under my chairmanship and to be able to talk about some of the strategic issues, to have time for reflection and to discuss issues in perhaps greater depth.

Quite inevitably, we will be spending time over the next 24 hours also reflecting on the events in Syria and other issues in our neighbourhood and beyond. Can I just say on Syria that we continue to be extremely worried and concerned for the people who are suffering so much.

We are working very closely with Mr Brahimi, whom I spoke with a couple of days ago, to offer him as much support as possible in his new mission. He is working with the Security Council, with the countries of the region, with us and with the Arab League. I will be meeting with him during the UN General Assembly later this month.

I spoke as well yesterday with Nabil al-Araby in the Arab League, and with other colleagues in the region and I know that my colleague Kristalina Georgieva will be announcing additional resources to support the humanitarian needs of people in Syria and in the neighbouring countries, working through the important NGOs of the region. She'll be announcing I think about 50 million Euros, but the details on that I will leave to her. That will be happening in Brussels, and it's yet another important element of the support we want to give.

We work closely with Syria's neighbours, and with the regional organizations who have a lot to offer both in terms of the political issues but also of course in ensuring that there is a process in place for the Syria that we hope to see come into being very soon. We are also working with opposition groups to try and achieve a position that is inclusive of all people in Syria and is able to unite the opposition in finding a way through for the future.

**P R E S S**

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We have to support the opposition in terms of getting them to come up with a political plan. We support humanitarian aid to the people of Syria and its neighbouring countries, where we are seeing tens of thousands of refugees coming across the borders. Although they are coping pretty well, there is no question they need extra support and I have already mentioned what Kristalina is doing.

Any use of weapons against the people of Syria is outrageous. We need to be very clear that we want to see the violence stop and that Assad must understand that he must go. There needs to be a transitional process. We have said to the opposition groups they need to come together and find a way in which they can represent all of people of Syria. It is very important that minorities do not get left out of this and that local people feel that the process that will come forward is going to ensure that they have stability and prosperity.

We'll also cover issues in our neighbourhood. I will be updating on Iran. I spoke to Dr Jalili a few weeks ago. We had a long and extensive conversation. I have urged Iran to look very carefully at the proposals that have been put forward by the E3+3, so that we can now move forward. I will be briefing the ministers later on about what I think we should be doing next.

Colleagues who have been travelling over the last few weeks will also be briefing on their visits, and of course I will be talking about my recent trip to Somalia, to Mogadishu and the discussions that we had there.

But the main thrust of this meeting will be to look at what we call horizontal issues, those issues that are so important for our relationships in the world and on which it is so important that we are engaged.

I've chosen two issues for our discussions: firstly water, an issue that for many years has been of great concern, and could become the most difficult issue that many regions will face, whether it's the discussion that is going around the Middle East, whether it's what's happening in Central Asia or more broadly what's happening as climate change affects the provision of water. We will look at how the External Action Service can engage to help support the provision of water for people across the world.

Secondly, education: I have what I call 'education in a suitcase'. That's to do with children who either have gone through trauma caused by disaster or trauma caused by conflict. We're providing education and support for them to get back into school. We know what a dramatic impact this can have on their capacity to survive a trauma and to ensure that they have stable lives in the future. I've invited the Commissioner for Education who is also the Cypriot Commissioner to join us for that important debate. Andris Piebalgs, the Development Commissioner, will be joining us for the discussion on water.

So we are looking at important strategic issues, which is the purpose of Gymnich, but of course also discussing the immediate concerns in Syria and the issues that have dominated the last few weeks.

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