



EUROPEAN UNION

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Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton upon arrival at Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 24 June 2013

Good morning.

Today we'll continue to look at the situation in Syria. Our concern is to try and push forward with a political process called by many Geneva II. This is an opportunity to try and find a way to stop the terrible crisis.

I think that in the discussions that we've had with President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov recently, I believe that they understand the importance of trying to get a political process moving. You'll know that there are discussions this week led by the UN, led by Dr Brahimi, who we're fully supporting. My Secretary-General Pierre Vimont went to see him in Egypt just before I was in Egypt, and I was speaking with his team while I was there, and we underlined the importance of trying to get this moving. In the end you need a political process. Full stop. You have to have that. It's very important that people gather in order to achieve that as swiftly as possible. It's not easy, I appreciate that, but the bloodshed, the terror, the horror that is going on in that country needs to be stopped and in the end negotiation is the only way we can stop it.

The important part of Geneva I was to try and find a way in which you could develop a process that allows the people to have a choice about their future. We've made clear for long time that we do not believe Assad can be part of that, in the sense that he could not continue to be in a leadership role in his country. But it is for the different sides in this to bring forward people who can come and have a discussion about how to go forward.

I think that Moaz al-Khatib has been very clear about the way he would like to approach that, and I think there are some good discussions now taking place. For us, it's about backing up that process 100%. The EU will be a strong partner in the process and we'll be a strong partner for the people of Syria long into the future, because this country will need to be rebuilt.

P R E S S

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We will also have a broader discussion about the southern neighbourhood, where I'll be able to report back on my visit last week to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and to the Middle East. There will be an opportunity as well to discuss the efforts of Secretary Kerry, which we are supporting fully to try and make some progress on the Middle East Peace Process.

I'm completely supporting John Kerry's efforts. I spoke with him again at the end of last week. I was in the region, as you know, last week and I'm very clear that he's thinking very hard about how to put forward his proposals. He will tell us all about these proposals when he's ready to do so, and I think it's very important that when he comes up with something, we all back him. I was heartened by what I heard in my discussions in Ramallah and in Jerusalem, in the sense that I think it's a really good moment to try and do this. I wish him every possible success and I'll be there with him to help him.

I'll report as well on progress made between Serbia and Kosovo. The Prime Ministers were with me again last week. This will form a big part of the discussions tomorrow at the General Affairs Council, but it's important too for Foreign Ministers to have a chance to discuss it.

I'm delighted that at lunchtime we'll be joined by NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen to talk about Afghanistan. It is very important that we continue to look at a long-term strategy to support the country into the future.

We will as well be joined by Commissioner Hedegaard to discuss climate change, which is a very critical issue in terms of the work we do, with over 100 states at risk from the effects of climate change - which is therefore an important element for foreign policy.

My view on Turkey is very clear. I've always believed that Turkey's future lies with us. But that requires huge progress on all the work that needs to be done, and of course I've expressed my concerns - as has my friend and colleague Stefan Füle - about the situation. We will have to see how Member States decide. It's in their hands, but my general view is that engagement is a much better option where you possibly can. Circumstances are rare where not engaging is the best option.

On Iran, we'll have to see. We've heard from the government. The President has said he wants to wait to have a new government in place before he moves forward on the nuclear talks.

I'll be meeting with the political directors of the E3+3/P5+1 shortly. We're just putting that meeting together, to look at how we go forward. But I really hope that we might see some progress. We put some good confidence-building measures on the table when I last met with Dr Jalili. I pointed out to him that it's really important that we're trying to make some progress now and I really hope that that will happen.

Thank you.
