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Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton following the Foreign Affairs Council

As you know, we began our discussions talking about three areas of Africa: Mali, Somalia and the Great Lakes, which all have different concerns, of course, but which are very important areas for the European Union. And we also had conclusions that cover a range of different geographical areas and topics, including on Bosnia and Herzegovina and on Myanmar. But I wanted to concentrate on three of the discussions we had.

The first one of these was to talk about Lebanon. I know a lot of you are very interested in that. So let me begin by saying how committed we are to stability, sovereignty, unity, and peace in Lebanon. We strongly support all institutions in their efforts to preserve peace and security. We also encourage Lebanon's policy of dissociation from the conflict in Syria.

Due to concerns over the role of Hezbollah, we have agreed to designate its Military Wing on the list of terrorist organisations. That does not prevent the continuation of dialogue with all political parties in Lebanon. We also agreed that the delivery of legitimate financial transfers to Lebanon and delivery of assistance from the European Union and its Member States will not be affected. Our position will be reviewed on a 6 monthly basis, which is the normal timeframe for review in circumstances such as this.

P R E S S

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We also discussed Egypt and the situation that I found when I was there last week. As you know, I have had the opportunity to meet with the acting President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Minister of Defence and also to meet with the Tamarod movement and the Muslim Brotherhood. In all of my conversations, I have underlined the importance of getting back to the democratic transition as swiftly as possible, the importance of release of political prisoners and the importance of an inclusive process. In our discussions today, all member states were supportive of us moving in that direction. We have been invited to consider looking at monitoring the elections that will take place in the next few months. We have been talking with all of them about the sort of roadmap they are putting in place, and we have been working hard as we have been doing over these months in support of an Egypt that belongs to the Egyptian people, fully inclusive and democratic in its future and the Council absolutely supported us in our work in doing that. And then I just want to talk about the Middle East Peace Process. We talked about the latest developments that have been taking place over the last few days. Everyone welcomed the announcement on negotiations. This is a crucial step. I want to pay tribute to Secretary Kerry for his tireless efforts. We just had an in-depth discussion with him by video-link. He confirmed the vital engagement and importance of the EU in the work that lies ahead. I also want to commend the political leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas and their teams. As you have seen in the conclusions, we want to do everything to make sure that these negotiations succeed and look forward to working with everyone to achieve that.
