



EUROPEAN UNION

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## **Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council**

Yesterday we had a meeting of defence ministers to discuss security and defence policy and you'll see conclusions on this adopted today. Today we began by looking at the Western Balkans and our relationship especially with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the desire to see progress in that country. We paid tribute to the work of our Special Representative Peter Sorensen, who is also head of delegation in Sarajevo, and the collaboration with the office of the High Representative on the ground.

Not surprisingly there was a great deal of interest in the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue which continues in Brussels today, into its second day. It finished at 10pm last night and began again at 11am this morning and they're still meeting. The purpose of the dialogue is to look at very practical issues that affect the capacity of those who live in the North of Kosovo to be able to get on with their lives. Colleagues in the Foreign Affairs Council were very keen to ensure that the message of the need to see the barriers removed and violence stop was understood and received by everyone. We also had a discussion about the potential for Serbia to come closer to the European Union and for the relationship in the context of the European perspective to develop with Kosovo as well.

In terms of Serbia, as you know I am in regular contact with President Tadic whom I met last week here for dinner. I know that he feels very strongly that it is important to stop the violence in the north and I am very pleased with the statement that he has made. What I have asked him to do is to make sure that from Belgrade they are putting the maximum pressure on those who are perpetrating this violence to make sure that the barriers are removed. I am sure that Member States when they will have their discussion in the General Affairs Council will examine what is being done and what is being said in what is their debate about the future.

We had a discussion on Iran, which was in two parts. First of all the continuation from the last Foreign Affairs Council to consider further sanctions on Iran. This is part of our ongoing concern as a result of the report from the IAEA, and the desire for us to see Iran taking seriously the international community's call to respect its obligation and move away from the pursuit of nuclear weapon technology.

## **P R E S S**

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We agreed to look at a range of issues including the energy sector, but the details of exactly what should be done now goes to the technical experts who decide what will work, what works for EU Member States and what effect this will have on Iran.

We'd also like Dr Jalili to respond to my letter which set out that the issues we put forward in Istanbul remain on the table and that we wanted them to come forward with their proposals or to respond to ours. We seek dialogue, but in the meantime we also will continue with the pressure to ensure that that's the path that they'll take.

Separately, but obviously within the same debate there was a discussion about what has happened in the British Embassy in Tehran and - as one of my colleagues put it - the consideration that an attack on one Member State is an attack on all. And I'll read you the statement that we've issued specifically on that: *"The Council is outraged by the attack on the British Embassy in Tehran and utterly condemns it. It is a violation of the Vienna convention. It also deplors the decision to expel the British Ambassador from Tehran. The Council considers these actions against the UK actions against the European Union as a whole. The EU is taking appropriate measures in response."*

And what William Hague was asking colleagues to consider is whether they could do things in solidarity with the UK. He was extremely grateful for the statements that I have made on behalf of all and for individual statements that ministers have made. In addition, some Member States have taken the decision to recall their ambassadors for consultations, others don't have embassies on the ground, and others are in dialogue with their teams on the ground to see what the appropriate thing to do would be. There was no requirement or a request for one single approach, rather each country should show in one way or another, its solidarity with the UK and I think the foreign secretary was very happy with what was said. So a two-part discussion, but very clear signals to Iran.

We also talked about the situation in Camp Ashraf in Iraq. I've appointed a personal envoy to discuss with the United Nations, with Member States, with the United States and with the Iraqi government and others the position of the 3,400 people who are in Camp Ashraf. There is an ongoing UN effort to try and deal with this issue and find ways to settle these people appropriately. There is a great concern in the European Parliament, in Member States' parliaments, with me and with others, about ensuring the safety of the people there. And we're in discussion and dialogue with all the parties I've identified to make sure that we play our part in supporting the UN as they take this forward.

And then my final remark on an informal discussion we had over lunch with Secretary General of the Arab League, Nabil Al-Araby. Our purpose was to meet institution with institution, to discuss with him the situation in the Arab Spring, and we particularly focused on the elections in Egypt.

We heard his analysis of the current situation in the Middle East Peace Process and the work of the Arab League on Syria and their proposals to Syria, their proposals on what we call sanctions but they describe as a boycott. That was a very fruitful discussion with a lot of support from the EU for the work of the Arab League and for Secretary General Al-Araby.