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## R E M A R K S

### **by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton to the Interparliamentary Conference (IPC), Vilnius, 5 September 2013**

*"It is always a great privilege to have an opportunity to be in this wonderful city and this is my first opportunity to stand in these walls which have their own important history for Lithuania, the whole region and for the European Union. I'm always delighted to have an opportunity to meet with parliamentarians, not just from the European Parliament but also from national Parliaments. Many of us met last time in Dublin and we'll continue our journey here today.*

*Each time we meet there is some subject that remains the same, and there are new issues that I know are uppermost in your minds. I hope in our question and answer session we will have a chance to discuss those issues that are most important to you, in the course of this afternoon.*

*It's also a pleasure because I believe parliamentarians play a very special role. Not only are you closest to the citizens that you represent, but you play a particular role in representing and defending the values that we hold dear at home and abroad and you can speak up in ways that frankly diplomats cannot. You work hard to observe elections and are taken extremely seriously across the world for the things that you say.*

*You share the knowledge and experience as well of the countries that you come from and the history which you have. And as we work so much more now with countries that we describe as being in transition, the contribution that you can make to supporting them from your own experience is absolutely invaluable.*

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*I want to talk about some of the aspects of that, when we think about the relationships we have in the Eastern Partnership.*

*I remember the television pictures from when we saw two million people linked Vilnius to Tallinn to Riga in a human chain, and what that represented not just for the people here but for people across the world. I still believe that's what they look to the European Union for today too: to strengthen the relationship that they have with the European Union and to have an opportunity in some cases to be part of the European Union and its future. Those who are closest to us want to join us, those who are further away want to imitate us.*

*With the African Union, with Asian countries, many conversations I have across the world are about trying to create something new in an economic sense to begin with, but more and more often in a political sense. Look at how the Asian nations have tried now to develop a human rights strategy. Look at the developments in the African Union where they model themselves largely on us.*

*What we know when we travel across the world, all of us, is how much people look for the same things. People want to live in dignity and freedom, they want to have a good job, they want their children to go to school, they want to be safe and they want a future. I've met people in so many places and they said the same things to me. They said we want what you have, you have democracy as a way of life. That's what a young woman said to me in Benghazi at the height of the war in Libya. That's been reflected in conversations, from Burma-Myanmar through to Egypt, through to Serbia-Kosovo, through to every country that is currently going through any kind of dramatic change.*

*I've spoken to this gathering before about what I call the importance of deep democracy. The countries going through transitions will find themselves on a bumpy and sometimes long road. Again we have in this room so much experience of transition and change, of the search for democracy, of the difficulties and of knowing that it is not something ever to take for granted. That's a strong and important message. Many countries look to us to show them how democracy can be developed. You have to dig the roots in deep and you have to continue to nurture them. You have to build the institutions of democracy because an election is not enough. It's a guarantee of the future of elections, of transparency, of administration, of all the elements that we recognize that make democracy work.*

*The Lisbon Treaty says "the European Union's actions on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation and which it seeks to advance in the wider world - democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity". It also says that the European Union's External Action should seek to preserve peace, to prevent conflict and to strengthen international security. I want to focus a little bit on how we bring together all of the different ways in which Europe can act.*

*We're better able to make sure that we are supporting political, economic and crisis management, fostering democracy, helping to stabilize countries and preventing lasting conflicts. I don't have to tell anyone here but when you look across the world there is no question that we need to do this more and the challenge is even bigger than we thought.*

*Right now we are faced with what I describe as an arc of instability that is evolving across our own neighbourhood from Libya to Egypt, from the tragedy of Syria to Iraq; August in Iraq was the deadliest month in 5 years. And we've just witnessed the brutal incidents in Camp Ashraf which I condemned in the strongest terms. I spoke to the new UN representative who asked to come see me to talk about how he can support those people.*

*All of the tools that we have and we can use have value. The basic truth should guide us. Whatever amount of political energy, time and money we spend on conflict prevention we will have saved several times the amount spent on dealing with the consequences of conflict. Not to mention the human suffering that can be averted through conflict prevention.*

*And, you know, I realized particularly in our modern media world, that sometimes trying to prevent wars doesn't get as much publicity as you would hope. The ever on-going work of diplomats, every minute of every day to try both to help people and prevent conflict is extremely valuable and often under rated.*

*We also need to continue to engage directly where we can make a difference. We know that we can help people to solve differences because we provide the environment where they can come together and we can provide support to them.*

*It has been especially true for the people working with Serbia and Kosovo. We will meet on Sunday for the 16<sup>th</sup> occasion. We can see the transformation that is on-going in the relationship between the people and the leaders and the capacity to now find the way forward; that means that there won't be a return to conflict and the lives of the people on both sides will be improved. They show great courage. They continue to show great courage. And last night we saw the registration which was necessary for the elections that will take place in Kosovo and we saw the support that is coming from Belgrade for those elections. Our role is to facilitate and support, but they would tell you if they were here that they could not have done it without us.*

*I also think about the work that we are doing in Egypt. Some of you may have seen the visits that I have made. I have been eleven times in Egypt since the revolution took place two years ago. But we went and continued to talk with Egyptians because we are trusted interlocutors within the country, within the region. They know that we talk to all and that our agenda is an agenda of support for the Egyptian people. And in the pursuit of democracy and freedom I will talk to everybody to try to help them come up with the political road map they need. We still talk to Egypt. Egyptians were in Brussels last week and we will be going back to discuss with them how they can still continue to do that in circumstances that have become more and more difficult.*

*We are trying to do it as well across our Neighbourhood, finding innovative ways to bring partnerships together, to put resources on the ground, to support the people, women's groups, civil society, helping to make sure that the electricity works, helping to support infrastructure that will give people better transport, helping to ensure the economic recovery which will be led, as it always is, in large part by small businesses starting all over these*

*nations. From Libya to Jordan, to Egypt, billions of euros mobilised for the purpose of supporting people.*

*And we will take the model that we developed there, the task force, to Burma-Myanmar in November, to use this mechanism to take leaders of industries and political leaders with us, all committed under an EU umbrella of working in the best possible way for social responsibility and support of the people of that country. And take parliamentarians who are close to Aung San Suu Kyi, with her team, with President Thein Sein, with parliamentarians, with our desire to see economic and political security for that country.*

*I also should mention the vital role - in terms of our intervention and dialogue - we play in the talks with Iran. I have already spoken to the new Foreign Minister twice. I am determined to ensure that if there is a prospect of a diplomatic solution we will find it and we will do all we can to ensure that the collaboration is effective. We work closely with Russia, with China, with the United States and with all European colleagues, but it is EU leadership in the work that we do.*

*I am also very much aware of the tragedy in Syria and although there are differences in some of the ways that we want to go forward, we are all united in some common things. The first and most obvious is that there has to be a political dialogue and solution and we will have to sit together. And anyone who says "that's the easy part" does not understand how important negotiations will be to end the war. It will be incredibly difficult but it will be necessary to do so.*

*And when it starts it's the best solution for people whose lives have been destroyed by what has happened, by death, by injuries. There are 2 million children directly affected by what has happened in Syria. All of them lacking the basics like school, a house, friends. All of these things are denied to children because they are either internally displaced in Syria or living in a country outside like Lebanon and Jordan.*

*We work with the United Nations, we believe in the work by Lakhdar Brahimi and his efforts, we've supported the initiative by Secretary Kerry and Minister Lavrov to try and get talks moving and we continue more than anything to be the biggest humanitarian donor in the world for the people in Syria and we will continue to do that.*

*And we also know that there are difficult times ahead as nations decide how best to try to tackle this problem and how to deal with the problem of the terrible chemical attack that took place on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August.*

*We also know that it is important to follow the negotiations that are going on in the Middle East, and again I pay tribute to John Kerry for his work. He will be joining us at the Gymnich meeting on Saturday in order to brief us on that and other issues. And we will continue to support those talks.*

*I want to focus as well on the work we're doing to support women all over the world. Because we believe that where women prosper, societies prosper and where they do not, societies do not. It makes no economic, political or moral sense to have half the population not able to contribute to the world.*

*I should, while in Vilnius, pay tribute to the work of the European Gender Equality Institute which is based here, and remind colleagues that we work closely with women in Egypt, in Jordan, across our neighbourhood and across the world and bring them together so their voice is heard, as we did with the women leaders of the Sahel region recently at a meeting in Brussels.*

*I want to spend a couple of minutes on the Common Security and Defence Policy. Quite often, our missions are about building the rule of law, community policing and capacity building. What characterizes them is that they are hands-on operations, direct in the approach that they take. Since the EEAS was established we've launched five new missions and we're constantly reviewing and adapting the ones we have. We have 16 missions and operations with 7000 men and women deployed in places like Afghanistan where we have 350 people who are training Afghan police officers, like in the monitoring mission in Georgia which monitors the situation on the ground and so on.*

*We do this in order to make sure that we are able to support the people and help them to deal with the issues that they are confronted with. And I am very glad that the European Council in December is going to pick up this question on what more we should do on Common Security and Defence Policy based on the report that I will give them by the end of this month. Defence Ministers, as you know, will join me later today to discuss this issue and it will also be part of the Foreign Ministers' discussions at the Gymnich.*

*This is about how we become an effective security provider and it's about looking at how we use our resources in Europe. We spend 200 billion Euros a year on defence and I think we can spend it better than we spend it now. We need to look at pooling and sharing, we need to build a strong industrial base to provide the capabilities, we need to make sure that it is also a source of jobs and growth and a driver of innovation.*

*And working with the European Defence Agency, we are able to do much to develop a working collaboration across the European Union in Research and Development, opportunities to pool knowledge to be used by all in a much more cost-effective way than it's currently the case.*

*Because you know that we face rising challenges, the financial crisis has affected budgets in every area, and that includes security and defence. We see the interdependence of member states when it comes to security and defence and now it's time for heads of state and government to help us drive this agenda further, including explaining to our public why defence matters as much as it does and to enable us to cooperate better among ourselves and with others. To work directly with the UN, with NATO, the African Union; with others who want us to help them and to make sure that part of what we are doing is in our capacity of building missions like in Libya, Niger, Somalia or Mali where we're helping partners to become more effective.*

*Colleagues, there is no unique recipe because every situation is different, but it is absolutely right that the European Union should look to see what it can uniquely do. We have a wide array of tools that we can use: diplomatic, security, defence, financial, trade, development, humanitarian.*

*My ambition is to make sure that they join up in a coherent way: To unite everyone on the EU side behind a coherent approach so we can work in a coordinated way using all our resources and our instruments, but using them truly effectively.*

*My final word is on the next time that I will be in Vilnius when we will be hosting the Eastern Partnership Summit here. It's very dear to our hosts in Lithuania but it really is extremely important for the EU. We know that the lead-up to Vilnius is going to be difficult. We have to ensure that our partners – perhaps particularly Ukraine – show that they can deliver on their commitments to reform. But we also have to recognize that they face immense external pressure. If we succeed, the Association Agreements, with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, will give our partners a framework they need for sustained transformation, in the rule of law, democracy, human rights and much better access to the biggest market in the world and the best standards that they can possibly have to modernize their countries.*

*I am convinced that we can open a new chapter in our long quest to promote stability and prosperity in the Eastern neighbourhood and draw them closer to us. And it will be a tribute to the work that we have all done if we are able to be successful with this.*

*Colleagues, I will stop there. It's a privilege, as I said, to have been able to come to speak to you. There are many topics and many issues and countries I would like to speak about. But it will be for me much more important to speak about the issues that you would particularly like to focus on.*

*Thank you so much."*

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