

Brussels, 09 March 2014 140309/02

## REMARKS

## by High Representative Catherine Ashton at the end of her visit in Iran

The main purpose of the visit was to, as EU High Representative, have a chance to talk to Iran about the potential for the relationship that we can have in the future. Many European Union countries' ministers are coming here. Many have historical links and this was about joining up the whole of the EU in thinking through the issues that we would want to discuss. Not surprisingly there was a big focus on human rights: I met with women activists on International Women's Day and talked to them about the situation that women find themselves in and some of the work that these women are engaged in, from journalists to those involved with Afghan refugees, people working across the spectrum of civil society and the importance of civil society.

And then thinking about some of the issues in the region, for example the real challenges of the drug trade from Afghanistan. Iran faces real difficulties there. There are ways in which we could work together to try and address that. And then looking into the future, the possibilities of all sorts of dialogues and discussions; again an example would be the environment. So that sort of group of different issues, things we may be able to talk about now because they're important to the European Union to do now, but most importantly things that could be, depending on what happens with the nuclear talks - inevitably that's been a backdrop to the conversations I've had.

One of the things that's been very clear is the support that is given across the political spectrum for the work that is going on currently in Vienna to try and move forward on a comprehensive agreement. That does not mean that we'll get an agreement; it does not mean that people are committed to any possible outcome at this stage, but I have had a real

## FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

sense that people are committed to wanting to see the talks happen and that, I think, is encouraging of itself.

It's also been for me interesting to see during the visit that people have wanted to talk across a spectrum of different issues and have been willing to meet with me and engage and that, I think, is important. Not surprisingly a number of issues in the region have been big focal points, but I'm at least encouraged that we've been able to talk frankly about some of these issues and I hope that if we are successful with the negotiations, and it's a big if, that we'll be able to start to move forward on a range of different issues with Iran.

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