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## POSITION PAPER

by *High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission* Catherine Ashton on the invitation of the **Forum for 21<sup>st</sup> century** calling a meeting regarding the current situation in Syria

Hereby High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission issued the following statement:

“First of all, I would like to thank *the Head of the section for Global security issues* of the Forum for 21<sup>st</sup> century for the invitation to be part of the discussion on actual and serious topic – Syrian civil war. The European Union (EU) welcomes offered space to express its position to this issue on the global platform. The positive experience from participation on the meeting with other international partners from the last two years organised by the Forum in Bratislava is the reason, why the EU adopts the possibility to attend the summit again. Additionally, I believe that together with all honoured guests we can reach the wide scale of alternatives to solve the problem of Syria.

Since violence and repression broke out in Syria in March 2011, the EU has not only called repeatedly for an end to attacks, but also suspended agreements intended to forge closer relationship with Damascus. Furthermore, the EU strongly condemns the mass killing of

civilians with chemical weapons on 21 August 2013, which, according to Western intelligence, resulted in the deaths of at least 1 400 people, including 400 children, while noting that different sources seem to indicate that the Syrian regime is responsible for this attack. The EU has reacted immediately to the violence by urging the regime to stop targeting civilians and to end the aggression. Indeed, the situation in Syria has achieved an intensity to which it is important to pay our attention and come out with appropriate solutions.

**The hostilities** are admittedly obliged to end their violent activity. It has to be definitely the main aim of the Forum and the EU hopes in mutual statement of all invited guests. **The EU welcomes endeavour of the Forum for achievement of such solution, which would be in compliance with international law. Any unilateral action against Syria regime or any one-side intervening in Syria would be considered from the EU perspective as breach of international law and more over – such intervention would bring unpredictable results with. Pursuant to peace-keeping mission the EU prefer to organize a Peace Conference prior to any further action. The EU endorses organizing of peace conference – Geneva 2. At the conference would be present representatives of the Syrian government, The National Coalition (opposition) and International Community as mediator. The EU calls on the opposition to come together and participate actively at the conference and encourages the National Coalition to take a leading role during negotiations.** With respect to all suggestions of the Forum, the definitive implementation of complete disarmament of the Syrian army and all other militant units is seen to be reasonable solution, but unreachable target in the short-term horizon. However, I trust that we can find the possibilities to convince the guilty party to stop all inhuman actions.

The EU welcomes the progress in **dismantlement** of all Syrian chemical weapons. The chemical attack is a blatant violation of international law, a war crime and a crime against humanity. The Syrian regime has to continue to hand over its chemical weapons and to place them under international control. This has to be fully worked up as quickly as possible including the details of its implications in terms of safe storage, verification and destruction. In terms of weapons embargo, there is a clear need to enforce this proposal as it was fully presented in Forum's draft.

I agree that **free and equal elections** shall assure the democratic future of Syria. All citizens under democratic regime of the state shall have the chance to vote for her/his preferred political party and nobody can be excluded having her/his passive voting right based on

involvement on the civil war and other well-known reasons. Election observation is a vital EU tool aiming to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide. By this activity, the EU can contribute to strengthen democratic institutions, build public confidence in electoral processes and help to deter fraud or intimidation in Syria. **The EU has multiple positive experiences with electoral observation in many countries around the world. The EU is prepared to share these experiences in potential general election in Syria as well.**

The EU recognizes **inspecting of armament sector** as potential element which would support cease fire in Syria but it recommends waiting for Report from The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which is currently inspecting chemical weapons producing sites in Syria. Armament-sector inspections are considered as very sensitive element in every peace effort and therefore the EU suggest making consecutive steps to achieve the objective of the Forum.

The Syrian crisis is the most dramatic **humanitarian situation** in the last decade and the international community cannot stand by idly. Moreover, almost half the population of Syria will need humanitarian aid by the end of this year. **The EU and its Member States are the biggest donor of assistance in response to the Syrian crisis, both in Syria and in neighbouring countries. In total, the EU has so far mobilised over €1.9 billion in relief and recovery aid from both the Commission and Member States,** but the worsening of the circumstances requires extraordinary measures. We need a common comprehensive UN-led aid strategy in consultation with host countries that includes humanitarian, development and financial support for the millions of Syrians now inside and outside their country as well as for neighbouring countries which so generously host large numbers of refugees.

To this end, the EU believes that a signed memorandum would represent the conjunction of all parties of the summit as a result of common attitude to Syrian problem. The EU hopes that these developments will facilitate the resumption of efforts towards a political solution to the conflict and bring peace and security to Syria.”

Catherine Ashton

*The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and*

*Vice President of the European Commission*