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Swedish Presidency of the European Union

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EU statement on death penalty in Belarus

It is with deep regret, that the EU has learned that the Supreme Court of Belarus turned down the appeals by Mr. Vasilii Jazepchuk and by Mr. Andrey Zhuk, who were sentenced to death this summer.

The European Union reiterates its longstanding position on the use of death penalty. We oppose the use of capital punishment in all cases and under all circumstances and have consistently called for its universal abolition. We believe that the abolition of the death penalty is essential to protect human dignity, and to the progressive development of human rights. The EU considers this punishment cruel and inhuman. It has not been found to act as a deterrent, and any miscarriage of justice – which is inevitable in any legal system – is irreversible. Consequently, the death penalty is abolished throughout the European Union.

The EU also recalls the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 2008 that reaffirmed its resolution adopted in December 2007, which expressly called upon

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all states that still maintain the death penalty to establish a moratorium on its use as a first step towards its abolition.

We call on the authorities of Belarus to commute these death sentences.

The two cases are in contradiction to the stated efforts by the Belarusian authorities during the past years to gradually restrict the death penalty. The EU continues to urge Belarus to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty with a view to its abolition. The EU welcomes the dialogue established with Belarus on these matters.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA* and the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO and SERBIA, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.