Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on the sentencing of Belarusian Presidential Candidate Sannikaw

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, made today the following statement:

“The High Representative strongly condemns the sentencing on political grounds by the Partizansky district court of former presidential candidate Andrey Sannikaw to 5 years of imprisonment. She is also deeply concerned about the harsh sentences handed out over the past days against a number of representatives of civil society and the political opposition.

These events are clear reminders of the significant deterioration in the respect for human rights and democratic principles in Belarus since the violations of electoral standards in presidential elections on 19 December 2010. There have been politically motivated harassments, arrests, detentions and trials of representatives of the democratic opposition, civil society and independent media. The High Representative is also seriously concerned about reports of alleged torture and other ill treatment.

The High Representative calls upon the Belarusian authorities to end at once the ongoing crackdown on the political opposition and civil society, to release all the political prisoners and to discontinue all politically motivated trials, including against the other ex-Presidential candidates which are currently being tried. She reiterates the readiness of the EU to consider further targeted restrictive measures in all areas of cooperation.”