Joint Statement by HRVP Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the sentencing of Human Rights defender Ales Byalyatski

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, and Stefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, made today the following statement:

"We deplore the harsh sentence pronounced today on the internationally renowned Human Rights defender Ales Byalyatski.

We consider today’s sentence as clearly politically motivated. It targets Ales Byalyatski and the Human Rights Centre “Viasna” for their courageous support to victims of repression in Belarus. As such, it is a symbol of the ever intensifying crackdown on civil society in the country since the 19 December 2010 Presidential elections.

We call on Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release and rehabilitate Ales Byalyatski and all other political prisoners in Belarus."