Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the sentencing of "Pussy Riot" punk band members in Russia

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

"I am deeply disappointed with the verdict of the Khamovnichesky District Court in Russia in the case of Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Ekaterina Samutsevitch, members of the punk band "Pussy Riot".

This sentence is disproportionate. Together with the reports of the band members’ mistreatment during their pre-trial detention and the reported irregularities of the trial, it puts a serious question mark over Russia’s respect for international obligations of fair, transparent, and independent legal process. It also runs counter to Russia’s international obligations as regards respect for freedom of expression. This case adds to the recent upsurge in politically motivated intimidation and prosecution of opposition activists in the Russian Federation, a trend that is of growing concern to the European Union. Respect for human rights and the rule of law is an indispensable part of the EU-Russia relationship.

Sentencing of the three young women, two of whom are mothers of small children, to two years in prison for a peaceful, if controversial, expression of their views, is deeply troubling. I expect that this sentence will be reviewed and reversed in line with Russia’s international commitments."