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21.09.2010

Council of Europe round table to discuss steps towards the abolition of the death penalty in Belarus

Date: 23 September 2010

Location: Minsk (Belarus) – National Library of Belarus

Organised by the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe.

Description: The round table will discuss the next possible steps towards a moratorium on executions and the abolition of the death penalty in Belarus. This meeting is also an opportunity for leading Council of Europe experts to provide the Belarusian authorities with concrete advice on how to remove obstacles to the abolition of capital punishment, strengthen public opinion support and mobilise professional groups in favour of abolition.

Robert Badinter, former Minister of Justice of France, will take part in the discussions and explain why the death penalty is wrong, why it has been abolished, and why it is important to promote the principle of universal abolition.

Participants include members of the parliamentary *ad hoc* group on capital punishment matters of the National Assembly of Belarus, representatives of the Presidential Administration, the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor's General Office, members of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court, as well as civil society representatives.

"Abolishing the death penalty must be accompanied by the introduction of an adequate prison system and acceptable alternative sanctions, where these do not yet exist, which provide for the highest possible protection of the public and take into account the rights of the victims of crimes without compromising the fundamental principle of respect for human rights," says the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe was a pioneer in the abolition process which made of Europe a *de facto* death-penalty-free zone since 1997 with the exception so far of Belarus. The abolition of capital punishment in Belarus would bring the country closer to Council of Europe standards of human rights, consolidate the legal prohibition of capital punishment in Europe and send an important signal to other parts of the world.

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