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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on Belarus**

The European Union was concerned to hear of the treatment of Alexei Shidlovsky (19) and Vadim Labkovich (16), who were accused of painting anti-government slogans on public buildings and statues in the town of Stolptsy, and who were sentenced to prison in Minsk on 24 February 1998.

The EU considers that the nature and length of pre-trial detention of these youths, the heavy police guard at their trial, and the severe nature of their sentences were disproportionate to their crime. The European Union urges the authorities of the Republic of Belarus to show clemency to these two young people, who have already spent six months in detention.

The Central and Eastern Europe countries associated with the European Union, the associated country Cyprus and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration.
