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Answer given by Mr Füle
on behalf of the Commission
(17.5.2011)

The assassination of Mr Rybiński attracted a lot of attention by the international community and by representatives of the Catholic Church in Tunisia.

Tunisian authorities investigated the murder quickly and located the priest's suspected killer on 21 February 2011. He is a Tunisian carpenter who was working in the school where the priest was found dead. According to the police reconstruction, the motive for the murder is financial, since the priest was the bursar at the Salesian school. The carpenter had stolen the money left in the school's cashbox. An act of religious extremism therefore seems to be ruled out.

On 21 February 2011 the High Representative/Vice President, made a statement¹ on the killing in which she stressed that the crime should be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. The statement also highlighted Tunisia's long-standing tradition of religious tolerance. The death of Father Rybinski had been firmly condemned by the Tunisian government and by the main Islamist movement in the country, Ennahda (Renaissance).

The European Union will continue to attach great importance to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief in the new context of the democratic transition in Tunisia. The Joint Communication on the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean² identifies democratic transformation and institution-building, with a particular focus on fundamental freedoms as one of the key elements of the Partnership.

With regard to the safety of Polish nationals with permanent residence in Tunisia and the consular protection of EU citizens in third countries, they should contact the relevant departments in their Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In third countries where a Member State does not have consular representation, EU citizens may contact the consulate of another Member State. It should also be noted that the European Commission and the High Representative do not have powers of criminal investigation.

¹ A 064/11, see http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/119403.pdf

² COM(2011) 200 final, see http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf