

**Question for written answer E-007889/2012
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)**

Rule 117

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Subject: VP/HR - 'Pussy Riot'

On 17 August 2012, three members of the Russian punk band 'Pussy Riot' (Nadezha Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich) were sentenced to two years' imprisonment after having been found guilty of 'hooliganism' for their performance of an anti-Putin song in Moscow's Orthodox cathedral. This disproportionate punishment is a clear demonstration of the suppression of fundamental freedoms and the use of force by a state that refuses to respect any critical voice and has used this case to send out a clear message of intimidation to all dissidents.

As Baroness Ashton has pointed out in her statement on the case, this incident 'puts a serious question mark over Russia's respect for international obligations of fair, transparent, and independent legal process'¹.

While these three women have captured international attention, it is important to recognise and defend the many other individual acts of expression in Russia that have been curtailed by the state. Freedom of speech cannot be limited only to those who attract support from the media or from artistic or political milieux. In its resolutions, Parliament has repeatedly given proof of its commitment to protecting the rights of non-violent protest and self-expression at every level in Russia.

The trio are now appealing the sentence. This is an opportunity for the Russian authorities to show their capacity for level-headed treatment of a minor offence by ordering the immediate release of the three condemned women.

What further steps does the VP/HR plan to take to ensure a fair, transparent and independent legal process for these women, all three of whom will be appealing their sentence?

Will this case be included in the next round of EU-Russia human rights consultations which is planned to take place in autumn 2012?

What role has the EU Delegation in Moscow been playing in support of the 'Pussy Riot' activists, and how will it support them in the appeal process?

¹ http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_12514_en.htm