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One step closer to Europe -Ukraine abolishes the death penalty

Amnesty International today welcomed the decision of an overwhelming majority of members of the Ukrainian parliament to abolish the death penalty.

“Ukraine has taken the monumental step of joining the vast majority of its European neighbours who have already removed this cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment from their statute books. This signals an important new commitment to protect fundamental human rights in the country,” Amnesty International said today.

“The speed with which the Ukrainian parliament has removed the death penalty from its penal code has been both unexpected and very impressive,” the organization said.

The Ukrainian parliament also took the decision to ratify Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention), which provides for the abolition of the death penalty except in time of war or the imminent threat of war.

Although Ukraine introduced a *de facto* moratorium on executions in March 1997 it has continued to pass the death sentence. Ratification of Protocol No.6 effectively means that existing death sentences will be commuted into life sentences and no one again should suffer judicial execution.

The historic decision of the Ukrainian parliament to abolish the death penalty follows a ruling made by the Ukrainian Constitutional Court on 30 December last year that the death penalty was unconstitutional, both violating the principle of the right to life, which is enshrined in the country’s constitution, and contravening the constitutional provision that no one should be subjected to torture or to cruel or inhuman treatment or punishment.

Background information

Ukraine made the commitment to abolish the death penalty in November 1995 upon entry to the Council of Europe. The government of Ukraine also committed itself to sign and ratify Protocol No.6 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention) relating to the abolition of the death penalty, within three years of its accession to the Council of Europe. Neither of these commitments were fulfilled by the Council of Europe’s deadline of November 1998 or its extended deadline of June 1999. In June 1999 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe decided to extend this deadline until its next session in January 2000. By this date Ukraine should have made substantial progress towards reforms aimed at the protection of human rights.

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