



**2021  
PORTUGAL.EU**

**International Conference  
on Death Penalty**

**MAY 4TH 2021**

# Portuguese Presidency of the European Union

## *International Conference on the Death Penalty*

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Portugal was a pioneer country in abolishing capital punishment for political crimes in 1852 and for all civilian crimes in 1867. While assuming – for the fourth time - the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Portuguese Presidency remains strongly committed to the global campaign against the death penalty. This conference intends to be a multilateral contribution to that effort.

The abolishment of the death penalty is a global and EU Human Rights priority. Achieving full abolition in the OSCE region remains a strong objective for the vast majority of OSCE participating States.

The death penalty violates the inalienable right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It disproportionately affects members of vulnerable groups, who cannot afford experienced defence lawyers, and death row prisoners continue to represent the most marginalized sections. Moreover, capital punishment fails to act as a deterrent to crime. Killing as punishment perpetuates a cycle of senseless violence.

The OSCE participating States have made a number of commitments regarding the death penalty, including to consider the potential abolition of capital punishment, to exchange information toward that end and to make information on the use of the death penalty available to the public.

The cause for abolition is reinforced by relevant resolutions and reports adopted by the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, including under the system of Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

In recent years the number of countries which carry out executions has gradually declined and an increasing number of countries have recognized that the death penalty undermines Human dignity and respect for Human Rights.

Statements and initiatives from the European Union, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the UN and individual Member States, calling for the abolition of the death penalty, are relevant contributions to this endeavour. It is also clear that the leadership by heads of state, Governments and other in position of power is important for achieving abolition.

It is hoped that the conference will contribute to:

- ✓ Keep the death penalty high on the national and multilateral agendas;
- ✓ Highlight the EU, OSCE/ODIHR and Council of Europe strategic priorities and initiatives against the death penalty;
- ✓ Improve knowledge of the legal justice system and institutional framework of the two OSCE Participating States that still retain the death penalty, both in law and in practice – Belarus and the United States;
- ✓ Underline the problems and criticism associated to the death penalty, including its cruel and unusual nature, irreversibility, the possibility of miscarriages of justice, the unequal and discriminatory application of capital punishment, and the failure of the death penalty to act as a deterrent to crime;
- ✓ Discuss the individual and Human impact of the death penalty system.

## AGENDA

**15.00–16.00**

### **OPENING SESSION**

*Opening remarks:*

**H.E. Mr. Augusto Santos Silva,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Portugal**

*Followed by:*

### **SESSION I – The Death Penalty - Multilateral Organizations**

*Keynote speakers:*

**Mr. Eamon Gilmore**, European Union Special Representative for Human Rights;

**Mr. Matteo Mecacci**, Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR);

**Mr. Christos Giakoumopoulos**, Director-General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe.

*Q&A*

*Moderator:* **Mr. Jorge Lobo de Mesquita**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the OSCE.

**16.00–17.00**     **SESSION II: The Death Penalty – Legal and institutional aspects**

*Keynote Speakers:*

**Mr. Andrei Paluda**, Human Rights Centre “Viasna”, Belarus. A former police officer, Andrei Paluda leads since 2010 the campaign “Human Rights Defenders against the death penalty”. He is a well-known Belarusian activist against the death penalty.

**Ms. Denise (Denny) LeBouef**, Attorney, USA. She has been a capital defender for over 30 years, representing persons facing death at trial and in post-conviction in state and federal courts. Denny LeBouef served as the Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Capital Punishment and John Adams projects.

*Q&A*

*Moderator:* **Ms. Anne-Kirsti Karlsen**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Norway to the OSCE.

**17.00–18.00      SESSION III - The Death penalty – Human and sociological perspectives.**

*Keynote Speakers:*

**Sister Helen Prejean**, a member of the Catholic congregation of St. Joseph, Sister Helen is a leading activist against the death penalty. She is known worldwide as the author of the bestseller “Dead Man Walking”, which inspired the award-winning movie with the same name.

**Mr. Michael L. Radelet**, Professor, department of Sociology at the University of Colorado. Dr. Radelet is the author of several publications focusing on the Human impact of the death penalty, including on the effects of death penalty on the mind and society, and on erroneous convictions.

*Q&A*

*Moderator:* **Mr. Carlos Brito**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal to the OSCE, European Union “*Chef de file*” on the death penalty.

**18.00 – 18.15      CLOSING SESSION**

*Rapporteur:* **Ms. Marta Santos Pais**, International Commission against the Death Penalty

*Closing Remarks:*

**H.E. Mr. Francisco André,  
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation,  
Portugal**

## TARGET AUDIENCE

- Diplomatic Missions to the OSCE, Council of Europe and European Union;
- Relevant OSCE/ODIHR, Council of Europe, and European Union Staff;
- Relevant representatives of Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders.

## SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

### 1. First session – Multilateral organizations:

- The European Union and death penalty;
- The OSCE and the death penalty;
- The Council of Europe and the death penalty;
- The relevance of multilateral fora;
- Challenges, trends, and perspectives.

### 2. Second session – Legal and Institutional aspects:

- The death penalty: legal ideals and practical results;
- The challenges of representing death row inmates;
- Punishment and legal torture;
- Inequality, race discrimination and wrongful convictions;
- The death penalty as a failed experiment;

### 3. Third session – Human and Sociological perspectives:

- Violence and retribution;
- The isolation and systemic dehumanization of the death row inmate;
- Facing the death penalty: the role of the spiritual advisor;
- Collateral victims of death penalty - families and children;
- Sociological trends and perceptions of the death penalty.

## MODALITIES

**Date:** Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**Time:** 15:00-18:15 (CET)

**Language:** English, with interpretation to/from Russian

**Registration:** Registration requests should be made through the following e-mail:  
[osce.portugal@mne.pt](mailto:osce.portugal@mne.pt) .

**Platform:** Zoom. The conference will be recorded and later accessible in the Portuguese Presidency of the EU webpage – [www.2021portugal.eu/pt](http://www.2021portugal.eu/pt)