Statement by Vice-President Viviane Reding, EU Justice Commissioner on the Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes

"Today, the 23rd of August, is the Europe-wide Day of Remembrance of the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Totalitarian regimes are the denial of human dignity and the violation of all fundamental rights of our societies built upon democracy and the respect of the rule of law. Most Member States of our European Union have experienced such a tragic past. This memory is the common heritage of all Europeans. We must offer the victims of those crimes, and their family members, sympathy, understanding and recognition of their suffering. Every victim of any totalitarian regime has the same human dignity and deserves justice, remembrance and recognition by all of us. On this day, all Europeans should be united in remembering all those who were victims of the atrocities and crimes committed by all sorts of totalitarian regimes. While nothing can bring back those victims, today must be a day to reflect upon and draw lessons from those devastating chapters of European history.

Keeping alive the memory of the past horrors of all totalitarian regimes is a means of promoting our basic European fundamental rights, in particular among our younger citizens and future generations. Confronting the inhumanity of those crimes and preserving the memory of those who were victims of those crimes must be a collective endeavour, shared and promoted by all of us in the European Union. We must therefore address knowledge gaps concerning the totalitarian past of all Member States, and especially concerning the period of time in which Europeans East and West, North and South were living different experiences. The memory of all those crimes should become yet another source of reconciliation and unity bringing together all the peoples of Europe. The European Commission will support, in particular through its financial programmes, efforts to remember, educate and improve our collective knowledge of those painful times.

The European Union is a beacon of inspiration and a source of encouragement to all nations struggling to come to terms with the sufferings of their past. It is an example for any reconciliation process founded on the respect for fundamental rights.

Keeping the memory alive is our collective duty as a sign of tribute and respect for all victims of the totalitarian regimes that have devastated Europe. It is also a way to ensure that it never happens again and that Europe’s people can never again be divided.
"The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail." These are the opening lines of the Lisbon Treaty and they provide a solid foundation for our common future and the Europe we want to leave to our children and our children’s children.

Today, we should pause to remember the victims of totalitarian regimes and to ensure that the memory of a dark past gives us hope for the future and to continue to build a better and stronger European Union giving hope and confidence to the next generations."