

EaP CSF Steering Committee statement condemning the unprecedented act of air piracy and seizing of Belarusian journalist Raman Pratasevich

Brussels, 25 May 2021

On May 23, in a despicable and unprecedented move, the Belarusian authoritarian regime forced down a commercial airliner travelling from Athens to Vilnius with the aim of detaining dissident journalist Raman Pratasevich. European Humanities University student Sofia Sapega was also removed from the flight and detained on the pretext of baseless allegations. Raman Pratasevich has been one of the key figures covering mass protests in Belarus through the NEXTA Telegram channel since August 2020, exposing the brutality of A. Lukashenka's regime against the people of Belarus. The Steering Committee of the EaP CSF strongly condemns this outrageous action from the Belarusian authorities that only confirms the regime's fear of freedom of speech and free media.

We welcome the European Council [Conclusions](#) from May 24 and the unanimous condemnation of this coercive act.

We call on the EU Council, European Commission and HRVP to put in place, without delay, the fourth package of sanctions against the leading figures of the regime and officials who took part in electoral fraud during the August 2020 presidential elections and subsequent human rights violations, as well as Belarusian companies that support the regime of A. Lukashenka.

We call on the EU Council, European Commission and HRVP to initiate and swiftly impose further sanctions on the masterminds and perpetrators of the kidnapping of Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega.

We call on EU member states and EaP countries to suspend international aviation agreements that allow flights to enter or leave Belarusian air space. We call on the EU to coordinate these steps with allied Western countries.

We call on the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to immediately start an investigation into this act of state-sponsored aviation piracy.

We call on the European External Action Service and the diplomatic representations of EU member states in Minsk to monitor the situations of the kidnapped persons and provide them with legal and any further assistance.

We call on the EU member states and the European Commission to take stock of the upcoming Covid-19 pandemic recovery payouts to the Belarusian regime, including those to be made through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and to stop these payments.

We call on the EU member states, European External Action Service and the European Commission to keep following the situation of the repressed Belarusian journalists, activists and civil society representatives who are facing increasing pressure and hostile actions from the regime. The ongoing EU support to free media and civil society as well as visa and



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relocation assistance has to be stepped up in relation to the regime's actions against its opponents.

We call on the Belarusian authorities to swiftly release Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega.

***Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society
Forum***