

BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES MUST RELEASE RAMAN PRATASEVICH IMMEDIATELY

27 May 2021

Statement by the Civic Solidarity Platform

We, the undersigned organisations, members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, are appalled by the illegal airplane diversion by the Belarusian authorities resulting in the arbitrary arrest of Raman Pratasevich, the Belarusian blogger and journalist, and his companion Sofia Sapega. The use of a military airplane armed with missiles to force the plane to change the route and land causes our particular concern. Lives of the passengers and the crew were put in danger. Actions by the Belarusian authorities clearly violated international legal norms and could be qualified as an act of piracy. We demand an immediate release of Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega, holding of an impartial international investigation of the incident, and taking effective measures by the international community to bring perpetrators to justice and prevent such dangerous incidents from happening.

On 23 May 2021, following the [forcible diversion and landing](#) in Minsk of a commercial Ryanair flight travelling between two member states of the European Union, Belarusian authorities unlawfully arrested and detained Belarusian blogger and journalist, Raman Pratasevich. These actions were committed in blatant disregard of the country's obligations under international law, and in violation of the rights of all those on board.

This instance of abduction of Mr. Pratasevich was quickly followed by the signing of a [new law radically restricting media activities in Belarus](#) by Aliaksandr Lukashenka on 24 May 2021. According to the new legislation, media, among others, are prohibited from making live reports about unauthorized demonstrations and from publishing the results of opinion polls which have not been authorized by the government. Moreover, media can now also be closed by the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus without a court hearing.

Raman Pratasevich is being prosecuted for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of borders. This attack is yet further evidence of the profound human rights crisis ongoing in Belarus, and the unprecedented level of political repression against any and all who express dissent with regard to the political situation in the country. The criticism levied against the Belarusian authorities by Raman Pratasevich as a part of his professional activities can never serve as sufficient grounds for restricting the legitimate exercise of his fundamental freedoms. Such an abuse of power by the Belarusian authorities must cease immediately. Pratasevich faces up to 15 years of prison term on the grounds of politically-motivated charges against him. There are serious reasons to believe that he will face torture and inhuman treatment at the hands of Belarusian authorities.

The Civic Solidarity Platform calls on the Belarusian authorities to immediately release Raman Pratasevich and his companion, Sofia Sapega, and to drop all criminal charges against them. Both should be allowed to continue their travel to the country of their choice. We also call for the immediate release of all other political prisoners and for an end to the political repression in the country.

The Civic Solidarity Platform welcomes the strong response from the [OSCE Chairpersonship](#), the [OSCE Parliamentary Assembly](#) and participating States. The Platform urges OSCE executive and political bodies, institutions and participating States to take active public, diplomatic and other steps to unequivocally establish the unacceptability of airplane interceptions to capture political opponents. The cases of Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega and other political prisoners should be monitored and the importance stressed of timely provision of legal and other assistance to them. The Lukashenka regime should continuously be requested to follow OSCE standards in dealing with journalists, activists, lawyers, and civil society representatives.

We welcome the unanimous response from the European Council, and the shock expressed by EU Member States, and call on the EU to introduce without any delays the fourth package of sanctions against those individuals and entities involved in the ongoing human rights violations in Belarus as well as entities that financially sustain the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka. We urge other OSCE participating States and members of the international community to take similar steps.

List of CSP member organisations supporting the statement:

1. The Swedish OSCE-network, Sweden
2. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Bulgaria
3. DRA Berlin, Germany
4. Netherlands Helsinki Committee, Netherlands
5. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), international NGO
6. Human Rights Club, Azerbaijan
7. Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia
8. Legal Policy Research Centre, Kazakhstan
9. Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Norway
10. Sova Center for Information and Analysis, Russia
11. Public Verdict Foundation, Russia
12. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor, Armenia
13. Public Association "Dignity", Kazakhstan
14. Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungary
15. ARTICLE 19, United Kingdom
16. Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, Azerbaijan/Switzerland
17. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland
18. Kharkiv regional foundation Public Alternative, Ukraine
19. Belarusian Helsinki Committee, Belarus
20. The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House, Lithuania
21. Crude Accountability, USA
22. Women of the Don, Russia

23. The Human Rights Center (HRC), Georgia
24. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law
25. Association UMDPL, Ukraine
26. Citizens' Watch, Russia
27. Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Lithuania
28. Human Rights Center ZMINA, Ukraine
29. Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine
30. Macedonian Helsinki Committee, North Macedonia
31. Human Rights Center Memorial, Russia
32. Public Association Dignity, Kazakhstan
33. Albanian Helsinki Committee, Albania
34. Swiss Helsinki Committee, Switzerland
35. Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan
36. humanrights.ch, Switzerland
37. Human Rights in Mental Health-FGIP, Netherlands
38. Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan"
39. International Partnership for Human Rights, Belgium
40. Belarusian Association of Journalists, Belarus
41. Libereco Partnership of Human Rights, Germany/Switzerland
42. Center for Participation and Development, Georgia

List of organisations supporting the statement:

1. Law Initiative, Belarus
2. FORB Initiative, Belarus
3. Civic Assistance Committee, Russia
4. Belarusian PEN, Belarus