



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU on the forced landing of Ryanair flight FR4978 in Minsk

Mr. Chair, on 23 May, the Belarusian authorities, in an inadmissible step and in unacceptable way, forced a civilian plane to perform an emergency landing in Minsk. The plane, owned by an EU company, registered in an EU Member State, flying between two EU capitals and carrying more than 120 passengers, was forced to land by a Belarusian military aircraft.

Two flight passengers, Mr Raman Pratasevich, a Belarusian journalist and co-founder of independent information outlet NEXTA and his associate, a Russian citizen Ms. Sofia Sapega, were detained by the Belarusian authorities and prevented from boarding the plane at the Minsk airport to its original destination.

We strongly condemn the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk on 23 May endangering aviation safety, and the detention by Belarusian authorities of journalist Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega. Such outrageous and illegal action cannot in any circumstances be used or justified by any state. This is also another blatant attempt by the Belarusian authorities to silence all opposition voices and free media, which fits into a broader picture of widespread repression in Belarus. We urge the Belarusian authorities to immediately release Mr Pratasevich and Ms Sapega and to fully guarantee their rights, including freedom of movement. We are deeply concerned about Mr Pratasevich's treatment in detention, where the use of torture by security forces has been widely documented, in particular following the recent death in prison of another political prisoner Vitold Ashurak.

In carrying out this coercive act, the Belarusian authorities have jeopardised the safety of passengers and crew. An urgent investigation into this unprecedented and unacceptable incident by the International Civil Aviation Organization should be carried out to ascertain any breach of international aviation rules.

On 24 May, the European Council announced the EU's intention to ban overflight of EU airspace by Belarusian airlines and prevent access to EU airports of flights operated by such airlines. The EU will also impose further restrictive measures against Belarus, including targeted economic sanctions and additional listing of individuals and entities involved in the forced landing of a Ryanair flight. The European Council also called on the EU-based carriers to avoid overflight of Belarus.

The EU stands in full solidarity with Latvia following the unjustified expulsion of Latvian diplomats.

The EU also reiterates its unwavering support to the democratic aspirations of the Belarusian people.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, and the EFTA country LIECHTENSTEIN, member of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.