

Recent developments in Belarus: UK statement, 10 June 2021



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Madam Chair,

The human rights situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate. On 25 May the UK spoke in this Council to condemn the forced landing of Ryanair Flight FR4978 in Minsk and the subsequent arrest of the journalist Roman Protasevich and his partner, Sofia Sapega.

The UK and many other participating States have justifiably condemned that act as an assault on human rights, press freedom, international law and civil aviation, and called for the immediate and safe release of Mr Protasevich and Ms Sapega. The Belarusian authorities have ignored those calls and instead released harrowing public broadcasts of Mr Protasevich and Ms Sapega, while under detention. The UK unequivocally condemns these acts including the staged appearance of Mr Protasevich broadcast on television on 3 June. It is clear that Mr Protasevich is distressed, under duress and shows visible evidence of physical mistreatment. Those responsible for these acts must be held to account. The UK agrees with the 4 June statement by the Director of ODIHR, Matteo Mecacci, that these broadcasts are deeply disturbing, prohibited under international law and a violation of Mr Protasevich's and Ms Sapega's right to a fair trial. We join Director Mecacci in calling for their immediate and safe release.

Further tragic examples of mistreatment in Belarusian prisons continue to be reported. Stepan Latypov stabbed himself after being held in custody since September and complaining of long term ill treatment and threats of criminal investigations into his family and friends. Vitold Ashurok tragically died in

prison. The Belarusian authorities claim he died of heart failure but his family claim he was healthy before being admitted to prison, did not receive proper medical assistance, and that his body was released with his head swathed in bandages

The UK calls for proper, transparent and independent investigations into all reports of mistreatment and violations of human rights. We continue to call for the release of all political detainees and journalists and those imprisoned for voicing opposition to the Lukashenko regime.

Madam Chair,

We continue to support the offer of the current and previous OSCE Chairpersons-in-Office to facilitate a genuine national dialogue and urge the Belarusian authorities to take up this offer. We also remind the Belarusian authorities, and this Permanent Council, that the recommendations of the independent report under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, provides a clear roadmap to end the political and human rights crisis that engulfs Belarus.

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