

Andrei Shved

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Dear Prosecutor General,

I am writing to demand the immediate release of **Raman Pratasevich** and **Sofia Sapega**, arrested on 23 May 2021 after their Athens-Vilnius flight was forcibly diverted by the Belarusian authorities to Minsk under false pretext. Raman Pratasevich was charged under Articles 293(1) (“Organization of mass disorders”), 342(1) (“Organization or active participation in group actions that severely violate public order”) and 130(3) (“Incitement of racial, ethnic, religious or other social hatred or enmity”) of the Criminal Code. The grounds for Sofia Sapega’s arrest have not been disclosed. It appears that they have been detained in retaliation for Raman Pratasevich’s critical journalistic work.

There is no evidence that Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega have committed an internationally recognized crime, and their detention is arbitrary. Their arrest was conducted in an unlawful and reckless manner, putting all passengers of the plane at risk when a Belarusian Air Force fighter jet diverted their flight and escorted it to Minsk.

On 24 May, Belarusian state television broadcast Raman Pratasevich’s self-incriminating statement in front of a camera with clear bruises on his face. I am concerned that this “confession” may have been extracted by force. Amnesty International has documented widespread use of torture and other ill-treatment in Belarus, violations of the right to a fair trial, and arbitrary prosecution of peaceful protesters and independent journalists in Belarus.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- **Immediately and unconditionally release Raman Pratasevich, Sofia Sapega and all those who have been arbitrarily detained and imprisoned in Belarus under trumped-up politically motivated charges in retaliation for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly;**
- **Take immediate steps to protect Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sapega from torture and other ill-treatment, including by launching an effective investigation into credible allegations of torture, and ensuring they have immediate, unimpeded and confidential access to a lawyer of their choice.**

Yours sincerely,