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Detained Belarus Activist Roman Protasevich Filmed 'Confessing'

By AFP

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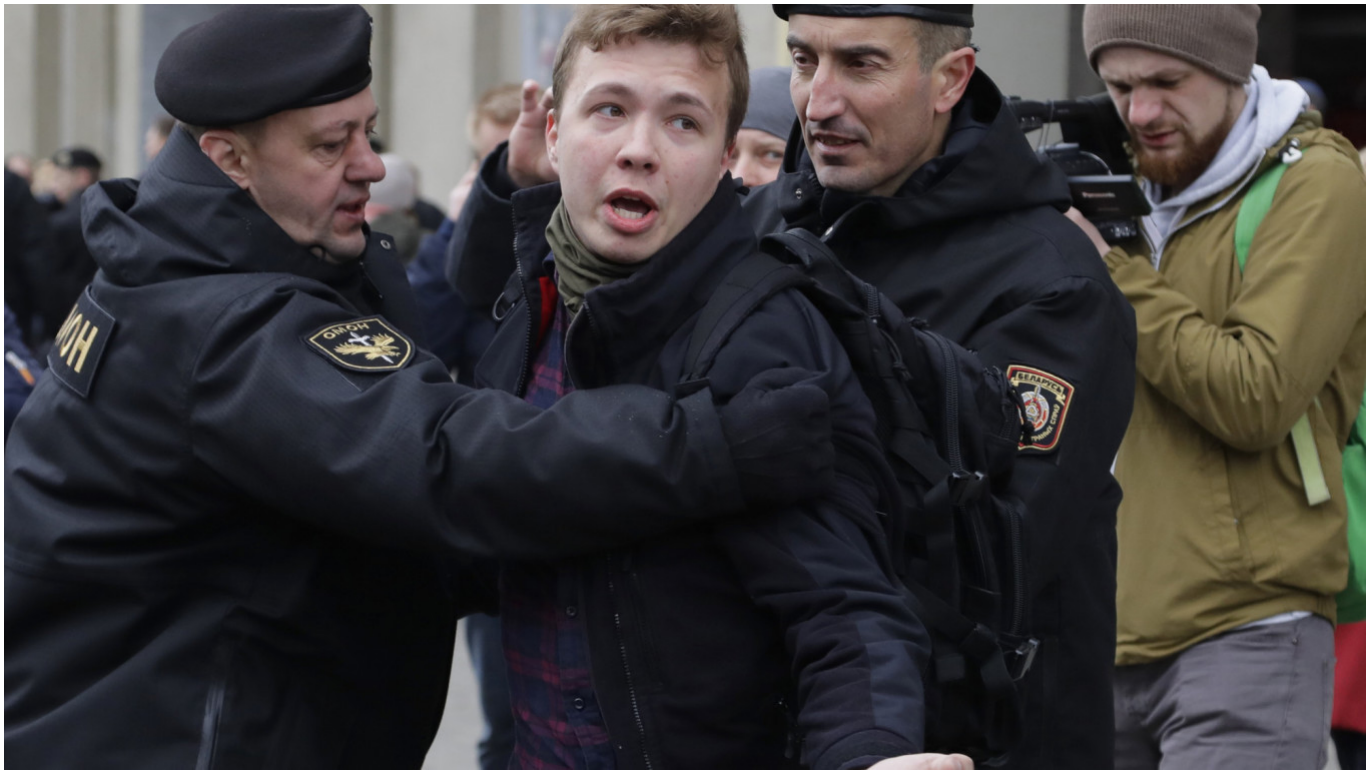

Roman Protasevich being detained at a protest in 2017. **AP/TASS**

Arrested Belarusian opposition blogger Roman Protasevich, who was on the diverted Ryanair flight, says he is cooperating and admitting to charges of organizing protests in a video circulated by state TV channels on Monday.

The passenger flight from Athens to Vilnius was diverted while in Belarusian airspace on Sunday over a supposed bomb threat, prompting a global outcry to Minsk's forced landing of the aircraft.

"I am in Detention Center no. 1 in Minsk. I can say that I have no health problems, including with my heart or any other organs," Protasevich said in the clip that appears to have been filmed on a phone camera.

The 26-year-old is wearing a black hoodie and sits behind a table in a non-descript room with

a pack of cigarettes by his side.

He fidgets with his hands as he makes the statement and some dark markings are visible on his forehead.

Embed:

> #Belarus Breaking. Pro-government channels published Raman #Pratasevich video address. He was forced to say he is confessing that he was “plotting riots” pic.twitter.com/vhyIs6FmWC
>
> — Hanna Liubakova (@HannaLiubakova) May 24, 2021

"The attitude of employees towards me is as correct as possible and according to the law. I continue cooperating with investigators and am confessing to having organized mass unrest in the city of Minsk," he said.

Earlier, the Belarus Interior Ministry said Protasevich was being held in Minsk and dismissed unconfirmed reports he was hospitalized with a heart condition.

"The administration of the institution has not received any complaints about his health," the ministry said on its Telegram channel.

Together with co-founder Stepan Putilo, Protasevich until recently ran the Nexta telegram channels that helped mobilize protesters during the demonstrations that gripped ex-Soviet Belarus for months after a disputed election last August.

Protesters demanded the resignation of strongman Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus for over two decades and in secured a landslide victory in an election his opponents say was rigged.

Related article: Pressure Mounts For Action Over Belarus Forced Landing

The authorities unleashed a violent crackdown on protesters, detaining thousands, many of whom reported torture and abuse in custody. Several people died in the unrest.

Exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who ran against Lukashenko in the election, also appeared in a similar video published by state media, urging her supporters not to protest.

Physical and moral pressure

Her allies said the video was made under pressure and that Tikhanovskaya was threatened into recording it.

She soon fled to neighboring EU member Lithuania.

"This is how Roman looks under physical and moral pressure," Tikhanovskaya said on Twitter on Monday, commenting on the video, and called for his "immediate" release.

Protasevich and Putilo — who both fled to Europe — were last year added to Belarus' list of "individuals involved in terrorist activity."

In Minsk, they face charges of causing mass unrest, an offence punishable by up to 15 years in jail.

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