

Belarus to Try Russian Citizen Detained on Diverted Flight

May 31, 2021



EPA/Toms Kalnins

A Russian student detained on a diverted Ryanair flight will face trial in Belarus, the country's foreign minister [told](#) Russia's Kommersant business daily Monday.

Sofia Sapega, 23, was arrested with dissident journalist boyfriend Roman Protasevich on May 23 when Belarusian authorities scrambled a military jet to divert the passenger plane over an alleged bomb threat.

"Most likely, [Sapega's] trial will take place in Belarus, given that all the information about the subversive activities of certain individuals came into our structures," Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei told Kommersant.

BBC's Russian service has [reported](#) that Sapega faces three criminal charges: organizing violations of public order, inciting hatred and organizing mass unrest, each of which carry sentences of between three and 15 years in prison.

Related article: [Putin Praises Closer Ties With Belarus in Lukashenko Talks](#)

A video that leaked on a pro-Belarus government social media account last Tuesday showed Sapega admitting to running a social media page that published the personal information of law enforcement personnel. Members of the opposition said Sapega's confession appeared to have been made under duress.

Makei said there are "different options" for Sapega, including being pardoned or extradited to Russia, a close Minsk ally that came to its defense amid a global outcry and Western sanctions over the plane diversion.

"The decision of the head of state can be made on both pardoning and transferring to serve a further sentence in Russia. We'll have to wait," he told Kommersant.

Sapega's defense lawyer [said](#) she will be formally indicted later Monday, according to Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Later Monday, a Minsk court convened behind closed doors and rejected Sapega's appeal seeking her release from pre-trial detention, the student's lawyer said.

The Kremlin has said that Russian President Vladimir Putin — who praised Russia's close ties with Belarus during his talks with President Alexander Lukashenko on Friday and Saturday — raised the topic of Sapega.

Hundreds of people rallied in support of Protasevich and Sapega in neighboring Poland on Saturday.

Updated at 3 p.m. to reflect new information.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/05/31/belarus-to-try-russian-citizen-detained-on-diverted-flight-a74054>