

Belarus NGO Denounces TV Interview With Jailed Activist

By [AFP](#)

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Belarusian activists protest in front of the European Commission office in Warsaw, on May 29, 2021, with placards showing the criminal code paragraph numbers that were used in order to detain Roman Protasevich. **Wojtek RADWANSKI / AFP**

Belarusian rights group Viasna on Thursday criticized plans by state-run media in Minsk to air an interview with opposition activist Roman Protasevich whose dramatic arrest last month spurred a global outcry.

Protasevich, 26, and his Russian girlfriend were arrested last month when Belarusian authorities scrambled a jet to intercept their Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania as it passed over Belarus.

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Belarus state-run channel ONT earlier in the day released a trailer for what it said would be a studio interview with Protasevich, adding that the "emotional" spectacle to be aired Thursday was not to be missed.

"Everything Protasevich will say was said under duress – at the very least psychological duress," Viasna head Ales Bialiatski told AFP.

He said that Protasevich will have been coerced into speaking by Belarusian security services because he was facing "unfair, but very serious accusations."

"Whatever he is saying now is pure propaganda, under which there is no truthful basis," Bialiatski added.

Western leaders condemned strongman Alexander Lukashenko for his arrest of Protasevich and Sofia Sapega, 23, who were accused of helping to coordinate historic anti-government demonstrations last year.

The European Union in response to the arrest banned Belarusian state carrier Belavia from operating flights to airports in the bloc and discouraged EU-based airlines from flying over the ex-Soviet country.

The protests the arrested pair are accused of helping coordinate erupted last August after Lukashenko claimed he won a sixth term in office following elections his critics and the West said were deeply flawed.

Authorities waged a brutal crackdown on the opposition and civil society, detaining and imprisoning thousands of demonstrators and pushing opposition leaders into exile. Several people died in the unrest.

After their arrest both Protasevich and Sapega appeared in 'confession' videos that their supporters said were recorded under duress and are a common tactic of the regime to pressure critics.

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