

Belarus Parades Opposition Journalist Before the Media

By [AFP](#)

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The opposition journalist captured by Belarus after the flight he was on was diverted to Minsk and paraded before the media Monday, in a scene the opposition denounced as Kafkaesque.

Roman Protasevich has already appeared in two controversial videos in which he confessed to alleged crimes — confessions dismissed by the opposition and his family as made under duress.

In Monday's news conference, which was organised by the foreign ministry, the 26-year-old activist said he was in good health.

He also said he had not suffered any ill-treatment in jail since his May 23 arrest and imprisonment.

"Never mind what he says," tweeted opposition Franak Viacorka, an adviser to the

opposition's leader in exile Svetlana Tikhanovskaya.

"Let's not forget, he's a hostage."

"This isn't a press conference but a scene out of Kafka, or Orwell," he added.

There was an international uproar when the Athens-to-Warsaw Ryanair flight on which Protasevic and his Russian girlfriend Sofia Sapega were traveling was intercepted by a Belarusian fighter and forced to land in Minsk.

The European Union has imposed sanctions including assets freezes and visa bans and told European operators not to use Belarusian air space.

But two senior officials at Monday's news conference reiterated the official line in Minsk that the flight had to be diverted because they had received a bomb threat from the Palestinian group Hamas.

Several Western leaders have dismissed this version of events, notably German Chancellor Angela Merkel who described it as "completely implausible".

Belarus has been shaken by unprecedented mass protests since the disputed re-election last year of Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled since 1994 with the support of Russia.

Lukashenko has responded with a crackdown on protesters, jailing many and forcing many others into exile.

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