

Belarus Prosecutors Seek 10-Year Jail Term for Activist

By [AFP](#)

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Roman Protasevich **AFP**

Belarusian prosecutors on Friday requested a 10-year prison term for an opposition activist who helped coordinate mass protests against President Alexander Lukashenko's regime in 2020.

Roman Protasevich, the editor of an opposition Telegram channel, was arrested in 2021 after his Ryanair flight was intercepted by a fighter jet and forced to land in Minsk.

The Moscow-allied country, ruled by Lukashenko since 1994, has cracked down on anyone linked to the protests, which were the biggest in Belarusian history.

Prosecutor Natalia Sokolova demanded Protasevich be jailed for ten years in a maximum security prison.

She also sought lengthy jail terms for two other exiled contributors to the Nexta channel, with

a request for Stepan Putilo to serve 20 years in prison, and 19 years for Yan Rudnik.

Sokolova said the shorter sentencing request for Protasevich was because he had "fulfilled the terms of cooperation."

After his arrest, which shocked aviation authorities worldwide, Protasevich is believed to have been coerced by authorities into issuing apologetic statements on state television.

As his trial opened in February, he said he was "fully guilty," in a video published by state news agency Belta.

He has been under house arrest since June 2021.

Protasevich is accused of a dozen crimes, including "inciting social hatred, organizing mass protests, calling for acts that harm national security, and "publicly criticizing" Lukashenko.

Nexta, a popular channel on YouTube and Telegram, had played an active role in the 2020 protests, which erupted after Lukashenko was accused of rigging an election.

The platform was banned and declared a "terrorist organization."

According to Belarus' independent Viasna rights group, there are now 1,500 political prisoners in the country.

The Minsk regime, reclusive for years, has become even more isolated after brutally suppressing the protests and allowing Russia to use Belarusian territory to launch its Ukraine offensive.

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