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EU Chief's Plane Hit by Suspected Russian GPS Jamming in Bulgaria

By AFP

September 01, 2025



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. **DPA / TASS**

A plane carrying EU chief Ursula von der Leyen was hit by GPS jamming as it readied to land in Bulgaria, with Russia suspected to be behind the incident, the European Commission said Monday.

The commission said Bulgarian authorities believed Russia was responsible for the jamming, which happened on Sunday, but it was not clear whether the aircraft was deliberately targeted, as similar incidents are common in the region.

"We can indeed confirm that there was GPS jamming," commission spokeswoman Arianna Podesta said at a press conference.

The chartered flight landed safely at Plovdiv International Airport, in the south of the country, without having to change route, she added.

Von der Leyen was in Bulgaria as part of a seven-country tour of "frontline" EU states, which, sitting on the bloc's eastern flank, are more exposed to what European officials describe as Russian hybrid threats.

The region has experienced "a lot of such jamming and spoofing activities," a different commission spokesperson said, adding that the EU has sanctioned several companies believed to be involved.

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The incident was confirmed by the Bulgarian government, which said in a statement that, "to ensure the flight's safety, air control services immediately offered an alternative landing method using terrestrial navigation tools."

The Financial Times, which first reported the jamming, said the plane was forced to land using paper maps.

The European Commission described von der Leyen's trip as a show of support for EU members "facing the challenges" of being located near Russia and its ally Belarus.

"Threats and intimidations [are a] regular component of Russia's hostile behavior," Podesta said on Monday. "Of course, this will only reinforce even further our unshakable commitment to ramp up defence capabilities and support for Ukraine."

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