

International condemnation of Belarus grows

by William Horsley, AEJ Media Freedom Representative

International condemnation of Aleksander Lukashenko's government in Belarus, and calls for harsher sanctions against it, gathered pace on Monday over the forced landing of a civilian airliner in Minsk on Sunday and the subsequent arrest of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich and his Russian girlfriend, Sofia Sapega. British foreign secretary Dominic Raab announced the UK's suspension of operations to the UK by the Belarusian airline Belavia, and of flights by British carriers through Belarusian airspace. He confirmed that what he called the Minsk government's "shocking assault" on civil society and the rule of law would be discussed by G7 leaders who are to meet in the UK next month.

The influential chairman of the UK parliament's foreign affairs committee, Tom Tugendhat, also urged the suspension of the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and the Yamal energy pipeline which flow through Belarus, and which he said provide the money that supports its "tyrannous regime".

The heads of the parliamentary foreign affairs committees of eight countries – the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the UK and the USA – have called for additional sanctions on the Lukashenko regime, as well as the immediate release of Mr Protasevich and all other political prisoners in Belarus, and the suspension of the country's right to use Interpol and other international organisations "to attack democracy in Europe".

Meanwhile the European Federation of Journalists has reported that the number of journalists behind bars in Belarus has risen to 29 -- almost double the number held just a few days ago. It demanded the release of all journalists there, and called for an official international mission including the European Union, the Council of Europe and the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) to visit the jailed journalists, and launch an international investigation to punish all those involved in the repression of journalists and media in Belarus.

Roman Protasevich had been forced into exile in Lithuania because, like many other Belarusian journalists, he has faced terrorism-related charges for his work exposing corruption and abuses of power. Timothy Snyder, the well-known historian of central and eastern Europe and author of 'On Tyranny', wrote in a newly-published commentary: "The state terrorism organized to silence one person [in Belarus] reminds us just how important reporters are. Without them... we have no chance of getting to the truth about oligarchy, war and elections, or about any issue that really matters."

https://snyder.substack.com/p/terror-vs-the-truth-in-belarus?r=1q55w&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email&utm_source=copy