

Diverted Ryanair Flight Investigation Concludes Belarus 'Unlawful'

By [AFP](#)

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Ryanair Boeing 737 SP-RSM lands in Vilnius from Minsk at about 21:30 local time on Sunday 23 of May 2021. Earlier this Boeing with 171 passengers on board operating regular flight from Athens, Greece to Vilnius was forced by Belarus officials to divert to Minsk while flying in Belarus air space. **Rokas Lukosevicius / imago images / Scanpix / TASS**

The United Nations agency in charge of investigating the diversion of a Ryanair flight by Belarus last year announced Tuesday it has completed its review, once again pointing the finger at the "unlawful" actions carried out by Minsk.

On May 23, 2021, a Ryanair flight from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Minsk, with Belarusian authorities arresting dissident journalist, Roman Protasevich, and his partner, Sofia Sapega, who were on board.

"The ICAO Council concluded its discussions yesterday on the May 2021 incident in Belarus airspace involving Ryanair Flight FR4978, condemning the actions of the Government of

Belarus in committing an act of unlawful interference," the International Civil Aviation Organization said in a statement.

The investigation was extended in early January to establish certain "missing facts" and examine new information.

The Montreal-based ICAO studied audio recordings of the Minsk air traffic controller who was monitoring the affected flight.

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The agency said that the bomb threat used as an excuse to divert the aircraft was "deliberately false and endangered its safety."

"The threat was communicated to the flight crew upon the instructions of senior government officials of Belarus," it concluded.

The statement added that the council representative of Russia – a close ally of Minsk – had "expressed his State's strong objection to identifying Belarus as the source of the unlawful interference which took place."

It said that the council, made up of 36 countries, had asked its president to pass the findings of the investigation on to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The ICAO's mission is to enact the rules governing global civil air transport, but it has no power to impose sanctions.

In the event of a proven violation of international rules, its role is to provide support for any countries wishing to pronounce condemnations or apply sanctions, in accordance with the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation, the institution said.

Last month, Sapega asked for a pardon from Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko after being sentenced to six years in prison for "inciting social hatred" and "illegal collection of personal data."

Protasevich is currently under house arrest pending trial.

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