



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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Tom Tugendhat MP
House of Commons
London
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| July 2021

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 22 June requesting the United Kingdom take further, urgent action on the situation in Belarus, following the Committee's evidence session with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and other witnesses on 15 June.

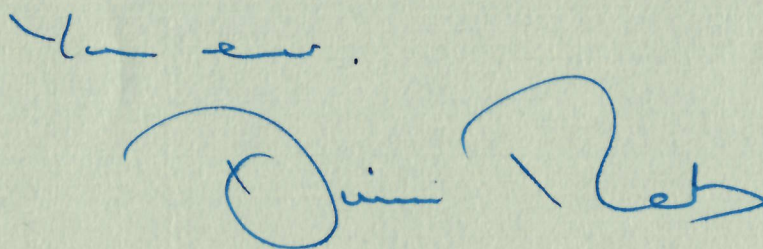
I would like to take this opportunity to repeat my unequivocal condemnation of the Belarusian regime for its brutal repression of the rights and freedoms of the Belarusian people. The UK has acted swiftly, robustly and in coordination with allies in response to the crisis in Belarus. We led partners in invoking the independent investigation under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism into the political and human rights violations following last year's deeply flawed presidential election, and are supporting all of the report's recommendations. The UK co-sponsored the UN resolution of 24 March which mandates the High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate the human rights violations and acts of torture, with a view to attributing accountability. Working in partnership with Denmark and Germany, we created and launched the independent International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) which brings together Belarusian and international NGOs to gather and securely store evidence against those responsible for violations and torture. We are committing over £400k to the IAPB, which is now supported by over 20 States. At this stage we consider these actions to be the most effective in responding to the situation in Belarus and in line with the recommendations in the Moscow Mechanism report, however, we will continue to explore all options.

As I said to the House on 24 May, we are acting in coordination with allies to take further measures against Lukashenko's regime. Following the forced landing of Ryanair FR4978, we immediately banned Belarusian aircraft from entering UK airspace, unless authorised, and advised UK aircraft to avoid entering Belarusian airspace. I welcome the decision of the European Council in taking similar measures.

On 21 June, we joined Canada, the EU and the US, in imposing further sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for the arrest of journalist Roman Protasevich and in regards to the continuing violation of human rights and suppression of democracy. This latest round has widened the group of those designated, including some state-owned companies. In total, we have now made more than 100 designations in response to the fraudulent elections and subsequent human rights violations in Belarus, including in response to the detention of Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega following the forced landing of flight FR4978, and we are also developing plans for further measures targeting specific sectors of the Belarusian economy. The UK has taken decisive action on global economic crime, including account freezing orders, unexplained wealth orders, new global anti-corruption sanctions regime and strengthening anti-money laundering requirements. We will consider further appropriate and effective measures to prevent the Belarusian regime from making money in the UK.

The forced diversion and landing of Ryanair FR4978 and the subsequent arrest of Mr Protasevich and his partner, was an outlandish attack on human rights, media freedom, international law and civil aviation. The UK immediately called for the incident to be fully investigated by the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). I welcome their decision of 27 May to do so. We expect discussion of the investigation team's interim report at the Council on 28 June, with the full report and its recommendations expected in the autumn.

I spoke to Mrs Tsikhanouskaya myself on 2 June. The UK continues to support the courageous efforts of the opposition movement in seeking a peaceful and democratic future for all Belarusians. We have increased our funding to civil society and independent media and will continue to use our global voice on the international stage to call for a peaceful solution to the crisis which recognises the Belarusian people's democratic rights and fundamental freedoms.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dominic Raab', with a stylized flourish at the end.

THE RT HON DOMINIC RAAB MP



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From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
King Charles Street, London

22 June 2021

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I am writing to you to request further and urgent action on the situation in Belarus. On 15 June the Committee took evidence from Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as well as two lawyers, a senior MEP and a former UK diplomat. They described a situation of rapidly deteriorating human rights, in which all national remedies have been exhausted. They also highlighted the danger to Belarusian sovereignty posed by Alexander Lukashenka's increasing reliance on Russia. They expressed the need for continued international pressure on the Lukashenka regime to hold fresh elections and to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice. Inaction would allow Lukashenka to continue to act with impunity against the Belarusian people and will allow him to have an unchallenged destabilising influence in the region.

This is an opportunity for the UK, as a problem solving and burden sharing nation, to support an open and resilient international order. We are able to mobilise multilateral mechanisms to protect the human rights of the Belarusian people and demonstrate leadership in this crisis that threatens the stability of Eastern Europe. We are persuaded that there remain some potentially effective remedies still available to the international community.

We therefore urge you to:

1. Seek support from other states, including Canada and the Netherlands, in taking a leadership role in orchestrating a response to the situation. Specifically, the UK could invoke Belarus' responsibility for human rights violations (namely mistreatment of detainees) under international law, specifically holding Belarus responsible for torture under the UN Convention against Torture. Should a diplomatic note reminding Belarus of its obligations fail to resolve the dispute, the UK should propose to submit a case for arbitration at the International Court of Justice.
2. Initiate a dialogue with the EU and other allies and partners with a view to extending the sanctions regime. This could include widening the pool of individuals and organisations sanctioned, potentially including state owned enterprises. These could be further bolstered by the sanctioning of Belarusian sovereign debt on the London Stock Exchange, preventing clearing houses from making this debt available on the secondary market.
3. Take forward any action with regards to the Ryanair flight as warranted by findings in the ICAO preliminary report such as adopting countermeasures against Belarus and insisting on the allowance of those detained to continue with their journey.

These actions, taken together, would send a strong signal to Alexander Lukashenka that the UK and the international community will not allow him to act with impunity.

It would be helpful to have your response by 1 July and I intend to place your answer in the public domain.

Best wishes,

TOM TUGENDHAT