

STATE DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR RELATIONS

United States Sanctions Belarus for Diversion of Ryanair Flight and Ongoing Repression
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On May 23, 2021, Belarusian authorities forced a Ryanair flight from Athens, Greece to Vilnius, Lithuania to land in Minsk in response to a false bomb threat and then arrested Roman Protasevich, an exiled journalist onboard the flight. The United States joined much of the international community in condemning the flight's diversion and imposing additional sanctions on Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's regime, adding to those levied throughout the last year due to Lukashenko's repression of opposition figures and others who have protested the results of the August 2020 Belarusian election.

Since becoming president of Belarus in 1994,¹ Lukashenko has centralized power around himself, disbanding parliament and then handpicking a new one, jailing or exiling opposition leaders, and amending the constitution to abolish term limits.² Press and foreign leaders, including U.S. President George W. Bush,³ have called him "Europe's last dictator."⁴

The United States deemed the 2006 elections, which netted Lukashenko over eighty percent of the vote,⁵ "fundamentally undemocratic."⁶ The election results and the Lukashenko regime's heavy-handed response to domestic protests against them led President Bush to declare a national emergency and sanction Belarusian officials.⁷ In 2008, the United States tightened sanctions due to Belarus's "worsening human rights abuses," prompting Belarus to expel the U.S. ambassador and most other U.S. diplomats from the country.⁸ Relations between Belarus and the United States had thawed a bit in recent years. In 2015, Lukashenko released political prisoners, and the United States suspended sanctions on state-owned entities.⁹ In 2019, the countries announced an exchange of ambassadors, and Belarus promised additional progress on human rights issues.¹⁰

In August 2020, however, Lukashenko won his sixth term in office in a highly disputed election, with the official tally showing that Lukashenko won eighty percent of the vote.¹¹

¹ James Shotter & Max Seddon, *Europe's "Last Dictator" in a Brutal Fight for Survival*, FIN. TIMES (Aug. 14, 2020), at <https://www.ft.com/content/4b9c32a1-2494-4f36-a10f-2777ec429e5d>.

² See *Profile: Alexander Lukashenko*, BBC (Jan. 9, 2007), at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3882843.stm>.

³ *Bush Calls Belarus Europe's Last Dictatorship*, CBC NEWS (May 7, 2005), at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/bush-calls-belarus-europe-s-last-dictatorship-1.569028>.

⁴ Shotter & Seddon, *supra* note 1.

⁵ C.J. Chivers, *Belarus Protest Dispersed as Police Arrest Hundreds*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 24, 2006), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/24/world/europe/belarus-protest-dispersed-as-police-arrest-hundreds.html>.

⁶ Exec. Order No. 13,405, 71 Fed. Reg. 35,485, 35,485 (June 16, 2006).

⁷ *Id.*; see also Chivers, *supra* note 5.

⁸ U.S. Dep't of State Press Release, U.S. Relations with Belarus (Jan. 29, 2020), at <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-belarus> [<https://perma.cc/D5BH-G2YP>].

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Belarusian Election Commission Says Lukashenko Was Re-elected by a Landslide*, REUTERS (Aug. 9, 2020), at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-belarus-election-commission-idUSKCN2560EK>; Isabelle Khurshudyan, *Belarusian President Lukashenko Wins Sixth Term in Widely Disputed Election*, WASH. POST (Aug. 10, 2020), at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/violent-crackdown-on-belarus-protests-follows-disputed-results-showing-lukashenko-re-elected/2020/08/10/cc56fb12-d9c2-11ea-a788-2ce86ce81129_story.html.

Prior to the election, authorities jailed two of Lukashenko's main opponents, and a third "was barred from running and lives in exile."¹² Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the wife of a jailed candidate, united the opposition camps and emerged as the main opposition candidate.¹³ Tikhanovskaya rejected the official election results, which credited her with less than ten percent of the vote, and filed a formal complaint with the election committee.¹⁴ After Belarusian authorities detained her, she fled to Lithuania, where she remains in exile.¹⁵ U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo called the elections "not free and fair,"¹⁶ and European Union (EU) leaders refused to recognize the official results.¹⁷

The disputed election prompted mass protests in Belarus.¹⁸ As the protests increased in intensity and numbers throughout the fall, with 200,000 demonstrators attending an October rally in Minsk,¹⁹ Belarusian security forces used "increasingly brutal" tactics against the demonstrators.²⁰ The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported hundreds of incidents of "torture and ill-treatment of people deprived of their liberty."²¹ While the Belarusian government claims that only one person died in the protests,²² the number of casualties is likely higher, with media reports of at least four deaths²³ and, according to Tikhanovskaya, dozens missing.²⁴

The fraudulent election and the regime's subsequent crackdown on protesters prompted the United States, EU, and other allies to impose multiple rounds of sanctions and visa restrictions on Belarusian officials in the latter part of 2020 and into 2021.²⁵

¹² Khurshudyan, *supra* note 11.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Belarus Election: Opposition Leader Tikhanovskaya Left "for Sake of Her Children,"* BBC NEWS (Aug. 12, 2020), at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53733330>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ U.S. Dep't of State Press Release, Presidential Elections in Belarus (Aug. 10, 2020), at <https://2017-2021.state.gov/presidential-elections-in-belarus/index.html> [<https://perma.cc/3ER2-SEWD>].

¹⁷ European Council Press Release, Conclusions by the President of the European Council Following the Video Conference of the Members of the European Council on 19 August 2020 (Aug. 19, 2020), at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/08/19/conclusions-by-the-president-of-the-european-council-following-the-video-conference-of-the-members-of-the-european-council-on-19-august-2020>.

¹⁸ *Belarus Election: Clashes After Poll Predicts Lukashenko Re-election,* BBC NEWS (Aug. 10, 2020), at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53717834>.

¹⁹ *Nearly 3 Months After Vote, Belarus Protests Still Go Strong,* AP NEWS (Oct. 31, 2020), at <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-ukraine-alexander-lukashenko-belarus-sviatlana-tsikhanouskaya-162a3c32cc000ba1e49e6bdf69d0d86f>.

²⁰ Bogdana Alexandrowskaja, *Belarus Police Get Rougher to Protect Alexander Lukashenko,* DEUTSCHE WELLE (Dec. 3, 2020), at <https://www.dw.com/en/belarus-police-violence-against-protesters/a-55804483>.

²¹ Off. of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Press Release, UN Human Rights Experts: Belarus Must Stop Torturing Protesters and Prevent Enforced Disappearances (Sept. 1, 2020), at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26199&LangID=E>.

²² *Belarus Protests Death Toll May Be Higher Than Official Numbers — UN Expert,* RUSSIAN NEWS AGENCY TASS (Aug. 14, 2021), at <https://tass.com/world/1189885>.

²³ Tony Wesolowsky, *Belarusian Opposition Looks to Reenergize Protests Against Lukashenka,* RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY (Mar. 21, 2021), at <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarusian-opposition-reenergize-protests-against-lukashenka/31160092.html>.

²⁴ Jacopo Barigazzi & David M. Herszenhorn, *Belarus Opposition Leader: Dozens Disappeared After Protests,* POLITICO (Sept. 1, 2020), at <https://www.politico.eu/article/belarus-opposition-leader-dozens-disappeared-after-protests>.

²⁵ *See, e.g.,* U.S. Dep't of State Press Release, Imposing Visa Restrictions on Additional Individuals Undermining Belarusian Democracy (Feb. 18, 2021), at <https://www.state.gov/imposing-visa-restrictions-on-additional-individuals-undermining-belarusian-democracy> [<https://perma.cc/Z7FJ-57AQ>]; U.S. Dep't of Treasury Press Release, Treasury Sanctions Belarus Officials for Undermining Democracy (Oct. 2, 2020), at

International condemnation of the Lukashenko regime escalated significantly with the diversion of Ryanair Flight 4978 on May 23, 2021. Just before the plane crossed from Belarus into Lithuanian airspace en route from Athens, ground authorities notified the pilots of a bomb threat to the plane.²⁶ Although the flight was closer to Vilnius than Minsk, a Belarusian fighter jet intercepted the plane and escorted it to Minsk.²⁷ Upon landing, Belarusian security agents arrested passengers Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega, a Russian national.²⁸ Protasevich is a twenty-six-year-old Belarusian dissident who cofounded and edited NEXTA, a Telegram channel that Belarusian opposition members use to share information and organize protests.²⁹ Protasevich fled Belarus in 2019 and had been living in Lithuania.³⁰

No bomb was found on the plane,³¹ and the email provider of the account from which the purported bomb threat originated later confirmed that the threat was sent after the flight was diverted to Minsk.³² According to a Belarusian state-owned news channel, “Lukashenko had personally given the order to land the Ryanair passenger jet,” claiming that he believed that there was a bomb threat.³³ World leaders blamed the Lukashenko regime for the fake threat, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel calling “[a]ll explanations for the forced landing of the plane other than to detain Protasevich . . . completely implausible.”³⁴

The flight diversion and Protasevich’s arrest prompted swift international condemnation and attempts to safeguard aviation. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called the diversion a “state hijacking”³⁵ and said that the “outrageous and illegal behaviour of the regime in

<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1143> [<https://perma.cc/T97N-27V7>]; U.S. Dep’t of Treasury Press Release, Treasury Sanctions Additional Belarusian Regime Actors for Undermining Democracy (Dec. 23, 2020), at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1222> [<https://perma.cc/EBH9-HS55>]; European Council Press Release, Belarus: EU Imposes Third Round of Sanctions over Ongoing Repression (Dec. 17, 2020), at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/17/belarus-eu-imposes-third-round-of-sanctions-over-ongoing-repression>.

²⁶ Patrick Reeve, *Ryanair Flight Forced to Land in Belarus with Top Activist on Board*, ABC NEWS (May 23, 2021), at <https://abcnews.go.com/International/ryanair-flight-forced-land-belarus-top-activist-onboard/story?id=77859336>; Daniel Victor, *What’s Happening in Belarus? Here Are the Basics*, N.Y. TIMES (May 26, 2021), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/world/europe/whats-happening-in-belarus.html>.

²⁷ Reeve, *supra* note 26.

²⁸ Andrew E. Kramer, *“It’s All Ruined”: Young Woman Caught Up in Belarus Clampdown*, N.Y. TIMES (June 11, 2021), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/11/world/europe/belarus-roman-protasevich-friend-detained.html>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Victor, *supra* note 26.

³¹ See Reeve, *supra* note 26.

³² Mary Ilyushina & Isabelle Khurshudyan, *Purported Bomb Threat Belarus Cited in Plane Interception Was Sent After Flight Diverted, Email Provider Says*, WASH. POST (May 27, 2021), at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-lukashenko-plane-email/2021/05/27/895b59d6-be5d-11eb-922a-c40c9774bc48_story.html.

³³ *Lukashenko Orders to Land Ryanair Jet in Minsk After Bomb Alert*, BELTA (May 23, 2021), at <https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-orders-to-land-ryanair-jet-in-minsk-after-bomb-alert-140132-2021>; see also Holly Ellyatt, *Belarus Leader Alexander Lukashenko Accuses Ill-Wishers of Crossing “Red Lines” and Waging a “Hybrid War”*, CNBC (May 26, 2021), at <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/26/belarus-president-lukashenko-responds-to-plane-hijack-for-first-time.html>.

³⁴ Michael Birnbaum & Isabelle Khurshudyan, *E.U. Agrees to Impose Sanctions on Belarus, Bars E.U. Airlines from Country’s Airspace, After Authorities Forced Down a Ryanair Jet*, WASH. POST (May 25, 2021), at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/24/belarus-ryanair-airplane-hijack-journalist>.

³⁵ *Id.*

Belarus will have consequences.”³⁶ EU leaders quickly agreed to sanction the Lukashenko regime and prohibit flights by EU airlines over Belarusian airspace.³⁷ UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab also condemned the “actions by the Belarusian authorities, who arrested journalist Roman Protasevich on the basis of a ruse, having forced his flight to land in Minsk” and called for Lukashenko to “be held to account for his outlandish actions.”³⁸ NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg similarly called it a “serious & dangerous incident which requires international investigation.”³⁹ In a statement on May 23, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said:

The United States strongly condemns the forced diversion of a flight between two EU member states and the subsequent removal and arrest of journalist Raman Pratasevich in Minsk. We demand his immediate release. This shocking act perpetrated by the Lukashenka regime endangered the lives of more than 120 passengers, including U.S. citizens. Initial reports suggesting the involvement of the Belarusian security services and the use of Belarusian military aircraft to escort the plane are deeply concerning and require full investigation.

. . . Given indications the forced landing was based on false pretenses, we support the earliest possible meeting of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization to review these events.⁴⁰

The next day, President Joseph Biden called the incident “a direct affront to international norms.”⁴¹ Biden noted with approval EU moves for economic sanctions and asked U.S. officials “to develop appropriate options to hold accountable those responsible, in close coordination with the European Union, other allies and partners, and international organizations.”⁴² The Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization stated in May that it would pursue a “fact-finding investigation” into the incident.⁴³

In a statement on May 26, Lukashenko denied any wrongdoing, claiming that he “acted lawfully . . . according to all international rules”⁴⁴ and accusing Protasevich of plotting a

³⁶ Ursula von der Leyen (@vonderleyen), TWITTER (May 23, 2021, 4:39 PM), at <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1396566441370001413> [<https://perma.cc/E6P2-WHM5>].

³⁷ Birnbaum & Khurshudyan, *supra* note 34.

³⁸ UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Dev. Off. Press Release, UK Condemns Actions by the Belarusian Authorities: Foreign Secretary Statement (May 24, 2021), at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-condemns-actions-by-the-belarusian-authorities-foreign-secretary-statement>.

³⁹ Jens Stoltenberg (@jensstoltenberg), TWITTER (May 23, 2021, 1:48 PM), at <https://twitter.com/jensstoltenberg/status/1396523402807107586> [<https://perma.cc/H5B4-CF2Z>].

⁴⁰ U.S. Dep’t of State Press Release, Diversion of Ryanair Flight to Belarus and Arrest of Journalist (May 23, 2021), at <https://www.state.gov/diversion-of-ryanair-flight-to-belarus-and-arrest-of-journalist> [<https://perma.cc/WD95-VLF3>].

⁴¹ White House Press Release, Statement by President Joe Biden on Diversion of Ryanair Flight and Arrest of Journalist in Belarus (May 24, 2021), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-diversion-of-ryanair-flight-and-arrest-of-journalist-in-belarus> [<https://perma.cc/3JAB-L92E>].

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ Int’l Civ. Aviation Org. Press Release, ICAO Council to Pursue Fact Finding Investigation Into Ryanair FR4978 (May 27, 2021), at <https://www.icao.int/Newsroom/Pages/ICAO-Council-agrees-to-pursue-fact-finding-investigation-into-Belarus-incident.aspx>.

⁴⁴ See Mary Ilyushina, *Belarus Leader Claims Plane Diversion Protected Passengers, Says Country Is Under “Hybrid Attack,”* WASH. POST (May 26, 2021), at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/26/belarus-plane-lukashenko-protasevich>.

“bloody rebellion.”⁴⁵ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused the West of hypocrisy, stating that “[i]t is shocking that the West calls the incident in Belarusian airspace ‘shocking,’” and noting, “[e]ither (they) should be shocked by . . . the forced (landing) in Austria of the Bolivian president’s plane at the request of the United States. . . . Or (they) should not be shocked by similar behaviour by others.”⁴⁶

On June 3, Protasevich appeared on Belarusian state TV with physical injuries and “appeared to confess to organizing ‘mass riots’—generating skepticism on the part of family members and human rights groups, who said that his demeanor and bruised face made clear that he had been coerced.”⁴⁷ A video of Sapega raised similar concerns about coercion.⁴⁸

Shortly thereafter, the EU and United States ratcheted up their responses. On June 4, the EU banned Belarusian airlines from flying over EU airspace,⁴⁹ and on June 8, President Biden renewed the national emergency relating to Belarus, which had been due to expire on June 16.⁵⁰ On June 21, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the EU issued a joint statement expressing their “deep concern regarding the Lukashenka regime’s continuing attacks on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and international law” and announcing coordinated sanctions for the flight diversion and “the politically motivated arrest of journalist Raman Protasevich and his companion Sofia Sapega, as well as to the continuing attack on human rights and fundamental freedoms.”⁵¹ In a separate statement, Blinken noted

⁴⁵ Tom Balmforth & Maria Kiselyova, *Belarus Leader Says Detained Journalist Was Plotting “Bloody Rebellion,”* REUTERS (May 26, 2021), at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/defiant-belarus-leader-accuses-west-waging-hybrid-war-2021-05-26>.

⁴⁶ *Russia Calls West’s Reaction to Belarus Plane Incident “Shocking,”* REUTERS (May 24, 2021), at <https://www.reuters.com/article/belarus-politics-russia-reaction/russia-calls-wests-reaction-to-belarus-plane-incident-shocking-idUSR4N2N901A> (alterations in original). The statement makes apparent reference to a 2013 incident. See, e.g., Kathy Lally & Juan Forero, *Bolivian President’s Plane Forced to Land in Austria in Hunt for Snowden*, WASH. POST (July 3, 2013), at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/bolivian-presidents-plane-forced-to-land-in-austria-in-hunt-for-snowden/2013/07/03/c281c2f4-e3eb-11e2-a11e-c2ea876a8f30_story.html.

⁴⁷ Antonia Noori Farzan, *Detained Belarus Dissident Breaks Down in State TV Interview, Renewing Fears of Coercion and Torture*, WASH. POST (June 4, 2021), at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/06/04/protasevich-belarus-interview/>.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ European Council Press Release, *EU Bans Belarusian Carriers from its Airspace and Airports* (June 4, 2021), at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/04/eu-bans-belarusian-carriers-from-its-airspace-and-airports>.

⁵⁰ Continuation of the National Emergency with Respect to the Actions and Policies of Certain Members of the Government of Belarus and Other Persons to Undermine Democratic Processes or Institutions of Belarus, 86 Fed. Reg. 31,085 (June 8, 2021).

⁵¹ U.S. Dep’t of State Press Release, *Joint Statement on Belarus* (June 21, 2021), at <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-belarus> [<https://perma.cc/D5X3-MJK6>]; see also U.S. Dep’t of Treasury Press Release, *Treasury and International Partners Condemn Ongoing Human Rights Abuses and Erosion of Democracy in Belarus* (June 21, 2021), at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0237> [<https://perma.cc/5LX3-7HLW>]; UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Dev. Off. Press Release, *UK Imposes Sanctions on Belarus Following Forced Landing of Ryanair Flight* (June 21, 2021), at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-imposes-sanctions-on-belarus-following-forced-landing-of-ryanair-flight>; European Council Press Release, *Belarus: Fourth Package of EU Sanctions Over Enduring Repression and the Forced Landing of a Ryanair Flight* (June 21, 2021), at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/21/belarus-fourth-package-of-eu-sanctions-over-enduring-repression-and-the-forced-landing-of-a-ryanair-flight>; Glob. Affs. Can. Press Release, *Canada Imposes Additional Sanctions on Belarusian Individuals and Entities Over Attacks on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (June 21, 2021), at <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2021/06/canada-imposes-additional-sanctions-on-belarusian-individuals-and-entities.html>.

that the coordinated sanctions “seek to promote accountability for the Lukashenka regime’s transnational repression and its affronts to international norms.”⁵² On June 24, the EU announced additional sanctions on the Belarusian economy, including, among other things, restricted access to EU capital markets, a prohibition on selling or supplying internet and telephone monitoring equipment to anyone in Belarus, and a ban on providing insurance to the Belarusian government.⁵³

On June 25, Protasevich and Sapega were transferred to house arrest as part of a plea deal in which they promised to work with Belarusian authorities to “expose their accomplices.”⁵⁴ Lukashenko continues to deny any wrongdoing, saying in an interview with state media on July 21 that Belarus “didn’t force anyone to land in Minsk and . . . didn’t change the flight routes.”⁵⁵ He claims that “[e]vents concerning the aircraft were a premeditated provocation . . . to enable further steps to choke Belarus and prevent its further development.”⁵⁶

The United States and its allies have expressed support for Belarusian opposition leader Svyatlana Tikhanovskaya. Tikhanovskaya met with President Biden at the White House on July 28⁵⁷ and with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on August 3.⁵⁸ She also met with U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Blinken, and other State Department officials, and discussed “the need for the ongoing Lukashenka regime crackdown to end, along with the unconditional release of all political prisoners in Belarus, and an inclusive political dialogue and new presidential elections under international observation.”⁵⁹ Tikhanovskaya said that she gave the Biden administration a list of specific targets for sanctions,⁶⁰ but State Department Spokesperson Ned Price would not comment on whether such a list

⁵² U.S. Dep’t of State Press Release, *Holding the Lukashenka Regime and Its Enablers to Account* (June 21, 2021), at <https://www.state.gov/holding-the-lukashenka-regime-and-its-enablers-to-account> [<https://perma.cc/VLN5-YKRY>].

⁵³ European Council Press Release, *EU Imposes Sanctions on Belarusian Economy* (June 24, 2021), at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/24/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-belarusian-economy>.

⁵⁴ Yuras Karmanau, *Jailed Belarus Journalist, Girlfriend Moved to House Arrest*, AP NEWS (June 25, 2021), at <https://apnews.com/article/europe-belarus-arrests-bc216bf7e6beca6db0514ccd635d823a>.

⁵⁵ *Lukashenko Describes Ryanair Aircraft Incident as Premeditated Provocation*, BELTA (July 21, 2021), at <https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-describes-ryanair-aircraft-incident-as-premeditated-provocation-141844-2021>.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ President Biden (@POTUS), TWITTER (July 28, 2021, 12:34 PM), at <https://twitter.com/potus/status/1420422355109748743> [<https://perma.cc/M4S4-5PE7>].

⁵⁸ Guy Faulconbridge, *We’re on Your Side, UK PM Johnson Tells Belarus Opposition Leader*, REUTERS (Aug. 3, 2021), at <https://www.reuters.com/world/were-your-side-uk-pm-johnson-tells-belarus-opposition-leader-2021-08-03>.

⁵⁹ U.S. Dep’t of State Press Release, *State Department Meetings with Leader of the Democratic Opposition of Belarus Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya* (July 19, 2021), at <https://www.state.gov/state-department-meetings-with-leader-of-the-democratic-opposition-of-belarus-svyatlana-tsikhanouskaya> [<https://perma.cc/FH2Y-D42R>]; see also White House Press Release, *Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan’s Meeting with Opposition Leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya of Belarus* (July 20, 2021), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/07/20/statement-by-nsc-spokesperson-emily-horne-on-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-meeting-with-opposition-leader-svyatlana-tsikhanouskaya-of-belarus> [<https://perma.cc/QAG7-M52F>].

⁶⁰ Jennifer Hansler, *Belarus Opposition Leader Says She Gave Sanctions List to Biden Administration*, CNN (Aug. 7, 2021), at <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/20/politics/belarus-opposition-leader-sanctions-list/index.html>.

exists.⁶¹ He said that the United States “remains[s] actively engaged” in the situation going forward, and that President Biden will consider increasing sanctions to address “the repression, the crackdown, and the continued imprisonment of political prisoners and political opponents” in Belarus.⁶²

In August 2021, the Lukashenko regime drew further international ire by trying to forcibly repatriate one of Belarus’s Olympic athletes, Krystina Timanovskaya, from Japan after she criticized the Belarusian athletic federation on Instagram.⁶³ She sought protection from Japanese police at a Tokyo airport and eventually received asylum in Poland.⁶⁴ The international community condemned Belarus’s actions, and the International Olympic Committee expelled two Belarusian coaches from the Olympics over their involvement in the affair.⁶⁵

On August 9, 2021—the one-year anniversary of the 2020 Belarusian election—the Biden administration, along with Canada and the United Kingdom, imposed further sanctions on the Lukashenko regime.⁶⁶ Pursuant to a new executive order that broadens the scope of the national emergency declared in 2006,⁶⁷ the Treasury Department announced sanctions on a number of individuals and entities, including Belaruskali OAO, “one of Belarus’s largest state-owned enterprises” and “a source of illicit wealth for the regime,”⁶⁸ and the Belarusian National Olympic Committee, which is headed by Lukashenko’s son.⁶⁹ The White House noted that since the diversion of the Ryanair flight, “the regime has only further expanded it[s] repression, including by threatening the safety of an Olympic athlete outside its borders,” and that with the additional sanctions, “President Biden is abiding by his pledge to hold the Belarussian regime accountable for its abuses.”⁷⁰

⁶¹ U.S. Dep’t of State Press Release, Department Press Briefing – July 20, 2021 (July 20, 2021), at <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-july-20-2021/#post-260813-Belarus> [<https://perma.cc/NXS5-AGBN>].

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ Motoko Rich & Tariq Panja, *Belarusian Sprinter Who Feared for Her Safety Is Offered Asylum in Poland*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 2, 2021), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/02/world/asia/belarus-olympics-kristina-timanovskaya.html>.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ Tariq Panja, *Two Belarus Coaches Are Expelled from the Olympics Over Their Treatment of a Sprinter*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 5, 2021), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/05/sports/olympics/belarus-coaches-expelled-kristina-timanovskaya-olympics.html>.

⁶⁶ White House Press Release, Fact Sheet: Executive Order Imposing Costs on Alyksandr Lukashenka and Belarusian Authorities for Ongoing Attacks Against Democratic Freedoms, Human Rights, and International Norms (Aug. 9, 2021), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/08/09/fact-sheet-executive-order-imposing-costs-on-alyksandr-lukashenka-and-belarusian-authorities-for-ongoing-attacks-against-democratic-freedoms-human-rights-and-international-norms> [<https://perma.cc/FJD3-FBX9>]; see also U.S. Dep’t of Treasury Press Release, Treasury Holds the Belarusian Regime to Account on Anniversary of Fraudulent Election (Aug. 9, 2021), at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0315> [<https://perma.cc/48C2-8DUZ>].

⁶⁷ Exec. Order No. 14,038, 86 Fed. Reg. 43,905 (Aug. 9, 2021).

⁶⁸ White House Press Release, *supra* note 66.

⁶⁹ See *id.*; *Lukashenko’s Son Replaces Father at Helm of Belarusian Olympic Committee After Ban*, REUTERS (Feb. 26, 2021), at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-belarus/lukashenkos-son-replaces-father-at-helm-of-belarusian-olympic-committee-after-ban-idUSKBN2AQ1AJ>.

⁷⁰ White House Press Release, *supra* note 66.