

Belarus: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the forced diversion of Ryanair flight FR4978 to Minsk on 23 May 2021



On 23 May, the Belarusian authorities, in an inadmissible step, forced a civilian plane to perform an emergency landing in Minsk. The plane, owned by an EU company, flying between two EU capitals and carrying more than 100 passengers, was forced to land by a Belarusian military aircraft.

One of the flight passengers, Mr Raman Pratasevich, an independent journalist from Belarus, was retained by the Belarusian authorities and prevented from boarding the plane at the Minsk airport to its original destination. This is yet another blatant attempt by the Belarusian authorities to silence all opposition voices.

We call for the immediate release of Mr Pratasevich.

In carrying out this coercive act, the Belarusian authorities have jeopardised the safety of passengers and crew. An international investigation into this incident must be carried out to ascertain any breach of international aviation rules.

This situation will be raised at the upcoming meeting of the European Council. The EU will consider the consequences of this action, including taking measures against those responsible.

Communiqué of European Council President Charles Michel on the incident involving a forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk, Belarus, on 23 May



I condemn in the strongest possible terms the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk, Belarus, on 23 May 2021 and the reported detention by Belarusian authorities of journalist Raman Pratasevich.

I call on Belarus authorities to immediately release the detained passenger and to fully guarantee his rights.

EU leaders will discuss this unprecedented incident tomorrow during the European Council.

The incident will not remain without consequences.

Presentation of letters of credentials to the President of the European Council Charles Michel



The President of the European Council Charles Michel received the letters of credentials of the following Ambassadors:

H.E. Mr Serge Thierry MICKOTO CHAVAGNE, Ambassador, Head of Mission of the Gabonese Republic

H.E. Mr Iván Emilio de Js. OGANDO LORA, Ambassador, Head of Mission of the Dominican Republic

H.E. Ms Pontšo Susan Matumelo SEKATLE, Ambassador, Head of Mission of the Kingdom of Lesotho

H.E. Mr Lim Hong Huai, Ambassador, Head of Mission of the Republic of Singapore

Invitation letter by President Charles Michel to the members of the European Council ahead of their special meeting of 24 and 25 May 2021



It is my pleasure to invite you to our special meeting of the European Council in Brussels on Monday 24 and Tuesday 25 May.

Our Monday evening dinner will be dedicated to foreign policy issues.

As agreed during our videoconference in March, we will hold a strategic

debate on Russia. Russia's illegal and provocative steps have continued both within EU Member States and beyond, most recently with the so-called "unfriendly states" list. A future discussion among ourselves could usefully be framed by a report from the High Representative and the Commission, in line with the five guiding principles for EU-Russia relations.

We will also address relations with the UK following the entry into force of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement on 1 May 2021. This agreement, as well as the Withdrawal Agreement and its Protocols, should be fully and effectively implemented, in the interests of a mutually beneficial relationship and close partnership. This includes ensuring that the UK respects the principle of non-discrimination among Member States.

As to other foreign policy issues, we will briefly address the situation in the Middle East as well as preparations for the upcoming EU-US institutional Summit mid-June.

Our discussion on Tuesday will revolve around the pressing issues of COVID and climate.

On COVID-19, we are entering a new phase as the pace of vaccinations is increasing across the EU and we seek to prepare for a reopening ahead of the summer. The recent agreement on the Digital COVID Certificates is a welcome step. We should continue our coordinated approach to facilitate free movement throughout the EU. It is nevertheless of utmost importance that we maintain our vigilance regarding new variants and that we are prepared to take action as necessary.

We should also discuss international solidarity in fighting the pandemic. As a leading vaccine producer, exporter and contributor to COVAX, the EU is at the forefront of efforts to help meet global needs. We should now address how, and to what extent, we can further step up our sharing of vaccines with the rest of the world.

In December 2020, we agreed to increase our climate ambition for 2030. On that occasion, we also agreed to revert once again to the matter before the Commission's Fit-For-55 package proposal. This will be a good occasion for everybody to state their key priorities and concerns in this respect.

As to the practical aspects of our meeting, we will begin at 7pm on Monday 24 May with our usual exchange with the President of the European Parliament. We will resume on Tuesday morning at 9:30am. I look forward to seeing you in Brussels.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

COVID-19: Coreper endorses political agreement on the EU digital COVID certificate to facilitate free movement

The Council's Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) today gave its unanimous support to the political agreement reached with the European Parliament on 20 May on the EU digital COVID certificate.

The aim is to facilitate safe and free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing proof that a person has either been vaccinated against COVID-19, received a negative test result or recovered from COVID-19. The certificate, which will be in use by 1 July, will be available in digital and paper format, contain a QR code and be issued free of charge. It is not a precondition for exercising free movement rights and it is not a travel document.



The certificate is an important step towards a more normal, freer and safer life during the pandemic. It will facilitate the free movement of all Europeans, starting this summer. And it shows once again that the EU delivers. Member states will need to remain vigilant with regard to the epidemiological situation so that movement in the EU is safe, but at the same time our societies and economies can gradually recover.

António Costa – Prime Minister of Portugal

Affordable and accessible tests

- Member states are encouraged to ensure that tests are affordable and widely available.
- 100 million euro will be available for the purchase of tests under the Emergency Support Instrument.
- Additional funding above 100 million euro could be mobilised, subject to approval by the budgetary authorities.

Travel restrictions

- It remains up to national governments to decide whether travellers with a certificate have to quarantine or get tested.
- Member states should refrain from imposing additional travel restrictions, such as testing or quarantine, unless they are

proportionate and necessary to safeguard public health.

- If they decide to introduce travel restrictions, member states must inform the other member states and the Commission, if possible 48 hours in advance.
- They must clarify the reasons for such restrictions, their scope and the start date and duration.
- This information should be published 24 hours before the measures come into effect.

Phasing-in period

- For a period of six weeks, citizens whose certificates were issued before 1 July will be able to travel within the EU using those certificates.
- If a member state is not ready to issue certificates in the new format by 1 July, it will have six weeks from that date to introduce the new EU digital COVID certificate format. National certificates in other formats will be accepted during the phasing-in period.

Types of vaccine

- When a person presents a vaccination certificate for one of the vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), member states will be obliged to accept it for the purpose of facilitating freedom of movement. The proposed legislation gives member states the option to accept vaccination certificates issued for vaccines which have been authorised nationally or have completed the WHO (World Health Organisation) emergency listing process.

Types of test

- Only PCR and rapid antigen tests will be accepted as proof of a negative test result.
- Only PCR tests will be accepted as proof of recovery. Rapid antigen tests, serological tests or other validated methods might be accepted at a later stage if scientific evidence becomes available.

Data protection

- There will be no centralised EU database.
- Member states must implement robust safeguards in line with EU data protection rules.

Background

The legal framework for the certificate consists of two legislative proposals that were tabled by the European Commission on 17 March.

The first proposal concerns EU citizens and their family members and the second concerns third-country nationals staying or residing legally in the Schengen area.

Under the proposals it will be possible to use the certificate across all EU member states, as well as in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The certificate will also be open to initiatives being developed globally.

The Council adopted its negotiation position on 14 April, while the European Parliament adopted its position on 29 April. After four trilogues and several technical meetings, the interinstitutional political agreement was reached on 20 May.

Next steps

The Council will now send a letter to the European Parliament to officially communicate that the member states' permanent representatives have endorsed the political agreement.

The European Parliament is then expected to vote its first reading position at its plenary session on 7-10 June. Afterwards the Council will officially adopt the regulations which will have to be signed by the Council and the European Parliament. Once the signature of the legislation has taken place, the regulations shall be published in the Official Journal of the EU and apply from 1 July.