LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS SUSISIEKIMO MINISTERIJA

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

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Ministers of Transport
of the EU

24 May 2021 Ref. No.

Adina Vălean
EU Commissioner for Mobility and
Transport

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to refer to the incident that took place yesterday, 23 May 2021, when a civilian aircraft of *Ryanair* with 123 passengers of 11 nationalities on board flying from Athens to Vilnius through the Belarusian airspace was rerouted close to the Lithuanian border and subsequently forced by the Belarusian authorities to land in Minsk.

During the incident, the passengers were held at the Minsk airport, because the aircraft was allowed to take off to Vilnius 5 hours after its forced landing in Minsk and only after a Belarusian political activist travelling onboard was arrested by the Belarusian authorities.

We are still gathering all the facts related to the incident, but it is obvious that usage of the Belarusian airspace for civilian flights raises many risks in terms of safety and security. The protection of EU citizens who may be involved in travelling through the Belarusian airspace requires our immediate attention and resolute action. Our Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly recommends Lithuanian citizens against all travel to Belarus and urges all Lithuanian citizens in Belarus to leave the country.

Lithuania has already requested the ICAO to launch an investigation with a view to clarifying all the circumstances of this incident, as well as their impact on civil aviation flights within the Belarusian territory. We are also launching a similar request to the EASA, which has already issued several recommendations to the European air carriers with respect to this matter.

However, in order to ensure full protection of our citizens, the competent authorities of Lithuania have established guidelines for all flights to and from Lithuania to avoid using Belarusian airspace as of 25 May 2021.

Dear Colleagues, I ask you to take this information seriously, because we, the Ministers of Transport, must take care of the safety and security of European aviation. I therefore urge you to consider requesting all EU air carriers to avoid the Belarusian airspace for the sake of protection of European citizens.

I will keep you informed about any further progress in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Marius Skuodis

Minister

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