**NAM Ambassadorial Meeting**

**29 September 2021, 11:00**

**Briefing by H.E. Ambassador Yury Ambrazevich,**

**Permanent Representative of the Republic of Belarus**

**to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva**

 Excellencies,

 Ladies and Gentlemen,

 At the outset let me thank the Chair of the NAM’s Geneva chapter, His Excellency Ambassador Galib Israfilov of Azerbaijan, for convening this Ambassadorial-level meeting at my request.

 I would also like to extend my greatest appreciation to all of you, Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends, for your interest.

 Let me outline the structure of my presentation, which, I think will take up to 20 minutes.

First, I would like to focus on the situation in and around Belarus generally.

Then, I will dwell on two specific cases, which drew much attention. These are the so-called diversion of the Ryanair flight in May and the situation with migrants on Belarus’ borders with its European Union neighbors.

 So, let me start with the first topic.

I am sure, all of you well know that the problems for Belarus began in the wake of the Presidential election, held in August 2020.

 The incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko won a resounding victory with 80% of the popular support.

 Yet, a small militant minority inside the country was not ready to accept the election outcome.

 Today, with the passing of time, we have at our disposal plenty of evidence suggesting that it was the West in general and our EU neighbors in particular, which played a key role behind this attempted “color revolution” in Belarus.

 As a matter of fact, there are a number of components which allow to say that the West has unleashed a hybrid war against Belarus:

Indeed, the West provided total backing to the opposition and helped them establish the so-called governments in exile in Vilnius and Washington.

The West provided funding to foreign as well as to Belarusian media and NGOs, which sought to mobilize protests in order to undermine our constitutional order.

The West introduced restrictions on contacts with the Government’s representatives.

The West introduced bans on travels by our officials to the EU and the USA.

The West imposed broad sectoral economic sanctions.

The West reinforced its military, that is, NATO presence along our borders.

Unfortunately, the West was able to drag some international organizations into its confrontation with Belarus, above all, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Indeed, the OHCHR has embraced a general anti-Belarusian stance, by twisting the mandates of relevant Human Rights Council’s resolutions and using fake news for its biased press-releases.

 The key objective of all these moves was to achieve a revolutionary change of the political leadership and, ultimately, to bring about a geopolitical reorientation of a country, which is a strategic ally of Russia and China, located in the center of Europe.

 The West’s claims that the protests in Belarus were spontaneous and peaceful were lies. In fact, the protestors used violence in abundance. Hundreds of law enforcement officers were injured and great damage was done to public and private property.

 Fortunately, this attempt at the “color revolution” failed, not least because the President of Belarus himself displayed an outstanding amount of courage and fortitude which helped rally the nation around him.

 Subsequent investigation and court trials showed that certain inspirers, organizers and executioners stood firmly behind the turmoil.

Many individuals have been convicted of conspiracy with the purpose of seizing power, organizing chaos, steering the protests and inciting strife in society and violence against law enforcement representatives.

 Our authorities continue to identify persons involved in these violent acts and bring them to justice.

 The Government has been carefully checking to what extent various NGOs and media outlets facilitated the protests and ensuing violence. Those organizations that breached our laws have been either penalized or closed down altogether.

 Let me touch upon one sensitive point. Namely, the West accused Belarus’ law enforcement bodies of using violence and brutality against the protestors.

 In this regard I cannot help giving you some brief statistics about violence and brutality applied by those who accuse us.

Indeed, in the US its police daily murders at least three persons without any trial. At least 19 people lost lives during the recent “Black lives matter” campaign. Overall, there are 2 million people in US prisons. Or consider France. The “yellow vests” protests in 2018-2019 allegedly resulted in 11 deaths. As for the UK, 18 individuals were killed as a result of police arrest over the 2019-2020 financial year.

So, our investigating agencies have thoroughly reviewed all relevant complaints and generally found all of them groundless.

What is more, their findings reconfirmed what the police officials were consistently saying, that is, that the means used by the police were totally proportionate to the threats they and society in general faced back then.

 Along with all these developments a public process launched by the President with the view to openly discussing and analyzing what happened in Belarus is going on. Its objective was to rally our people around, to work out ways whereby we can proceed to develop our political system in an evolutionary way in the context of new realities and new challenges.

 As a result, the past year saw thousands of meetings at which ordinary people met with members of parliament, government officials, trade union representatives and others.

A specially established Constitutional commission has examined thousands of proposals on how to change our Constitution. We plan to hold a referendum in early 2022 in order to address constitutional changes.

 All in all, the situation in Belarus has today returned to normalcy. There have been no protests in Minsk any more since December 2020.

We are immensely grateful for the support rendered to Belarus at that hard time by all those friendly countries, including a great number of Non-Aligned states and our two strategic partners – Russia and China.

 Let me now turn to first of the two specific issues, which I wish to address.

 I believe most of you have heard about this case.

On 23 May 2021 our government received a warning that a bomb was planted on a Ryanair flight on its way from Athens to Vilnius that could detonate over Lithuania. Our authorities at once notified the Ryanair crew and invited them to land at the Minsk airport, which the crew accepted on their own will without any coercion or pressure.

It so happened that Mr. Roman Protasevich, an insignificant opposition figure charged in Belarus for his subversive and unlawful activities, was on this flight. He was detained.

The West immediately responded with mass hysteria, accusing Belarus of “air piracy”, state terrorism, hijacking, interception, forced landing with a use of a military fighter jet.

The situation around the Ryanair flight presented to the world by the international media and Western politicians is a pure case of disinformation build entirely on speculation and prejudice.

Interestingly enough, all accusatory statements against Belarus were made by Western politicians in the first few hours after the plane landed in the complete absence of any factual data. And some of them were made even before Mr. Protasevich was arrested. This has been confirmed by the data from CCTV cameras at the Minsk airport. This kind of haste only serves to corroborate our version that the incident itself was a "set-up".

In the course of that day similar statements have been inflated and overgrown with incredible details, thanks to the exuberant imagination of political journalists in the Western media.

I am convinced that the purpose of the media hype was to denigrate and demonize Belarus, to revive attention to the situation around Belarus, which, by the way, began to calm down due to the absence of protests from December 2020.

Some politicians in Lithuania and Poland, among others, stood to benefit from this case. So did the Belarusian opposition. Both needed to put pressure on the West, namely, its key players in Berlin, Paris, London and Washington, in order to trigger another wave of economic sanctions. Indeed, as the European Union and the United States seemed to be losing interest in Belarus at that time, so the prospect of new economic sanctions so much desired by the opposition and its Western puppets was fading away.

As a result, within a month after the incident, the EU countries introduced bans on Belavia's flights and imposed sanctions against Belarus so long-awaited by Vilnius, Warsaw, Riga, as well as the Belarusian opposition. Interestingly, all these decisions have been made in the absence of a conclusion from the ICAO investigation, which it launched at the very end of May. We are now four months after the incident, and ICAO has not produced yet a result and we think that it is unlikely to come up with any.

Yet, all the data for completing this work is available to ICAO: for example, radar data, including movements of a military fighter jet, black boxes with records of all talks that remain intact. All those involved in the events are alive, including the pilots, who seemed to have disappeared, as do relevant employees of the Vilnius airport, where the plane was heading and where they also received a warning about the bomb.

As for Belarus, we have shown on our TV the records of talks with the pilots and all the data from the radars. Belarus hosted an ICAO expert mission and provided all relevant information. However, there is no information as for how other involved countries cooperate with ICAO. Greece is the place of departure, Ireland is the airline's headquarters, Poland is the country of the aircraft’s origin, Lithuania is the destination point.

ICAO’s silence clearly points to the fact that Belarus did not violate any rules of international air traffic in a situation when it received a warning about a threat to a civil aircraft flying over its territory. It also suggests that someone set up the whole scandal in order to trigger new steps of international pressure on the Government of Belarus.

 In the meantime, we have received help from some unexpected quarter. Indeed, in July a book in French was published titled *“Le détournement du vol Ryanair FR4978”* written by Swiss former intelligence officer named Jacques Baud. The author, who has no connection to Belarus at all, presents his own unbiased investigation and concludes that Belarus is not to blame and the entire case is about politics used by Western countries against Belarus.

 We are absolutely convinced that politics is also at play in our conflict with some EU countries over the migration issue.

 In a nutshell, the conflict is this: since June 2021 three EU countries bordering Belarus – Lithuania, Latvia and Poland – have been registering increased entry flows of illegal migrants coming from Belarus.

They were very quick to accuse Belarus. Their basic argument is that we intentionally bring migrants from the Middle East and Asia with the purpose of smuggling them to the neighboring countries in order to destabilize the latter in retaliation for their support of the Belarusian opposition.

Like in the case with the accusations about the Ryanair flight, these are utter nonsense.

 To begin with, all countries are affected by migration. Belarus does not make an exception. There has always been the so-called “Belarusian route” for migrants on their way from Asia to Europe. True, it did not attract much attention in the past, because Belarus was very effective in preventing illegal migration through its territory.

 The situation, however, changed. The European Union terminated cooperation with us on migration as a result of political tension. Let me tell you in this regard that since last April we have been consistently proposing to our European counterparts to resume cooperation on migration. But we received no reaction from them.

In this regard the President of Belarus repeatedly stated that the West should not expect Belarus to work on illegal migration as effectively as it used to do in the past for the simple reason that economic sanctions imposed by the EU compel us to change priorities and redirect financial and human resources elsewhere.

 We believe that transnational criminal groups involved in illegal smuggling heard about these developments and decided to use the situation to their own advantage by increasing migrant flows via Belarus.

 But, what concerns Belarus most is how our opponents treat these people on the move.

 According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, its Signatories must process all applications for asylum. Belarus as well as the three EU countries concerned are all Signatories.

 In this regard let me stress one crucial point. All these migrants are seeking asylum in the European Union, with none of them seeking it in Belarus – the fact, which UNHCR, an agency that has been consistently in touch with these people, can easily corroborate.

As a matter of fact, we closely cooperate with this agency and do our best to help the people in need. For example, UNHCR sub-regional director Rolland Schilling has been on a visit to Belarus just last week.

The same, unfortunately, cannot be said of our three EU neighbors. After allowing some migrants to enter early in the crisis, they changed their policy and now prevent all entries, while pushing back to Belarus all those who somehow managed to sneak in.

Most alarmingly, all three use violence against asylum seekers, which already resulted in a number of death prompting a joint IOM-UNHCR statement on 21 September that denounced violence against migrants.

What is also of great concern is that these countries declared the state of national emergency, which enabled their governments to trample upon their international obligations with regard to the provision of asylum and to prevent the mass media and civil society from finding out what is really going on their part of the borders with Belarus.

So, we have no doubt whatsoever that both the Ryanair flight and the migration case have been invoked by our opponents in an effort to further demonize Belarus, to present it as a source of tension in the region and justify their destructive anti-Belarus activities, while in the migration case they find it useful to forget about their previous commitments to Belarus as well as about their international obligations to provide asylum to refugees.

So, dear colleagues, as you may see from my presentation Belarus currently finds itself in a predicament for the simple reason that its people made a choice last year, which many in the West did not like, because it frustrated their geopolitical plans. As a result, the ordinary Belarusians now to have pay the price by suffering from economic sanctions and other deprivations.

In this situation we very much need support, unity and solidarity from our NAM partners and brothers.

 On this note, I would like to stop and invite your comments and questions.

 Thank you.