

PRESS RELEASE

Belarusian journalist and activist Roman Protasevich to receive the 2021 Ion Rațiu Democracy Award and Fellowship

London, 28 May 2021 The Rațiu Family Charitable Foundation and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars announce that Belarusian journalist and activist Roman Protasevich will receive the 2021 Ion Rațiu Democracy Award and Fellowship.

Roman Dmitriyevich Protasevich (26 years) is the former editor-in-chief of the Nexta Live channel, which is based on the Telegram messenger app and has over 1 million subscribers, being the primary source of news that covered the 2020-2021 Belarus rallies. On 23 May 2021, Protasevich was detained by Belarusian authorities after the international passenger flight from Athens to Vilnius was intercepted in Belarusian airspace by a Belarusian fighter jet and directed to land in Minsk.

The Awardee studied journalism at Belarusian State University until he was expelled in 2018 and has been an opposition activist since his youth, also as a member of the opposition organization Young Front. He worked in the Belarusian media and for the Belarusian edition of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In 2017-2018, he was a Václav Havel Fellow in Journalism in Prague, then moved to Poland in 2019, where he announced that he asked for political asylum in January 2020. He later relocated to Vilnius, where opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya is also based.

Roman Protasevich was one of the coordinators of Nexta until September 2020, covering protests against alleged rigged presidential elections in August 2020. In November 2020, together with the co-founder of Nexta, Sciapan Pucila, he was accused of organizing mass riots, of actions that grossly violate public order, and of incitement of social enmity based on professional affiliation. As of March 2021, Protasevich became the chief-editor of the Telegram channel "Belarus of the Brain", which has around a quarter of a million subscribers and was formerly edited by Belarusian blogger Ihar Losik, held in detention by Belarusian authorities since June 2020.

"We are honored to grant the 2021 Ion Rațiu Democracy Award and Fellowship to Belarusian young journalist and democracy activist Roman Protasevich, who has been bravely giving voice to an entire country during the largest anti-governmental protests in the history of Belarus, by using technology and new media to the benefit of democracy. He and his partner Sofia Sapega must be immediately released and this unacceptable episode needs to be investigated. We hope that, as a recipient of the Ion Rațiu Democracy Award and Fellowship, he will be able to enjoy soon the type of life-changing experience that Ion Rațiu encountered as a young Romanian democracy activist in Washington in the 1970s and 1980s", states Nicolae Rațiu, Chairman of the Rațiu Family Charitable Foundation.

Recipients of the Ion Rațiu Democracy Award and Fellowship have the opportunity to engage with the Washington policy, media and scholarly communities. Awardees are provided with a stipend to spend from one to three months at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. for the duration of their stay.

Former recipients are: Suraya Pakzad, women's rights activist, Afghanistan; Camelia Bogdan, judge, Romania; Ai Weiwei, artist and activist, China; Manuel Cuesta Morua, scholar and political activist, Cuba; Jamil Hasanli, historian and democracy activist, Azerbaijan; Mustafa Nayyem, journalist and blogger, Ukraine; Angela Kocze, Roma rights activist and scholar, Hungary; Aung San Suu Kyi, politician, diplomat, author, and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Myanmar; Nabeel Rajab, human rights activist, Bahrain; Oleg Kozlovsky, democracy and human rights activist, Russia; Adam Michnik, historian, essayist, former dissident, public intellectual, Poland; Eleonora Cercavschi, human rights and democracy activist, Republic of Moldova; Anatoli Mikhailov, expert of German philosophy, Belarus; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, democracy and human rights activist, Egypt; Sergio Aguayo, academic and human rights activist, Mexico.

[The Ion Rațiu Democracy Award](#) expresses the deep commitment to democracy of the late Ion Rațiu (1917-2000) through his contributions as a Romanian politician and intellectual as well as his interest in democratic change worldwide. Building on the accomplishments of the Ion Rațiu Democracy Award (2005-2016), the [Ion Rațiu Democracy Fellowship](#) supports individuals around the world who are working on behalf of democracy as activists or intellectuals, whether they are in exile from repressive regimes or operating within emerging democracies.

[The Rațiu Family Charitable Foundation](#) was established in London in 1979 by Ion and Elisabeth Rațiu to promote and support projects which further education and research in the culture and history of Romania, both in Romania and the UK. The Foundation offers up to 100 annual grants, principally for projects, postgraduate courses, conference participations, travel grants, and other short term courses including academic research. It also offers annual seed funding for innovative projects, principally in Romania, which foster Romanian arts and civilisation, heritage, civil society, democracy, and environmental protection.