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Belarus Leader's Ex-Spokesman, Veteran Opposition Leader Detained – State Media

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Alexander Feduta served as President Alexander Lukashenko's first press secretary in 1994 before falling out with him the next year and defecting to the opposition. **Facebook**

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko's former spokesman-turned-critic who was reported missing in Russia has been detained alongside a veteran opposition leader on unspecified charges, state media said Tuesday.

Political analyst Alexander Feduta, 56, served as Lukashenko's first press secretary in 1994 before falling out with him the next year and defecting to the opposition. Amnesty International has declared Feduta, who in 2011 and handed a two-year suspended sentence for post-election violence, a prisoner of conscience.

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The Belarusian KGB detained Fedut "on direct suspicion of a committed crime," the state-owned news agency Belta reported.

Belta added that opposition leader Grigory Kostusev has also been detained under the same procedures.

Belta did not say when or where Feduta and Kostusev have been detained, or what charges they face.

Kostusev's opposition party, the Belarusian Popular Front, said on its website Tuesday that the 2010 presidential candidate was detained in the eastern Belarusian town of Shklow.

Kostusev's detention "continues the campaign of persecution against legal opposition activists in Belarus," his assistant Vadim Saranchukov said.

Russia's Moskovsky Komsomolets tabloid reported Sunday that Feduta had arrived in Moscow for unspecified consultations in late March. It said a Russian citizen identified only as Alexandra V. had first declared Feduta missing late Saturday.

"My husband is missing. His phone has been turned off for more than 24 hours," the outlet quoted Feduta's wife Marina Shibko as saying.

The latest arrests follow detentions of anti-government demonstrators who recently renewed anti-Lukashenko protests that first broke out over his August 2020 election victory but subsided over the winter.

Lukashenko, a key ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin who has ruled over the ex-Soviet eastern European nation for nearly 27 years, denies vote rigging and accuses protesters of being sponsored by the West.

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