

Russia, Belarus Spy Agencies Join Forces Against 'Destructive' West

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Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) head Sergei Naryshkin. Kremlin.ru

Russia's and Belarus' intelligence agencies have joined forces against "destructive" Western activities in the wake of Minsk's highly criticized plane diversion to arrest a dissident, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) [announced](#) Thursday.

SVR chief Sergei Naryshkin met his KGB counterpart less than two weeks after Belarusian authorities ordered a European flight to land in Minsk and arrested a Belarusian dissident journalist with his Russian girlfriend. Western governments voiced outrage over what they described as "air piracy" and "state-sponsored hijacking" and ordered their airlines to avoid Belarusian airspace, while Russia came to the defense of its close ally.

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"In the spirit of traditionally fraternal relations, Russia's SVR and Belarus' KGB have agreed to work together to counter Western destructive activities aimed at destabilizing the political

and socioeconomic situation in the Union State,” SVR said in a statement.

“Union State” refers to a loose bilateral integration treaty that Russia and Belarus signed in 1999. Moscow has in recent years pushed for deeper integration, facing regular demurrs from Minsk amid public fears of loss of sovereignty.

Naryshkin met Belarus KGB chief Ivan Tertel less than 24 hours after Belarusian government-controlled television published footage of the arrested dissident’s interrogation. In the video released on ONT channel, 26-year-old Roman Protasevich claimed that he had been set up by an unnamed associate with whom he had a personal conflict.

The Naryshkin-Tertel talks in the Belarusian city of Vitebsk near the Russian border focused on cooperation “in the context of aggressive U.S. and Western countries’ policies toward Russia and Belarus.”

“The importance of consolidating efforts aimed at strengthening Moscow and Minsk’ potential in countering global challenges and new threats to the security of the Union State was noted at the meeting,” the SVR said.

Russia on Wednesday released the second installment of a \$1-billion loan to Belarus as Minsk prepares to be hit by a fresh round of Western sanctions. The European Union, which has agreed to ban Belarus’ state airline from operating in EU airspace, has also pledged to unlock a 3-billion-euro (\$3.7 billion) loan and grant package to a “future, democratic Belarus” if strongman President Alexander Lukashenko leaves power after 26 years at the helm.

Lukashenko visited Russian President Vladimir Putin last weekend, a show of Moscow’s support amid Western condemnation of the dramatic Ryanair flight diversion.

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