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American Lawyer Detained in Russia Alongside Veteran Belarus Opposition Leader – CNN

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Belarusian-American lawyer Yuras Zyankovich. **Wikicommons**

A U.S. passport holder was detained in Moscow alongside a veteran Belarusian opposition leader three months ago and spirited away to Minsk to face charges of attempting a coup, CNN reported Tuesday.

Belarusian-American lawyer Yuras Zyankovich was detained by Russia's FSB security agency in April while having lunch at a Moscow restaurant with Alexander Feduta, the former spokesman-turned-critic of Belarus's leader.

Feduta, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's first press secretary who had a falling out with him in 1995 and became his critic, was reported missing before it emerged that he was apprehended as part of a joint Belarus-Russian operation.

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Plainclothes FSB agents put a hood over Zyankovich's head, bundled him into a car and took him to Belarus in a three-vehicle convoy, CNN cited his wife Alena Dzenisavets as saying. Dzenisavets has not spoken with Zyankovich since April 11, when he called her in Houston hours before he was detained.

The FSB said at the time that it detained two Belarusians who planned to stage a "military coup" and "kill" Lukashenko. The 66-year-old strongman who has ruled Belarus since 1994 also alleged that the plotters sought to kidnap his children.

The Belarusian opposition denies the claim.

Zyankovich's dual citizenship does not automatically grant him the right for U.S. consular officials to visit him, CNN reported, adding that he has had occasional visits from his lawyer.

A melodramatic documentary broadcast on Belarusian state television appeared to show Zyankovich saying he had "the backing of the Jewish capital of America" around the time of Belarus' August 2020 post-election protests. CNN said the audio may have been doctored.

"Zyankovich's words don't match the movement of his lips," it reported.

Dzenisavets told CNN that the couple went to Belarus at that time to vote, visit family and purchase a summer property. Zyankovich, who attended the rallies disputing the election results that gave Lukashenko his sixth presidential term, was also detained then and served 10 days of administrative arrest.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, a close ally of ex-Soviet Belarus, has denounced what he called Western silence on Lukashenko's claim of the alleged assassination plot.

It is unclear when Zyankovich and his co-defendants will go on trial.

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