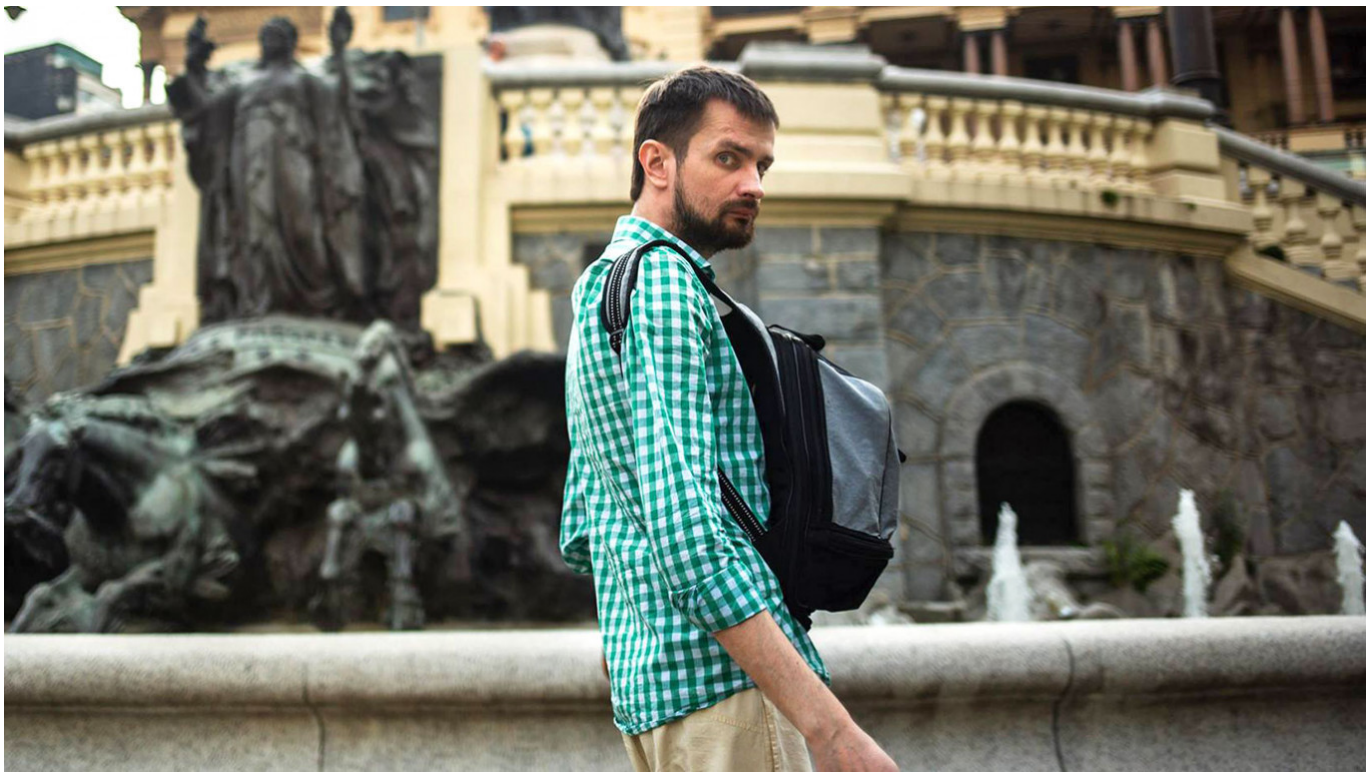
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Pro-Government Reporter Detained in Moscow, Held in Belarus – Activists

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Gennady Mozheiko. **Gennady Mozheiko / Facebook**

Belarusian security officers detained a pro-government reporter who covered a deadly shooting incident involving Belarus' KGB security agency and an IT worker in Moscow before transporting him to Minsk, activists said Saturday.

Russian officials and media executives have criticized the actions, along with other steps seen as the continuation of Belarusian authorities' crackdown on remaining activists and independent media following last year's unprecedented protests over disputed presidential elections.

Belarus' Viasna rights group said at least 86 people were detained last week in connection with a Minsk apartment raid Tuesday where IT worker Andrei Zeltser allegedly shot dead a KGB officer and was killed in return fire. Observers linked the detentions to the authorities' attempt to suppress discussion of the incident.

Among those detained is Gennady Mozheiko, a veteran reporter for the Belarus edition of

Russia's popular Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper, according to Viasna. The group said Mozheiko was apprehended in Moscow on Friday and is now being held in a notorious detention center in Minsk.

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Belarus blocked KP's website last Wednesday after it published Mozheiko's interview with Zeltser's classmate, who characterized the 31-year-old as "good" in contradiction to the KGB's description of him as a "serious criminal." Belarus has refused to print KP in the country since the disputed August 2020 presidential elections, which handed Alexander Lukashenko a sixth consecutive term and sparked mass protests that led to a heavy crackdown.

KP's editor-in-chief Vladimir Sungorkin said the newspaper revised Mozheiko's interview minutes after it went online because the original version was "inconsistent with the current beliefs about" the shooting incident.

KP said Mozheiko has been charged with "incitement of hatred" and "insulting the authorities." These criminal charges carry maximum prison sentences of 12 years and 3 years each, if a court finds him guilty.

Russian officials and media executives decried the latest clampdown in Belarus, which enjoys close ties with neighboring Russia and depends heavily on its loans and military aid as a guard against Western sanctions.

"If it turns out that Mozheiko was indeed kidnapped out of Moscow, then this is a completely different story," Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-funded RT broadcaster, tweeted Sunday.

"Even the arrogant and powerful United States of America doesn't think of kidnapping its enemy Snowden from Russia," Simonyan wrote, referring to the whistleblower behind the National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance leaks who has been living in exile in Moscow.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova called on Belarus to "observe journalists' rights in line with generally accepted international standards."

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