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Polish-Belarusian Journalist Jailed for 8 Years in Belarus

By AFP

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Polish-Belarusian journalist Andrzej Poczobut. **Leonid Shcheglov/AP/TASS**

Belarus on Wednesday sentenced Polish-Belarusian journalist Andrzej Poczobut, who reported critically on President Alexander Lukashenko's regime, to eight years in prison, local rights group Viasna said.

"Judge Dmitry Bubenchik found Poczobut guilty and sentenced him to eight years in a penal colony with enhanced security," Viasna said on its website. He was found guilty of taking part in "actions harming national security" and "inciting hatred."

The 49-year-old was sentenced in the western city of Grodno, on the Polish border, where he was based.

Poland, Belarus's EU-member neighbor, has condemned the case and called for his release.

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Poczobut is a correspondent for Poland's top daily Gazeta Wyborcza and an active member of Belarus's Polish diaspora.

"I do not have any illusions, I will take the sentence calmly and with a calm conscience go to prison," he said in a letter published by his newspaper ahead of the verdict.

Poczobut refused to leave Belarus after Lukashenko suppressed mass protests against his rule in the summer of 2020 and was arrested in March 2021.

According to Viasna, Poczobut refused to sign a petition to be pardoned by Lukashenko after his arrest.

Viasna, a renowned rights group, included Poczobut in its list of 1,449 political prisoners in Belarus.

Lukashenko has been in power in Belarus since 1994.

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