Belarusian Artist, Political Prisoner Dies in Jail

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Ales Pushkin **Serge Serebro / Vitebsk Popular News (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

Belarusian artist and political prisoner Ales Pushkin died early Tuesday at a hospital where he was urgently transferred from a prison facility, the Belarusian human rights center Viasna [reported](#), citing the artist's wife.

The reasons for the 57-year-old dissident's hospitalization in intensive care as well as the circumstances surrounding his death remain unclear.

An acclaimed artist and activist, Pushkin had staged an array of anti-government performances throughout his career.

He actively took part in the country's 2020-2021 protests against longtime ruler Alexander Lukashenko and appeared in a famous photograph showing him waving the white-red-white flag of democratic Belarus while facing a wall of security officers.

Pushkin was arrested in March 2021 amid Lukashenko's sweeping crackdown on dissent in

the wake of the 2020–2021 protests.

The official pretext for Pushkin's arrest was a painting depicting anti-Soviet Belarusian activist and poet Yevgeniy Zhihar displayed at an exhibition in Grodno.

While Belarusian officials consider Zhihar to be a Nazi collaborator, Pushkin, [according](#) to the authorities, "glorified" Zhihar by "characterizing him as a person from the Belarusian resistance [movement and] a fighter with the Bolsheviks."

A court in the Belarusian capital Minsk found Pushkin guilty in March 2022 of desecrating state symbols and "committing intentional actions aimed at the rehabilitation and justification of Nazism" and sentenced him to five years in a penal colony.