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Belarusian Police Deny Beating Russian Comedian During Arrest

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Artemyi Ostanin. **t.me/moscowcourts**

Belarus' Interior Ministry denied Friday that its law enforcement agents used violence while detaining Russian stand-up comedian Artemyi Ostanin earlier this week.

A member of Russia's presidential human rights council said Thursday that Ostanin was beaten with batons before being transferred to Russia, sharing a photo showing his back covered in bruises and welts. Doctors later diagnosed him with a fractured spine, respiratory and lung issues and multiple bruises and abrasions.

Ostanin, who faces up to six years in prison in Russia if convicted of inciting hatred, requested an official investigation into his alleged mistreatment. A Moscow court placed him in pre-trial detention until May 15 over a viral joke that drew backlash from pro-war Russian bloggers.

"No physical force or other illegal methods were used against this citizen during his detention, transportation and transfer," Belarus' Deputy Interior Minister Gennady Kazakevich said in a statement published on the ministry's website.

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Ostanin was arrested at Minsk Airport on Monday at Moscow's request, Kazakevich said. Belarusian law enforcement agents then deported the comedian and handed him over to Russian authorities at the border.

Kazakevich insisted that Belarusian law enforcement had "fully complied with national legislation."

However, Ostanin claims that Russian authorities did not use physical force after his transfer.

Belarus' Interior Ministry warned that those who defame its employees could face criminal prosecution.

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