

AP Photographer Takes Blow to Face at Protest in Belarus

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Photographer Sergei Grits speaking after being injured in a rally Tuesday. **Vasily Fedosenko**

Police in Belarus broke up a small protest Tuesday against a parliamentary election and detained several protesters as well as a group of journalists.

The journalists, who included Reuters' Minsk-based photographer, a photographer from The Associated Press and a television film crew from German channel ZDF, were released after about two hours.

They were searched at a police station and had their cameras taken away. When they were released, the photographers' cameras were returned to them, but the pictures they had taken had been erased. ZDF retained its footage.

The human rights group Vesna-96 said four opposition activists detained during the protest against Sunday's election were still being held by police.

"We were photographing the picket, when a bus came up and men in civilian clothes jumped

out and quite aggressively began to push everyone into the bus," said Reuters photographer Vasily Fedosenko.

The AP photographer was struck in the face and had his glasses broken, Fedosenko said.

When the journalists were released, a plainclothes policeman apologized for the incident but did not explain why they had been detained.

A Minsk police spokesman said the journalists had been released and made no further comment.

Belarus' two main opposition parties have denounced Sunday's vote as a sham and have urged people to boycott it.

The election for the 110-seat chamber takes place two years after police cracked down on street protests following a presidential election that installed President Alexander Lukashenko for a fourth term in power.

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