

Russian Tycoon Mazepin Denies Funding Belarus Opposition

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Dmitry Mazepin. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

Russian fertilizer tycoon Dmitry Mazepin denied Monday that he had financed opposition social media in his native Belarus after a jailed journalist hinted at an unnamed Urals oligarch's role in the country's anti-government protests last summer.

“Neither I nor my companies have ever financed the [Nexta] Telegram channel,” Mazepin [said](#) in a video interview published by the RBC news website.

Nexta's co-founder and former editor Roman Protasevich, who was arrested with his Russian girlfriend after their flight was forced to land in Minsk on May 23, told state television that a company run by an unnamed Russian businessman from the Urals had sponsored the project.

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Protasevich's allies and Western powers have denounced the televised interview, saying it was

filmed under duress.

Observers said Mazepin — the Minsk-born owner of the Uralchem chemicals company who had called for dialogue to end the harsh crackdown on anti-government rallies that broke out after the August 2020 Belarus presidential election — fit Protasevich's description.

St. Petersburg media reported Friday that Mazepin had unexpectedly [withdrawn](#) from a scheduled roundtable at Russia's flagship St. Petersburg International Economic Forum after the Protasevich interview aired the previous evening.

Mazepin on Monday said that Nexta, which galvanized the Belarusian protests and had 2 million subscribers at its peak, goes against his views and allegations of his involvement are part of widespread claims of Russian influence in the ex-Soviet republic's affairs.

"I understand the authors of this political melodrama well. On the one hand, they would like to show a plan by Western special services to capture Belarus and on the other hand to show the Russian trace," the tycoon said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov cast doubt upon Mazepin's role in financing Belarusian opposition social media, telling reporters at a daily briefing that Protasevich may have been referring to a different Urals businessman.

"Mazepin wasn't accused of anything. Actually, Protasevich never said the last name Mazepin. Perhaps he or the Belarusian side should explain who he's talking about, you can't play cat-and-mouse here," Peskov was quoted as saying Monday.

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