

Critics Slam 16-Year Term for Belarus 'Railway Partisan'

By [AFP](#)

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Vitaliy Melnik was shot in the legs during detention. t.me/sewerfsefsd

Belarus' opposition criticized Friday a lengthy prison sentence handed to a man accused of sabotaging railway equipment in the ex-Soviet country that Russia used as a launchpad for its Ukraine offensive.

"The resistance against the war continues in Belarus despite the risk of severe punishments. The criminal case against 'railway partisan' Vital Melnik ended yesterday with a verdict of 16 years of imprisonment," Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya said on Twitter.

Tikhanovskaya said that Melnik was "shot in the knees" at the time of his arrest in April.

The Viasna rights group said earlier that a court in the capital Minsk had sentenced Melnik to 16 years in jail during a closed-door hearing on Thursday.

It said Melnik had been found guilty on multiple charges including "terrorism" and "insulting" strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko.

Lukashenko is a close ally of the Kremlin and has sought to stamp out any remaining pockets of dissent in Belarus since his contested re-election for a fourth term in 2020.

The Belarusian interior ministry said in April it arrested three men in their late 20s, who allegedly damaged and set fire to electric relay boxes and signal boxes near the town of Osipovichi southeast of Minsk and also had a device designed to derail a train.

The ministry published video footage of bloodied and bruised men lying on the ground, saying that police had shot at them because they resisted arrest.

A fourth man was detained for a "similar crime" in the Borisov region northeast of Minsk.

The man, shown lying on the ground with tourniquets and blood-stained bandages on both legs, is a convicted murderer, the ministry said.

In late March, Belarus state media reported that a Telegram channel called "Live. Community of railway workers of Belarus," which has been declared extremist, had posted instructions on destroying railway infrastructure.

The Telegram channel describes the detained men as partisans. It condemns Belarusian railway workers who take part in transporting Russian military equipment and weapons to the border with Ukraine.

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