

# Covert Action Props Up U.S.-Polish Axis Against Belarus: A Deep Dive into Far-Right Regime-Change Activists and Their Backers

By [FOIA Research](#)

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*In Western mainstream media, the current protests in Belarus are portrayed as a natural development, in which the country's peaceful citizens are finally standing up against an aging dictator clinging to power after the allegedly fraudulent August 9th elections. However, with a closer look at the people and entities behind the unrest, a much less benign picture emerges: far-right regime-change activists supported by foreign backers who have an interest in (1) driving a wedge into the decades-old dependency of Belarus on Russia, (2) integrating the country into a "buffer zone" between Western Europa and Russia that is increasingly looking to the U.S. as an ally and (3) co-opting the last predominantly Russia-orientated Eastern European state into the NATO ambit.*

The 2020 protests in Belarus show all the signs of yet another foreign-backed [color revolution](#) in Eastern Europe.

They are also not the first Western-backed effort to get rid of President Alexander Lukashenko's government, which has managed to stay in power since 1994. In 2006, the country saw the so-called [jeans revolution](#) (March 19-25, 2006), a short-lived series of protests that, similar to the current protests, erupted on the evening of the elections. At the time the protests were led by the Belarusian "democratic opposition," whose figurehead was then presidential candidate [Alaksandar Milinkievič](#), then and [now](#) propped up by the West.





Top: Coat of Arms of the Belarusian People's Republic, known as Pahonia. Bottom: Flag of the Belarusian People's Republic.

As is the case with the current protests, during the run-up to the 2006 Jeans revolution, white-red-white flags were waved by the demonstrators. But when their usage was outlawed starting in late 2005, the Belarusian opposition adopted denim as a symbol of protest.<sup>[1]</sup> In the former Soviet Union, denim was often identified with Western culture and the fabric symbolized the [pro-Western](#) sentiment of the anti-Lukashenko opposition of the time.

The white-red-white flag harks back to the history of the [Belarusian People's Republic](#), a short-lived state that emerged after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918, when Russia, in exchange for a truce, was forced to make large territorial concessions to Germany in the Baltics. Although Belarus was formally declared independent, it was nonetheless more of a German puppet state, since it was largely dependent on Germany's army for its defense. When the German army retreated from Belarus in December 1918, after Germany's defeat in World War I, the Red Army moved in and proclaimed the Socialist Soviet Republic of Belarussia, which in 1922 was incorporated into the Soviet Union. Anti-communist Belarusians subsequently began running a "government-in-exile," whose "capital-in-exile" is currently Ottawa, Canada.<sup>[2]</sup>

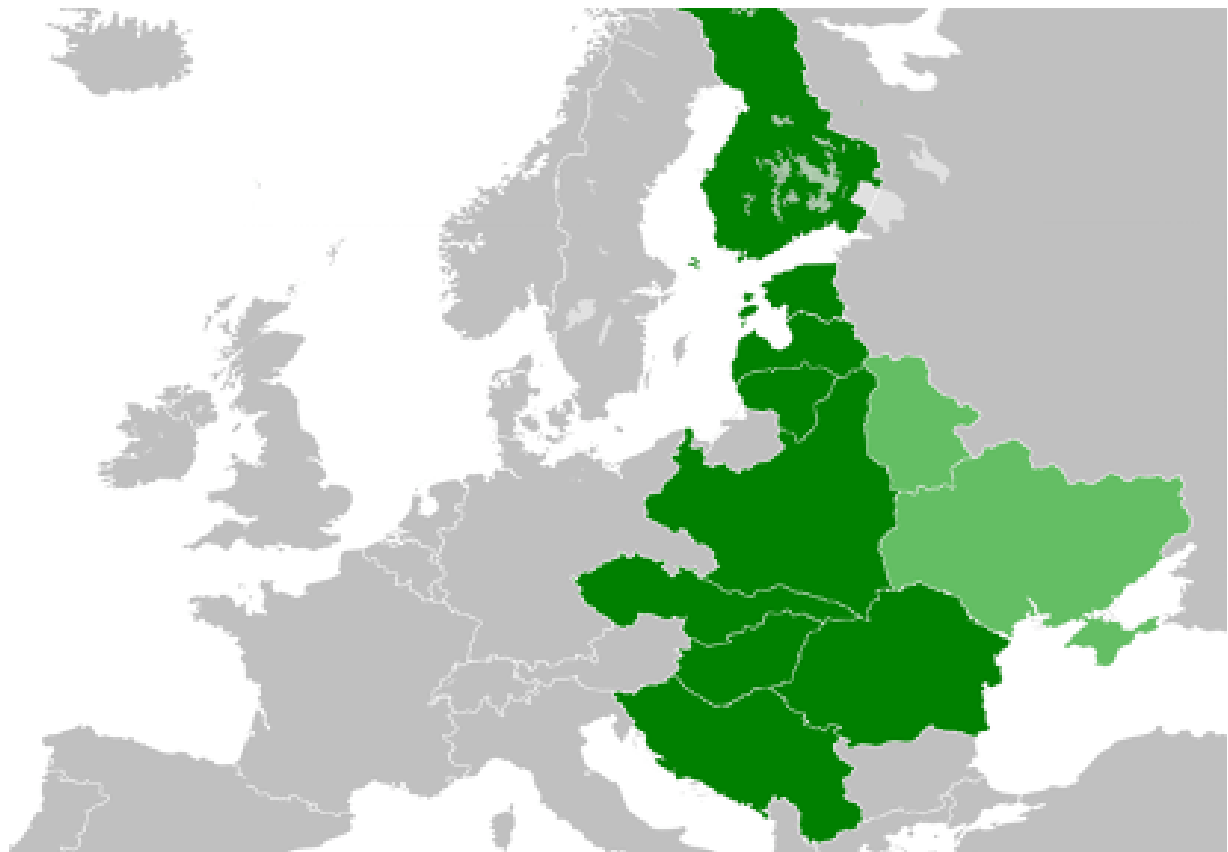
With the 2020 color uprisings, one need not look far to find foreign powers backing the protests.

Pressure on Belarus has been building, particularly from neighboring Poland, whose right-wing government has moved increasingly close to the U.S. in the past few years. It is no coincidence that Poland became a preferred base of operations for Belarusian exiles trying to bring down the Lukashenko government.



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (left) and Poland's Minister of Defense Mariusz Blaszczak (right) sign the U.S.-Poland Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement in the Presidential Palace in Warsaw, Poland, on August 15, 2020. [Source: [militarytimes.com](https://www.militarytimes.com)]

[As CAM reported](#), on August 15, 2020, not even a week into the protests in Belarus, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo signed a [military cooperation agreement](#) with Poland that provides for more American troops to be stationed in the country. The agreement goes hand in hand with Donald Trump's decision to reduce the number of American troops in Germany. At the end of July, the Pentagon announced the withdrawal of 12,000 troops from Germany, of which around 5,600 are to be moved to other European countries including Poland. Furthermore, several U.S. military commands will move out of Germany, including the [U.S. Army V Corps overseas headquarters](#), which will relocate to Poland in 2021.



Piłsudski's post-World War I Intermarium concept ranging from Finland in the north to the Balkans in the

south. [See CAM's detailed investigation on the Intermarium.](#) (In light-green: eastern parts of Ukrainian and Belarusian territories in 1922 incorporated into Soviet Union.) [Source: [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)]

This development reflects the increasing rift in U.S.-EU relations, and U.S.-German relations in particular, which Trump's "America First" policies have brought into the open. It is a clear sign that Germany, which has been the U.S.'s number one military partner in Europe, will cease to play that role in the foreseeable future, with Poland likely to take it on.

The date when the deal between Pompeo and Poland's right-wing president, Andrzej Duda, was signed is significant. It commemorates the victory of Poland against the Soviet Union in 1920 during the Polish-Soviet war and is integral to the celebration calendar of Polish fascists and anti-communists. According to the [Military Times](#):

After the signing ceremony, Pompeo joined Duda and other Polish leaders at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to mark the centennial of Poland's landmark victory ... In the Battle of Warsaw, often called the "Miracle on the Vistula," outnumbered Polish troops led by Marshal Józef Piłsudski defeated an advancing Red Army.

That [Józef Piłsudski's](#) name is highlighted in this context is not surprising, since he is commonly seen as the originator of the [Intermarium](#) union, the idea to create an anti-communist bulwark between Western Europe and Soviet Russia, reaching from the Baltics to the Black Sea. U.S. military strategists seem to have [picked up on the idea](#), but more with regard to gaining a foothold in the region by propping up right-wing governments in the "Intermarium belt," and striving to weaken its competitors, Western Europe and Russia, economically and politically. Belarus is of no particular economic interest to the U.S. in terms of natural resources. However, it is one of the last two countries bordering Russia that is neither a NATO nor an EU member, and the last country in Eastern Europe that is intrinsically tied to Russia.

Poland's role in the current Belarusian regime-change operation is quite significant, since the country became the base for two popular Belarusian-language news channels which have been leading a propaganda onslaught on the government in Belarus: [belsat.tv](https://belsat.tv) and Nexta.



Nexta footage on Germany's first public broadcasting channel, ARD. [Source: Tagesschau]

While in the course of the protests the independent Belarusian news landscape was practically shut down, only Nexta has continually managed to publish reports from inside the country, and by now has become one of the most quoted "sources" in Western mainstream media. As the [BBC wrote](#), "Nexta ... has managed to bypass many of the restrictions" and, when the protests started to intensify, the exposure of Nexta simply exploded: "Within hours, its audience grew on election night by 100,000 and then after two nights of protests it had amassed more than a million."

If one is to believe the [BBC](#), Nexta is a local grassroots effort that "has no website, and only a small editorial team of four in Warsaw, but it does have a YouTube and a Telegram channel." That it is highly unlikely that Nexta has only a "small team" becomes evident when looking at the sheer mass of posts the channel pumps out. As a Twitter user aptly [commented](#) [typos removed]:

[The] organisation and coordination of "protest" actions in Belarus is done from abroad, by 3 Telegram channels. Nexta channels encourage attacks on the police. It publishes a few publications a minute, so they should have large editorial groups, working 24/7.

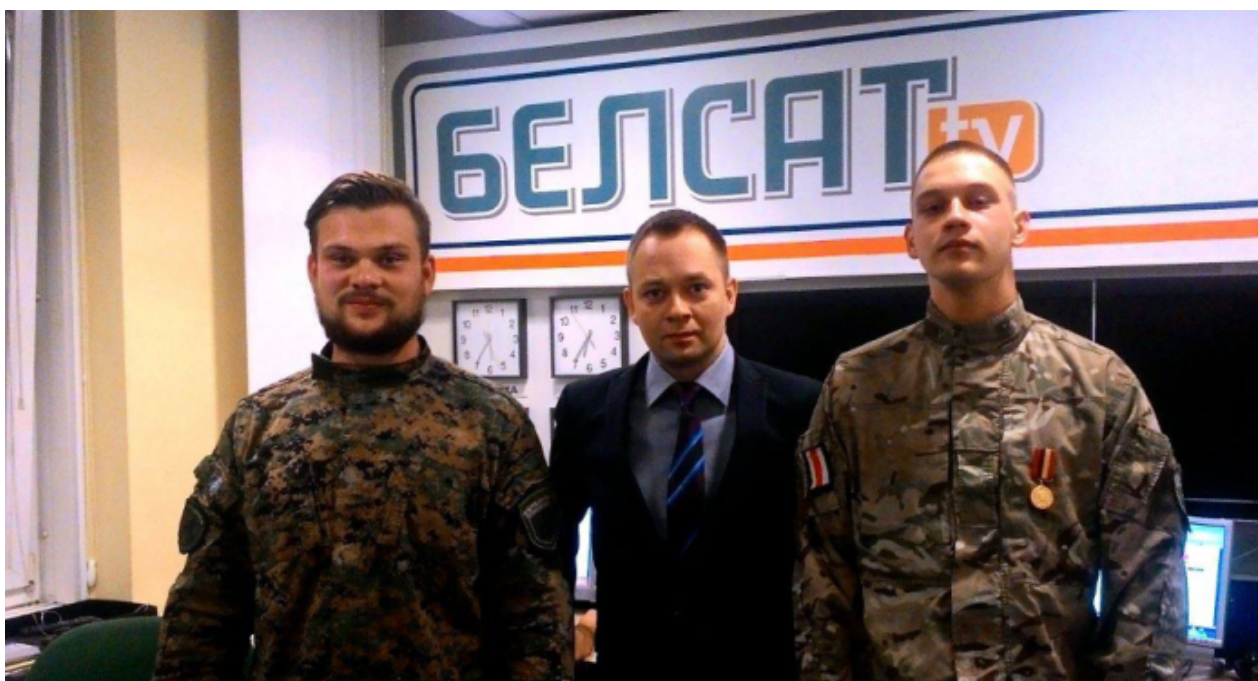
According to [strana.ua](#), another medium sympathetic to the protests, Nexta started as an anti-Lukashenko [YouTube channel](#) created by a Belarusian teenager, [Stepan Putila](#), also known under the moniker [Stepan Svetlov](#), back in 2015. That year Putila moved from Minsk to Poland to study film production, from where he kept building the Nexta brand, e.g., creating an eponymous [Telegram channel](#) in 2018. According to [strana.ua](#), Putila apparently had access to insider information of the Belarusian Interior Ministry, which helped to create the image of a whistleblower platform.

One year into his studies, Putila started to work for the Warsaw-based channel Belsat.tv, an anti-Lukashenko Belarusian-language TV channel [financed by the Polish Foreign Affairs](#)



[Ministry](#), for which his father worked as a sports commentator. Belsat's motivations seem more than shady. In 2015, an article appeared on the channel that encouraged people to join as volunteers on the side of Ukraine in the war in Donbass, even providing a contact email address and phone number. In that context, Belsat presenter Daroha Via, posted a picture on Facebook, showing him together with two fighters advertising the cause. The image is subtitled<sup>[3]</sup>:

I am rarely trying to reach out to people on my Facebook profile, but today I not only want to reach out, but also to make clear: KGB employees, you won't be able to block us. You can get in touch with the guys here: <http://belsat.eu/programs/belaruskiya-vayary-na-danbase-dobraahvotniki-stvar-ayuts-antyrejtyng-ukrainskaj-uladze/>



Belsat.tv presenter Daroha Via with military personnel advertising to fight in the War in Donbass.

[Source: [Facebook](#)]

Besides his involvement with Belsat, Daroha Via also doubles as nationalist Belarusian agitator in Poland. For example, he has taken part in demonstrations in front of the Russian embassy in Warsaw, together with Nexta-founder Putila and a comrade-in-arms (Zmicier Jahoraŭ) waving the flag of the Belarusian People's Republic.



Top: Stepan Putila and Daroha Via protesting in front of the Russian embassy, Warsaw, in December 2019. [Source: [Facebook](#)] Bottom: Ales Karniyenka firing the protests in front of the Belarusian embassy in Warsaw in June 2020. Source: [Facebook](#).

Another example of a [belsat.tv](#) presenter slash Belarusian nationalist agitator is Ales Karniyenka who, like Putila and Via, seemed to inflame the August 2020 Belarusian protests from Poland, on TV and in real life. For example, Karniyenka hosted a talk show in December 2019, where he advertised Nexta and encouraged people to rise up with NATO at the doorstep. His Facebook page shows him leading the protests in front of the Belarusian embassy in Warsaw on June 21, 2020. That Karniyenka touches base with neo-Nazis is indicated by the cast of his talk show guests, including Yanechak Yasav, who appeared on the show exposing his Odinist tattoos and Thor's hammer dangling on a necklace.





Facebook post by Ales Karnyienka showing Yanechak Yasav on Belsat. Notice the Odinst tattoos and Thor’s hammer around his neck. [Source: [Facebook](#)]

The only other person known to be associated with Nexta, Roman Protasevich, seems to hail from the same swamp of nationalist regime-change operatives. He has a far-right and anti-communist background, and [worked for](#) an USAID-supported radio station in Belarus called [euroradio.fm](#), as well as for Radio Liberty (Radio Svaboda).



Entities supporting Euroradio.fm, the former employer of Nexta’s Roman Protasevich, including USAID and the Polish Solidarnosc Foundation. [Source: [euroradio.fm](#)]

When looking at [Protasevich’s Facebook page](#) it becomes clear that he has, in recent years, been part of various far-right demonstrations and subversive activities. In his youth, Protasevich was a member of the Young Front, a nationalist and [militaristic](#) youth group based in the Czech Republic. Protasevich was part of the Maidan protests in Kiev 2013/2014, as a [picture on Facebook](#) shows him, clad in a Belarusian People’s State flag, taking part in the destruction of a Lenin statue. That he sees himself as a “Belarusian knight,” can be guessed from his Facebook pictures.





Top: Picture from a neo-Nazi rally posted by Roman Protasevich in March 2018 on Facebook. Note the Thor Steinar jacket, a brand favored by neo-Nazis. [Source: [Facebook](#)]; Bottom: Roman Protasevich as “Belarusian knight.” [Source: [Facebook](#)]

Protasevich’s long-standing connections to Ukrainian nationalists is also indicated by his [sympathies](#) for the [Pahonia Detachment](#), a group of Belarusian volunteers fighting in the war in Donbass. The professionally armed militia has fought alongside the neo-Nazi [Azov battalion](#) in Ukraine, which now has been incorporated into the [Ukrainian National Guard](#). The prevalence of neo-Nazis among the Pahonia Detachment seems also strongly indicated. For example, a photo shows a Pahonia member in uniform showing off his Odinist skull tattoos.









Top: The Pahonia Detachment (badge with mounted knight) commemorated in an Ukrainian exhibition alongside the Azov battalion. [Source: Facebook]; Center: Picture posted by the Pahonia Detachment on April 4, 2018, on Facebook, subtitled: “On the way to the front.” [Source: [Facebook](#)]; Bottom: Members of the Pahonia Detachment. Note the Odinst tattoos on neck and face. [Source: [Facebook](#)]



The Pahonia Detachment also identifies with the historic legacy of the Belarusian People’s Party, as is apparent from the widespread use of the white-red-white flag on the detachment’s social media accounts. [Source: [Facebook](#)]

Another murky figure in the Ukrainian-Belarusian-Polish regime-change axis, is the Polish “photojournalist” [Witold Dobrowolski](#), traveling the world to “report” on violent uprisings, from Maidan, over Hong Kong to the recent protests in Belarus. His photos show that he is always just a step away from the neo-Nazi black block when attending demonstrations. Dobrowolski, formerly the editor of the Polish neo-Nazi magazine [SZTURM](#), has been associated with key figures of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi scene and with entities known for their



regime-change activities. He attended the first [Intermarium Support Group](#) conference, bringing together para-military specialists from the Central Eastern European far-right spectrum, particularly countries foreseen to join the Intermarium union. He also appeared as a speaker at the first [Paneuropa Conference](#) on April 28, 2017, in Kyiv, Ukraine, which brought together neo-Nazis from all over Europe who sympathized with the Azov battalion. In the conference protocol he is introduced as “one of the first to launch the Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation and cooperation along with Vladyslav Kovalchuk, on the Ukrainian part.”<sup>[4]</sup>





Pictures by Witold Dobrowolski from protests in [Hong Kong](#) (top), [Beirut](#), Lebanon (center), and [Minsk](#), Belarus (bottom), always just a step away from the violent black block.

In August 2020, Dobrowolski appeared in the context of the Belarus color uprisings. He was traveling to Minsk on August 6, 2020, according to his [Facebook page](#). Also in Belarus, Dobrowolski seems to have been “documenting” violent black block agitators, as photos on Facebook suggest. Apparently he was among the many protesters who were detained and mistreated during the protests in mid-August. Upon his release, Dobrowolski was [interviewed by the BBC](#) about his detention, where he was simply introduced as “photojournalist,” not in the least mentioning his neo-Nazi connections. On Twitter [he wrote](#): “Kidnapped, tortured and sent to gulag but now free and safe with members of Polish diplomacy.”



Twitter post by OzKaterji showing Witold Dobrowolski on BBC. [Source: [Twitter](#)]

This nexus between Belarusian, Polish and Ukrainian nationalists, perhaps appearing as a



fringe phenomenon to some, is in fact extremely relevant in hindsight of the “successful” color revolution in Ukraine that has led to a creeping Nazification of the country.



Top: Olena Semenyaka (center) supporting the Belarusian protests together with other members of the antifeminist, neo-Nazi group [Silver Rose](#) (Срібло Троянди). [Source: Facebook.]; Bottom: Silver Rose during a happening in March 2020, where they symbolically buried feminism. [Source: [Facebook](#)]

Currently, Ukrainian nationalists are cheering, since the U.S.-Polish intervention is likely to drag Belarus away from the influence of Russia, and bring the country into the aspired Intermarium buffer zone. Influential Ukrainian neo-Nazis, such as [Olena Semenyaka](#), have shown their solidarity, reproducing the symbols of the Belarusian protests: women dressed in white holding flowers. Usually, Semenyaka rather spends her time symbolically burying feminism in the streets of Kyiv with her friends of the all-female antifeminist neo-Nazi group [Silver Rose](#) (Срібло Троянди) —dressed all in black. Semenyaka has been appearing as spokesperson of the U.S.-sponsored neo-Nazi Azov battalion, as host of the neo-Nazi

Paneuropa conference, as well as of the Intermarium Support Group.

Despite relying on nasty nationalist and neo-Nazi elements to fire the Belarusian uprisings, known foreign meddlers, such as the Atlantic Council, [dubbed](#) the protests as “generally very sweet, polite, and peaceful,” and speculated that the “Belarus revolution may be too velvet to succeed.” These statements are part of a clear disinformation campaign designed to sanitize the protests for a Western audience and obscure the presence of the far-right in them.

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*[FOIA Research](#) is a nonprofit research platform that focuses on transnational relations of the far right, particularly neo-Nazi and paramilitary structures. Moreover, the project seeks to identify intelligence projects that have been instrumentalizing, or propping up, far-right proponents. FOIA Research has teamed up with CovertAction Magazine to provide background information and reports on the extreme right in Europe and beyond.*

#### Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> “ОМОН против правды [Riot police against the truth],” [charter97.org](#), September 16, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151222084221/http://www.charter97.org/bel/news/2005/09/16/omon>.

<sup>[2]</sup> According to the Wikipedia page of the [Belarusian People’s Republic](#), the locations of the capital-in-exile were as follows: 1919–1923 Kaunas, Lithuania; 1923–1945 Prague, then Czechoslovakia; 1948–1970 Paris; 1970–1983 Toronto; 1983–present Ottawa.

<sup>[3]</sup> Facebook post by Daroha Via, November 3, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/daroha.via/posts/1082835665074692>.

<sup>[4]</sup> “1st Paneuropa Conference Report,” Reconquista Europe (Blog), June 15, 2017. Archived version from June 13, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180613133924/http://reconquista-europe.tumblr.com/post/161847863121/1st-paneuropa-conference-report-the-1st-paneuropa>.

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