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Ukrainian Prisoners Soloshenko, Afanasyev Return Home From Russia

By The Moscow Times

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Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced an exchange has been agreed for Afanasyev and Soloshenko in late May.

Ukrainian citizens Gennady Afanasyev and Yuri Soloshenko have been released from Russian prison and are returning to Kiev, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko wrote on Twitter Tuesday.

"Finally! Yuri Afanasiev and Gennady Soloshenko are already on board a Ukrainian airplane and are flying from Moscow to Ukraine," Poroshenko wrote on the social media site.

Soloshenko and Afanasyev have been exchanged for Ukrainian journalists Yelena Glishchinskaya and Vitaly Didenko, RIA Novosti reported. The plane carrying the journalists and Glishchinskaya's child has arrived in Moscow.

Both Glishchinskaya and Didenko have been accused by the Ukrainian courts of involvement

with a separatist organization. Prosecutors allege that both have had dealings with Narodnaya Rada Bessarabii, a group calling for the secession of some parts of the Odessa region from Ukraine.

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Soon after Poroshenko's statement, the lawyers of the convicted Ukrainians petitioned Russian President Vladimir Putin for a pardon soon after. The men did not admit their guilt as part of the process.

On Tuesday, Putin pardoned Soloshenko and Afanasyev, according to a presidential decree published on the Kremlin's website.

Media reports had previously speculated that they could be exchanged for two Russians who were detained in mass riots in Ukraine's Odessa on May 2, 2014.

Afanasyev was arrested in Crimea in May 2014 and charged over alleged plan to commit terrorist attack on the peninsula.He was found guilty by Moscow City Court last year. Soloshenko, a 73-year old former defense factory head, received a six year prison sentence last year on espionage charges.

The return of Soloshenko and Afanasyev comes three weeks after the long-awaited exchange of Ukraine's Nadiya Savchenko for two Russian soldiers, Yevgeny Yerofeyev and Alexander Alexandrov.

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