Putin's 'Chef' Pays Russian Operatives Released by Libya

By [AFP](#)

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An ally of President Vladimir Putin has shelled out nearly $500,000 to two Russian political operatives recently freed by Libya after 18 months in captivity, his company said Monday.

Russian media last week reported that Maxim Shugaley and his interpreter Samir Seifan, who were arrested in Libya in May 2019 on charges of vote meddling, were released on Dec. 10 and were flying back to Russia.

Concord, a company owned by EU-sanctioned businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, said on Monday that he would be supporting the two men with 18 million rubles ($246,420) each — 1 million rubles for each of the 18 months they were held captive.

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"Russians don't abandon their own!" Concord said in a statement on the social media network Vkontakte.

Nicknamed "Putin's chef" because his company has catered for the Kremlin, Prigozhin was sanctioned by the European Union in October on grounds of undermining peace in Libya by supporting the Wagner private military company.

Prigozhin, 59, was earlier sanctioned by the United States for his links to Wagner, which has been accused of sending mercenaries to fight in conflicts in Libya, Syria and countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

In conflict-torn Libya, Moscow backs strongman Khalifa Haftar against the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

Shugaley and Seifan — both Russian citizens — were accused last year by Libyan authorities of election meddling on behalf of Moscow while they were working with the son of ousted leader Moamer Kadhafi.

Russia had made their release a condition for any improvement in relations with the internationally recognized Tripoli-based government.

Both operatives were employed by the Foundation for the Defense of National Values, a Moscow-based organization that is part of a media group the United States has linked to Prigozhin.

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