

'A Very Grim Milestone': Evan Gershkovich Marks 1 Year in Russian Jail

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Evan Gershkovich. **Yaroslav Chingaev / Moskva News Agency**

A year after Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was jailed in Russia, his parents and friends say they remain hopeful that he will soon be freed.

“One year is way too long for Evan to be behind bars on these completely bogus charges,” said Pjotr Sauer, The Guardian’s Russia correspondent and Evan’s close friend.

“It's a very grim milestone, of course,” Sauer told The Moscow Times. “At the same time, I'm incredibly proud of how Evan has carried himself through this whole time. ... He's definitely not broken.”

On Friday, his family, friends and colleagues are holding a number of events to mark the anniversary of his arrest and call for his release, including a 24-hour readathon of his

reporting, as well as a [gathering](#) of friends at Berlin's Brandenburger Gate.

“We are trying to bring attention to the fact, to as many people as possible, that Evan is innocent, he's been wrongfully detained,” said his father, Mikhail Gershkovich.

Evan was featured on the cover of Time magazine this month. And on Friday, The Wall Street Journal [left](#) a blank space on its front page to symbolize the year of Evan's reporting that was lost because of his detention.

“It's so important to keep Evan in the picture,” Sauer said.

“His friends and The Wall Street Journal have done a really good job to humanize Evan and tell the story of who he is, not just as a reporter, but also as a person. I do think it helps, but in the end, he's still behind bars. So we hope and expect more work from the White House to release him.”

Evan, 32, was raised in New Jersey by his parents, Ella Milman and Mikhail Gershkovich, who emigrated to the U.S. from the Soviet Union in the late 1970s.

He worked as a reporter for The Moscow Times between 2017 and 2020, his first journalism job in Russia. His reporting offered clear signals on where Russia was headed, from the militarization of the country's youth to the poisoning of opposition activist Alexei Navalny in 2020.

He then worked at AFP before being hired by The Wall Street Journal in January 2022.

After many foreign correspondents left Russia amid the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the passage of wartime censorship laws, Evan returned to Russia to report on how the country was being reshaped by the war.

But on March 29, 2023, he was detained by the Federal Security Service (FSB) on espionage charges while on a reporting trip in Yekaterinburg, becoming the first Western journalist to be charged with spying in Russia since the Cold War.

Evan, his employer and the U.S. government vehemently deny the espionage accusations against him. The Russian government has still not provided any evidence for its claims.

“He is such a good journalist — and also by the reaction of not just foreign correspondents, but lots of Russian people, his Russian colleagues [and] Russian friends — the anger and the shock they showed when Evan was arrested just shows how well-liked he was among a lot of Russians as well,” Sauer said.

The U.S. government has designated him as “wrongfully detained,” a move that helps ensure State Department involvement in efforts to secure his release.

Related article: [The Torture of Isolation: Inside the Russian Prison Housing U.S. Journalist Evan Gershkovich](#)

This month, Russian and Western media [reported](#) that Moscow and Washington had been in

talks to exchange Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, Evan and former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan before Navalny's Feb. 16 death in an Arctic prison. Though reports differed on how far those negotiations had progressed.

"We follow the news closely, but I can't offer any specific insight," Evan's father Mikhail said of the reports. "We are excited that both governments are interested in some kind of a deal."

On Thursday, the Kremlin [said](#) exchange talks were ongoing, and President Vladimir Putin has publicly expressed a willingness to swap the journalist.

Evan stays in touch with his family and friends through letters, receiving regular updates on what is happening in the world outside his Moscow prison cell.

"It's our discussions, book discussions," Ella says of their correspondence. "Sometimes worldwide events, but mostly some memories, a lot of the personal stuff, lots of joking around [and] sharing."

"He shared a few recipes with me, what he made with the vegetables and whatever was sent to him, [and] the kind of tea he makes," she said.

Mikhail said he keeps Evan up to date on developments in artificial intelligence and that the two play chess together.

"I'm saying 'play,' but I'm an amateur, not a good chess player. Evan has read a book on strategy, so he's basically schooling me in chess," he said.

Sauer said Evan's friends also mail him food, clothes and books, as well as send him translated news articles.

"He wants to keep on being updated with the world," he said.

Sauer said the letters from family, friends and supporters have been the "biggest support system" for Evan given his isolation in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo prison.

"He wants to feel like he's still living with us, even though he's miles away behind bars," Sauer said. "He wants to know the stories about what's going on, the gossip, the laughs, the jokes."

A team of volunteers translates every letter sent to him into Russian — as is required by the country's prison service — and translates letters that Evan sends back into English.

"There's obviously only so much we can do. In the end, the rest he has to do himself and stay in jail," Sauer said.

Ella and Mikhail said they have also found support from their son's friends, with three of Evan's closest friends joining them for Thanksgiving last year.

"I'm sure Evan talks to them in the letters and tells them to check up on us, to make sure we're OK," Ella said.

Above all, Evan's attitude — which remains upbeat and unshaken even after one year in jail —

has helped his friends and family cope with his absence.

“He has been an inspiration for me. He's holding himself together. It's inspiring for me and helped me hold myself together as well,” Mikhail said.

“We are very hopeful that the next year will bring some resolution for this whole thing.”

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