

Russia May Free 20-30 Political Prisoners in Historic Exchange With West

By [Politika.Kozlov](#)

July 31, 2024



Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS

This article was first published by [Politika.Kozlov](#).

Russia may be preparing to free between 20 and 30 political prisoners and journalists in an imminent exchange with the United States and Germany, a source familiar with the planning said, in what, if confirmed, would be the largest swap since the end of the Cold War.

Previous reporting by independent Russian media suggested that up to 10 high-profile political prisoners were being readied for the rumored exchange.

“I know of more people than those who have already been mentioned publicly,” the source told Politika.Kozlov.

“My estimate is that Moscow will extradite about 20 to 30 people to the West.”

The source spoke on condition of anonymity in order to share details about a sensitive diplomatic matter.

Speculation has been growing in recent days that a major prisoner exchange is on the horizon as several jailed dissidents and journalists [were moved](#) from their prison cells to unknown locations.

Among those prisoners whose whereabouts have become unknown are activists [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#), Oleg Orlov and Lilia Chanyshova, as well as former Moscow city councilman Ilya Yashin.

According to Politika.Kozlov’s source, the list of individuals being readied for exchange includes people linked to the late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny’s organizations, Russian citizens jailed for criticizing the war in Ukraine and U.S. citizens.

The list includes prominent dissidents Kara-Murza and Yashin, the source said.

Related article: [More Russian Political Prisoners Moved, Fueling Speculation of Imminent Swap](#)

The source said it was his understanding that U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich is among those slated to be exchanged.

The list may also include individuals whose trials are still ongoing, the source said.

Authorities have made “great efforts to keep the information inside Russia as much a secret as possible until the last moment,” Politika.Kozlov’s source added.

On Wednesday, aircraft from the special Rossiya Airlines detachment serving the Kremlin and the government reportedly flew to regions where a number of political prisoners were being held.

According to Politika.Kozlov’s source, these aircraft transported the political prisoners from remote regions in order to maintain secrecy.

“The prisoners held closer to Moscow could easily have been taken out by car,” the source said.

The source said the exchange could take place as soon as Wednesday or Thursday, but did not have more specific details on its timing.

Slovenian broadcaster N1 Slovenija, citing anonymous sources, [reported](#) earlier Wednesday that a major prisoner exchange involving the U.S., Germany, Russia and Belarus was expected “in the coming hours.” That report was published shortly after a court in Ljubljana [sentenced](#) a Russian couple to prison on espionage charges, but then unexpectedly ordered their deportation from the country.

Also on Wednesday, information about four Russians imprisoned in the United States on charges including cyber crime, money laundering and electronics smuggling disappeared from the Federal Bureau of Inmates database.

The White House, when asked Wednesday about a possible exchange, said it was “committed” to returning detained Americans in Russia, but otherwise declined to “get into specifics.”

“We do not negotiate in public. We cannot negotiate in public because we want to make sure we can get this job done,” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

Russia last exchanged prisoners with the U.S. in December 2022 when it freed American basketball star Brittney Griner for the notorious arms dealer Viktor Bout, who had been held in a U.S. prison for 12 years.

Following that exchange, President Joe Biden expressed regret that former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan, who was jailed in 2018 on espionage charges, could not be included in the deal.

If confirmed, the upcoming exchange would be the largest since 2010, when Washington and Moscow swapped 10 Russian secret agents who had been living undercover in the U.S. for four Russian nationals.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/07/31/russia-may-free-20-30-political-prisoners-in-historic-exchange-with-west-a85896>