

# What We Know About the Prisoner Exchange Between Russia and the West

By [Moscow Times Reporter](#)

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**Alexander Shcherbak / TASS**

A historic prisoner swap is underway between Russia and the West, leading Western media [reported](#) Thursday, citing anonymous sources familiar with the situation.

U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich, ex-U.S. Marine Paul Whelan, Russian-U.K. opposition figure and journalist Vladimir Kara-Murza and Russian-U.S. journalist Alsu Kurmasheva were freed in the exchange at an airport in Ankara, Turkey, The Wall Street Journal [reported](#).

The exchange is believed to include over a dozen more journalists, dissidents and other political prisoners released from Russia in exchange for Russians held in the West — the largest and most complex swap since the end of the Cold War.

Here is what we know so far. This article will be updated as more information is made public.

## How many prisoners will be freed?

The Moscow Times' partner outlet Politika.Kozlov [reported](#) late Wednesday that Russia may be preparing to free between 20 and 30 political prisoners and journalists in an exchange with the U.S. and Germany, citing a source familiar with the planning.

[According to CBS](#), 24 people are expected to be in the prison swap — at least 12 political prisoners held in Russia are expected to be released to Germany and eight Russian nationals are expected to be returned to Russia.

## Who is being freed from Russia?

### Evan Gershkovich

Gershkovich, 32, a Wall Street Journal correspondent and former Moscow Times reporter, was in July sentenced to 16 years in prison for espionage — charges that he, his employer and the U.S. government strongly denied.

He was arrested in March 2023 during a reporting trip in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg and spent nearly 16 months in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo Prison before being sentenced to a "strict-regime colony."

### Vladimir Kara-Murza

Russian-British opposition politician Kara-Murza, 42, is among those being freed on Thursday, Bloomberg reported, citing an anonymous European official.

Kara-Murza was serving a 25-year prison sentence for treason and other charges for his criticism of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calls to Western countries to impose sanctions against the Kremlin.

His family and supporters have raised alarm over his health, which is said to have deteriorated in prison due to a nerve condition he sustained after surviving two poisoning attempts in the 2010s. He was [hospitalized](#) in July.

### Paul Whelan

Whelan, 54, is a former U.S. Marine who was arrested in Russia in 2018 and sentenced to 16 years in high-security prison on espionage charges in 2020. The case has been widely criticized by the U.S. government and international human rights organizations, who argue that the charges are politically motivated.

Russia reportedly [refused](#) to release Whelan along with Brittney Griner as part of a prisoner exchange in 2022. U.S. President Joe Biden said at the time that Russia was treating Whelan's case differently "for totally illegitimate reasons."

### Alsu Kurmasheva

Kurmasheva, 47, a dual U.S.-Russian citizen who works for the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) news outlet, was arrested on a trip to visit family in Russia and sentenced in

July to 6.5 years in prison for spreading “fakes” about the Russian army.

Kurmasheva was sentenced in a secret hearing on the same day that Gershkovich was sentenced.

### **Other names**

The investigative outlet The Insider [reported](#) that the list of prisoners to be freed also includes jailed dissidents Lilia Chanyшева, Ilya Yashin, Ksenia Fadeyeva, Andrei Pivovarov, Oleg Orlov and Vadim Ostanin; artist Sasha Skochilenko; German-Russian political scientist Dieter Voronin; 19-year-old German-Russian citizen Kevin Lik; German citizens Rico Krieger and Patrick Schöbel and German-Russian activist Herman Moyzhes.

### **Who is expected to be freed from the West?**

#### **Vadim Krasikov**

[According to CBS](#), Krasikov, a Russian citizen serving a life sentence in Germany for the 2019 killing of a former Chechen rebel commander in Berlin, is among the prisoners expected to be returned to Russia. German authorities said the assassination was ordered by Russian intelligence services.

In an interview with conservative U.S. pundit Tucker Carlson in February, President Vladimir Putin [brought up](#) the case of Vadim Krasikov — without mentioning him by name — in the context of a possible prisoner exchange.

#### **Ludwig Gisch and Maria Rosa Mayer Munos**

Two Russian nationals going by the names of Ludwig Gisch and Maria Rosa Mayer Munos were convicted for spying in Slovenia, which later ordered their expulsion from the country.

The couple, whose Russian names are Artyom and Anna Dultsev, pleaded guilty on charges of "spying and falsifying documents," the Ljubljana regional court said in a statement.

The two Russians, who are both about 40 years old and hold Argentinian passports, were detained in 2022 over alleged spying for Moscow, media reported. They were said to have used a business and an art gallery in Ljubljana as cover and used false identities.

#### **Pavel Rubtsov (“Pablo Gonzalez”)**

The Insider reported that Rubtsov, a Spanish-Russian citizen arrested in Poland and accused of posing as a journalist named Pablo Gonzalez in order to spy for Russian intelligence, is on the list of prisoners to be returned to Russia.

The Insider's list also [named](#) hacker Roman Seleznev, businessman Vladislav Klyushin, smuggler Vadim Konoshchenok and Norwegian GRU “illegal” Mikhail Mikushin among the Russians slated to be freed by the West.

## Where will the swap be held?

Russian media [reported](#) that a Gulfstream business jet from Slovenia, where Artyom and Anna Dultsev had been sentenced after pleading guilty to espionage on Wednesday, has landed in Turkey.

The U.S. - Russian prisoner swap is being “carried out in Ankara with the [coordination](#) of” Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MIT), according to the Turkish news agency Ihlas Haber Ajansi (IHA).

Turkey's NTV news channel is [airing](#) live footage of two Russian planes purported to be carrying some of the prisoners at Ankara's airport.

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