

Some Freed Russian Prisoners 'Feared for Their Lives' – German Chancellor

By [AFP](#)

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Mikhail Klimentyev / TASS

Some prisoners freed from Russia and Belarus in a major swap had feared for their lives, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Friday, after meeting a group of the detainees on their arrival in Germany.

He described a "moving" encounter with the prisoners, many of whom "did not expect this to happen now," adding: "Many feared for their health and even their lives."

Speaking after welcoming the prisoners at Cologne airport, Scholz insisted the swap was "the right decision, and if you had any doubts, you will lose them after talking to those who are now free."

Two dozen prisoners were freed Thursday in the complex swap, including U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich and a Russian hitman jailed for a brazen murder in Berlin.

Germany is receiving a total of 12 detainees. These include five who hold German nationality, including some dual nationals.

Among them is Rico Krieger, a German who was sentenced to death in Belarus on espionage charges before a reprieve this week.

The German government has defended the decision to free Russian hitman Vadim Krasikov, who assassinated a former Chechen rebel commander, and was a key figure sought by the Russians as part of the deal.

"We are a society that is characterized by... the idea of individual freedom and by democracy," Scholz said.

"And the fact that those who have to fear for their lives because they have stood up for democracy and freedom can also count on the protection of others is part of our self-image as a democratic... society," he added.

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