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Widow of Murdered Chechen Rebel Says Kept in Dark About Killer's Release

August 02, 2024



Russia's President Vladimir Putin welcomes killer Vadim Krasikov at Vnukovo-2 Airport. **Mikhail Voskresensky / POOL / TASS**

The widow of a former Chechen military commander gunned down in Berlin said German authorities did not inform her they had agreed to release his convicted killer in a prisoner exchange with Russia on Thursday.

Zelimkhan Khangoshvili was shot dead in 2019 by Vadim Krasikov, a Russian intelligence officer who was later sentenced to life in prison over the killing. Krasikov was among eight Russians who returned home Thursday in a major prisoner exchange involving 24 people.

"No one asked us about the exchange," Khangoshvili's widow, Manana (Raisa) Tsiatiyeva, told Kavkaz.Realii, an affiliate of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "The fact that this happened shows that the victims' opinions are not important to the German authorities."

Krasikov's release has stirred controversy in Germany, with Chancellor Olaf Scholz acknowledging the "difficult" decision that facilitated the swap. U.S. media reported that the

release of the intelligence officer was a critical part of the exchange.

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U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Thursday that Scholz had promised U.S. President Joe Biden he would secure Krasikov's release as a personal favor. Biden expressed "great gratitude" to Scholz at a press conference celebrating the exchange.

German media reported that Scholz's office clashed with the German Justice Ministry over Krasikov's case. The ministry eventually ordered prosecutors to suspend Krasikov's sentence to enable his deportation.

As part of the exchange, Germany received 12 prisoners, including Russian dissidents and some German nationals.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was filmed greeting and hugging Krasikov on the tarmac at Moscow's Vnukovo airport early Friday, where he promised state awards to him and other returnees.

The Kremlin has denied any links to Khangoshvili's assassination.

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/08/02/widow-of-murdered-chechen-rebel-says-kept-in-dark-about-killers-release-a85915