The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Sleeper Agents Tell State TV About Life Undercover

By AFP

August 06, 2024



Anna Dultseva, Artyom Dultsev and their children arrive in Moscow. **Mikhail Voskresensky, RIA Novosti / kremlin.ru**

Two sleeper agents who returned to Russia as part of last week's historic prisoner exchange spoke to state television about breaking the news to their Spanish-speaking children that they were Russian.

Artyom Dultsev and Anna Dultseva, a married couple who spent years posing as Argentine expats in Slovenia while acting as "illegals," returned to Russia to a hero's welcome last week, with their two children, Sofiya, 11, and Daniil, 9.

Spies like them live abroad long-term under assumed identities. In 2010, a similar couple returned to Russia in a prisoner swap after bringing up their sons as Canadians.

In their first interview since the exchange, the Dultsevs, who were sentenced to prison in

Slovenia last month for spying, talked to the Rossiya television channel at a foreign intelligence facility.

"We told the children that we are Russian, that they are Russian," Dultseva said, recalling the conversation on the plane from Ankara.

Her husband said their daughter "had emotions, she started crying a little bit." Their son "reacted more calmly to this but very positively," he added.

Related article: ‘If You Talk, You’ll Go in a Bag’: Freed Russian Political Prisoners Recount Harrowing, Surprising Prison Swap

Dressed in a pink shirt and dark jeans, the couple walked hand in hand with their children, who had been placed in foster care after their arrest in December 2022.

Dultseva was shown praising her children in Spanish — "muy bien" — as they said their first phrases in Russian. She said she had found it hard to speak Russian again.

"You don't think in the [Russian] language — you control yourself all the time and when we arrived we realized we couldn't speak," Dultseva said.

A voiceover in the state television interview described the couple as "high-class specialists."

"Such people give their whole life to serving the motherland and make sacrifices a normal person can't understand," the voiceover said. "The Dultsevs brought up their children as Spanish-speaking Catholics... Now they are about to find out what borscht is."

Upon the couple's return to Russia, President Vladimir Putin hugged Dultseva, who wept as she stepped onto Russian soil Thursday.

"When I saw the honor guard out of the window of the plane, I started crying and Sofiya said: 'This is the first time I've seen you crying,'" Dultseva said.

She added that she felt "huge gratitude to our country, huge gratitude to Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin]."

While in prison, "we didn't doubt for a moment that the country remembered us, that Russia and the [secret] service were behind us," Dultsev said.

His wife vowed they would continue working "to serve Russia."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/08/06/russian-sleeper-agents-tell-state-tv-about-life-undercover-a85948