

Putin Secretly Awards Swapped Spy Couple – Reports

December 10, 2024



Vladimir Putin (2nd R) welcomes Russian citizens released in a prisoner exchange, at Vnukovo-2 Airport.
Mikhail Voskresensky / POOL / kremlin.ru

President Vladimir Putin secretly [awarded](#) the Order of Courage to two married sleeper agents who returned to Russia as part of a landmark prisoner exchange with the West, according to the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service's (SVR) "Spy" magazine.

Artyom Dultsev and Anna Dultseva received a hero's welcome, including by SVR chief Sergei Naryshkin and Putin himself when they stepped on Russian soil with their two Spanish-speaking children on Aug. 1.

They were among eight Russians held in Western countries who were [swapped](#) for 16 journalists, dissidents and other political prisoners held in Russia.

The Dultsevs spent years posing as Argentine expats in Slovenia while acting as "illegals" until they were arrested in December 2022 and sentenced for espionage in July 2024.

The December issue of the SVR's "Spy" magazine reported that Putin awarded Artyom Dultsev and Anna Dultseva the Order of Courage, but did not say when he issued the decree.

Investigative news outlet Agentstvo, which first spotted the interview with the Dultsevs, [said](#) it was unable to find Putin's decree awarding the couple in any of the publicly available databases.

The Dultsevs' biography in the "Spy" magazine notes that they were offered to serve in Russia's intelligence service in 2009. They were deployed abroad "under special conditions" in 2012 after three years of special training.

In an interview, Anna Dultseva said they were due to deploy in 2010, but the assignment was postponed after the United States busted a Russian spy ring of sleeper agents.

Artyom Dultsev told the magazine in an interview that their arrest was a "failure, but it's something that happens sometimes."

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