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American Among 3 Detainees Freed by Belarus, White House Says

By AFP

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Journalist Andrey Kuznechyk **RFE/RL**

U.S. officials said Wednesday they had secured the release of three "hostages" who had been detained in Belarus, including an American citizen, in a diplomatic success for President Donald Trump's administration.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed the release of the three, including "one American and two individuals from Belarus, one of whom worked for Radio Liberty."

U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania Kara McDonald, speaking on CNN from Vilnius, described the release as "a big day for team America, for the president, for the secretary of state," adding "we just welcomed them [the detainees] here a few minutes ago."

Exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya hailed the "wonderful news" in a post on X, thanking Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio "for their joint efforts in making this

happen."

Chris Smith, the deputy assistant secretary of state for Eastern European affairs, described a "special operation" in which he and other U.S. officials "crossed into the Belarusian frontier [and] went into Minsk to meet with Belarusian counterparts who brought these three detainees to us."

"They were handed over to us, and we brought them back out through Lithuania," he told CNN.

The released American has not been identified.

The White House's Leavitt called the U.S. citizen's release "a remarkable victory on the heels of Marc Fogel returning to America last night."

Fogel, an American teacher held in Russia since 2021, was freed Tuesday in a prisoner swap with Moscow.

One of the persons freed by Minsk is Andrey Kuznechyk, a veteran journalist with Radio Liberty, according to a statement from the broadcaster which is known in Belarus as Radio Svaboda.

'Joyous day'

In a statement, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) President Stephen Capus said: "This is a joyous day for Andrey, his wife, and their two young children. After more than three years apart, this family is together again thanks to President Trump."

RFE/RL posted a video of Kuznechyk hugging his wife, still wearing a prison uniform.

RFE/RL is a broadcaster funded by the US Congress, which was founded during the Cold War to transmit information behind the Iron Curtain.

Kuznechyk was arrested in 2021 and in 2022 sentenced to six years in a hard labor camp on a charge of participating in, or organizing an "extremist organization," the broadcaster said.

On Sunday billionaire Elon Musk, who is spearheading Trump's federal government cost-cutting efforts, called for RFE/RL and another broadcaster funded by Congress, the Voice of America, to be shuttered.

Tsikhanouskaya wrote on X that the other Belarusian citizen released, activist Yelena Movshuk, is "in a serious health condition."

Movshuk was detained in 2020 and in 2021 sentenced to six years on a charge of taking part in mass riots.

Tsikhanouskaya's aide Franak Viachorka wrote on Facebook that Movshuk "is in a difficult physical and psychological condition."

"We drove her to a safe place. On the way she told of all the horrors that she had to go

through," he added.

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