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Crypto Kingpin Alexander Vinnik Back in Russia After U.S. Handover

By AFP

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Russian citizen Alexander Vinnik, released from U.S. custody, arrives in Moscow. **TASS**

Russian cryptocurrency kingpin Alexander Vinnik has arrived in Russia after being released by the United States as part of an exchange deal that saw Moscow free U.S. teacher Marc Fogel, officials said.

Vinnik arrived in Russia overnight, according to video images released by state news agencies.

"I would like to thank everyone, above all, President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin," Vinnik said in the video released by Russian news agencies that showed him in a car heading home.

A senior U.S. official told AFP earlier that Vinnik, who pleaded guilty in May 2024 to conspiracy to commit money laundering, "was handed over to Russian officials."

U.S. President Donald Trump's government has hailed the prisoner exchange as a positive sign for diplomacy between the two countries and for possible negotiations over an end to the

Ukraine war.

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Trump's overtures to Putin in particular have caused alarm in Europe, which has viewed Russia as a major threat since the invasion of Ukraine.

Trump revealed on Wednesday he expected to meet Putin in Saudi Arabia for Ukraine peace talks in a sudden thaw in relations.

Vinnik was extradited to the United States from Greece in August 2022, hours after he had been released from a French jail.

He was the operator of BTC-e, one of the world's largest cryptocurrency exchanges that processed more than $9 billion in transactions, according to U.S. court documents.

The U.S. Justice Department had previously called the exchange "one of the primary ways by which cyber criminals around the world transferred, laundered, and stored the criminal proceeds of their illegal activities."

Vinnik said after arriving in Russia he didn't know he was heading to his home country until the last moment.

He was later shown hugging his crying mother, who said: "I was waiting for this so much."

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