The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Frees U.S.-Russian Dual National Ksenia Karelina in Prisoner Swap With United States

April 10, 2025



Russian-U.S. citizen Ksenia Karelina being exchanged early Thursday. **FSB / TASS**

Russia released U.S.-Russian dual national Ksenia Karelina in a prisoner exchange with the United States early Thursday in Abu Dhabi, U.S. officials confirmed.

"American Ksenia Karelina is on a plane back home to the United States," Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote on X. "She was wrongfully detained by Russia for over a year and President Trump secured her release."

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) later told the state-run TASS news agency that President Vladimir Putin pardoned Karelina, adding that she was exchanged with Arthur Petrov, a German-Russian dual national arrested in Cyprus in 2023 at the request of U.S. authorities for allegedly exporting sensitive U.S.-made microelectronics to Russia.

The law enforcement agency also released a video showing the exchange at Abu Dhabi

International Airport, with about a dozen people in suits, their faces blurred, overseeing the prisoner swap. In the video, Petrov said he was feeling "not bad," but was very tired after not having slept for two days.

The Kremlin declined to comment on the exchange, state media reported.

Karelina, a resident of Los Angeles, was arrested in January 2024 while visiting family in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg. She was initially charged with "petty hooliganism," but authorities later accused her of treason, saying she had donated around $50 to a Ukrainian charity.

In August, a Russian court sentenced Karelina to 12 years in prison. Her appeal was denied in the fall.

Related article: Russia and U.S. Delegations Arrive for Embassy Talks in Istanbul

The CIA played a central role in brokering Thursday's exchange, according to the Wall Street Journal, which first broke the story. CIA Director John Ratcliffe was said to have conducted negotiations with FSB head Alexander Bortnikov and was present at the Abu Dhabi airport for the handover.

"Today, President Trump brought home another wrongfully detained American from Russia," WSJ quoted Ratcliffe as saying in a statement. "I'm proud of the CIA officers who worked tirelessly to support this effort, and we appreciate the Government of U.A.E. for enabling the exchange."

Ratcliffe had reportedly spoken multiple times with Bortnikov, as well as with Sergei Naryshkin, head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), since becoming CIA director. Bortnikov was also involved in last year's negotiations to release WSJ reporter Evan Gershkovich, the newspaper said.

Karelina's lawyer Mikhail Mushailov told the RBC news outlet later on Thursday that his client was released from police custody in Russia and was already in communication with her parents.

According to sources cited by WSJ, Karelina is one of several Americans and Russian-U.S. dual citizens arrested in Russia that U.S. officials have been discussing with Russian counterparts.

Thursday's reported swap marks the second such exchange between Washington and Moscow since U.S. President Donald Trump took office earlier this year.

In February, the U.S. secured the release of Marc Fogel, an American teacher jailed in Russia on drug charges, in return for Russian cryptocurrency figure Alexander Vinnik.

The Trump administration hailed the release of Fogel as a positive step for diplomacy and a potential opening for future talks on ending the war in Ukraine.

Original url:

https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/04/10/russia-frees-us-russian-dual-national-ksenia-karelina-in-prisoner-swap-with-united-states-a88676