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Dozens of Russian Elites Received Serbian Passports After Ukraine Invasion – IStories

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Serbian flags. **Stefan Kostić / pexels**

Serbian authorities have issued passports to dozens of Russians with Kremlin ties since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the investigative news outlet IStories reported Wednesday, citing government data.

A total of 204 Russians were naturalized as Serbian citizens between early 2022 and April 2025, including many with links to Russia's defense industry and intelligence services, the outlet said.

Among those granted citizenship are 11 current and former executives of sanctioned Russian defense firms and their family members, including spouses and daughters. These firms include Radio-Electronic Technologies Concern (KRET), Elekon, the Kazan Optical and Mechanical Plant, as well as Almaz-Antey.

One recipient, Viktor Shendrik, reportedly served in the FSB's elite Vympel unit and acted as a top bodyguard for President Vladimir Putin and his billionaire associates Arkady and Boris Rotenberg. Others were linked to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, or to Umar Kremlev, president of the International Boxing Association, and his associate, Presidential Security Service chief Alexei Rubezhnoy.

Nine passport recipients were identified as current or former executives at sanctioned banks, including VTB, Gazprombank and Dom RF.

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None of the newly naturalized citizens appear on Western sanctions lists and can travel visa-free across the EU, according to IStories. Holders of Serbian passports have access to 29 countries within the Schengen Area, which allows for passport-free travel across most of Europe.

IStories also reported that more than 30 Russians who received Serbian passports in 2024 were tied to Russian state institutions or major businesses.

Ilya Shumanov, former head of Transparency International Russia, suggested the mass passport issuance could be part of a covert Moscow-Belgrade arrangement in which Russia provides financial support to Serbian authorities.

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