

US-Russia Swap frees jailed ballerina in £39 Ukraine donation case



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Russian-American ballerina Ksenia Karelina has been freed in a high-level prisoner swap between the United States and Russia, ending her more than year-long imprisonment in Yekaterinburg.

Karelina, a Los Angeles resident, was arrested in early 2024 during a family visit to Russia. She was later sentenced to 12 years in prison after pleading guilty to charges brought by Russia's FSB,

which accused her of donating \$51 (£39) to a Ukrainian charity on the day Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

The charity in question denied any involvement in arms supply, stating its mission focused solely on humanitarian relief. Russian authorities reportedly found evidence of the donation through her phone records.

In return, the US released Arthur Petrov, a dual Russian-German national detained in Cyprus in 2023 and extradited to the US. He faced charges of smuggling microelectronics to Russia for military-linked firms.

The exchange was carried out in Abu Dhabi in the early hours of Thursday. Russian media confirmed that President Vladimir Putin had personally pardoned Karelina ahead of the swap.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed her release, stating she was “wrongfully detained” and is now en route back to the United States. “President Trump secured her release and continues to fight for the return of all Americans held abroad,” he added.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe was present during the exchange, according to The Wall Street Journal.

This marks the second such exchange in less than two months. In February, American teacher

Marc Fogel was freed in return for Russian national Alexander Vinnik, who was imprisoned in the

US on money laundering charges.

Talks between US and Russian officials continue in Istanbul, as both sides seek to restore limited diplomatic operations curtailed since the Ukraine war.