# Bulgarian nationals found guilty of espionage in major UK intelligence operation



A jury at London's Central Criminal Court, commonly known as the Old Bailey, found three Bulgarian nationals guilty of espionage activities on Friday, marking a significant development in one of the UK's most complex and extensive investigations into foreign spying. The trio, comprising Katrin Ivanova, 33, Vanya Gaberova, 30, and Tihomir Ivanov Ivanchev, 39, collectively referred to as "the Minions" by their ringleader, were accused of carrying out industrial-scale surveillance operations on behalf of Russian intelligence over a three-year period, from 2020 to 2023.

The prosecution outlined how these individuals had operated under the direction of Jan Marsalek, an Austrian businessman and alleged Russian agent, who remains at large and is wanted by Interpol following the collapse of the payment processing firm Wirecard. Marsalek allegedly acted as a go-between for Russian intelligence agencies and Orlin Roussev, 47, the primary ringleader of the espionage operation, who had already pleaded guilty to related charges. The jury's verdict followed deliberation that lasted over 32 hours, during which they examined the extensive evidence, including secure messaging communications on Telegram and advanced surveillance technology found at Roussev's base of operations in Great Yarmouth.

Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Metropolitan Police's counter-terrorism command, cited the case as one of the largest spying operations uncovered on British soil, describing it as "industrial-scale espionage on behalf of Russia." The network employed a range of sophisticated spy equipment, including devices hidden in everyday objects—such as a Coca-Cola bottle and a Minions toy, alongside advanced technology intended to capture mobile phone data. In total, police seized an impressive array of materials during raids across the operation's known locations, including 33 audio devices, 55 visual recording devices, and a significant number of fake identification documents and mobile phones.

The spies targeted a variety of individuals deemed enemies of the Russian state, including journalists and dissidents. Among their activities, they discussed using Gaberova as a "honeytrap" to ensnare Christo Grozev, a prominent investigative journalist known for uncovering Russian government misdeeds, including links to the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in Salisbury. Their covert operations led them to follow Grozev from Vienna to Valencia, where they attempted to capture sensitive information about him.

Additional plans discussed by the spy ring included kidnapping and even potential murder of targets, and conducting surveillance at a US airbase in Germany, where Ukrainian troops were believed to be training. The sophistication and ambition of the operations suggested a calculated effort to threaten national security and the safety of individuals residing in the UK.

During the trial, the defendants argued that they had been misled about their activities, claiming ignorance of their association with Russian intelligence. Ivanova suggested she was unaware of the nature of her actions until it was too late. Gaberova similarly claimed to have been manipulated by her romantic partner Dzhambazov.

Sentencing for the three convicted spies is scheduled for May, where they face potential prison terms of up to 14 years. Their accomplices, Roussev, Dzhambazov, and another suspect, Ivan Stoyanov, who admitted to espionage charges previously, will also face sentencing. The case, which has captivated public interest, has drawn attention for both the serious allegations and the unexpected, almost farcical, intricacies of the spy ring's operations, accentuated by the personal relationships entangled within the group.

As authorities continue to assess the implications of the case, it underscores the evolving landscape of international espionage, particularly how foreign intelligence agencies may increasingly rely on non-professional operatives to conduct covert operations within the UK and beyond.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bulgarians-convicted-spying-russia-in-uk-accused-honeytraps/> - This article corroborates the conviction of three Bulgarian nationals for spying on behalf of Russia and details their involvement in 'honeytrap' operations and other espionage activities. It also mentions the role of Jan Marsalek as an alleged Russian agent.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/03/07/russian-agents-found-guilty-britains-spy-ring/> - This article supports the claim that the spy ring was directed by Jan Marsalek and provides details about the operations carried out by the Bulgarian nationals, including their targets and methods.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/russia-spy-ring-uk-bulgarian-nationals-guilty-b1215375.html> - This article confirms the guilty verdict for the Bulgarian nationals and highlights the sophisticated espionage tactics used by the group, including the use of 'honeytraps' and advanced surveillance technology.
* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bulgarians-convicted-spying-russia-in-uk-accused-honeytraps/> - This article details the extensive surveillance operations conducted by the spy ring, including their targets such as Christo Grozev and Ukrainian troops training at a US airbase in Germany.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/03/07/russian-agents-found-guilty-britains-spy-ring/> - This article provides insight into the personal relationships within the spy ring and how these were used to further their espionage activities, as well as the involvement of Jan Marsalek in directing the operation.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/russia-spy-ring-uk-bulgarian-nationals-guilty-b1215375.html> - This article discusses the sentencing of the convicted spies and their accomplices, who face potential prison terms, and highlights the significance of the case in the context of international espionage.
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