# Three Bulgarian nationals convicted for espionage on behalf of Russian intelligence



Three Bulgarian nationals were convicted by a jury at London’s Central Criminal Court on Friday for their involvement in a sophisticated espionage operation that put lives at risk while acting on behalf of Russian intelligence. The group, which included Katrin Ivanova, 33, Vanya Gaberova, 30, and Tihomir Ivan Ivanchev, 39, were referred to internally by their ringleader as "the Minions," borrowing the name from the popular animated films. Their activities, described by police as “industrial scale,” spanned from 2020 until their arrest in February 2023.

During their trial, which commenced in November, jurors deliberated for over 32 hours before reaching guilty verdicts on charges of conspiring to spy for a foreign state. The group’s espionage actions were reportedly coordinated from a guesthouse in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, where a cache of advanced surveillance equipment and devices was located. These included hidden cameras disguised in everyday items, such as a Coca-Cola bottle and children's toys, as well as dozens of fake identity documents and a significant number of mobile devices. Police recovered a total of 221 mobile phones, 495 SIM cards, and 11 drones during the operation.

Orlin Roussev, 46, the ringleader, and his deputy, Biser Dzhambazov, 43, had previously pleaded guilty to similar charges. Their operations involved surveillance of prominent individuals, including journalists and political dissidents, and were financed with over £200,000 transferred from their Moscow-based handler, Jan Marsalek, who is wanted on international fraud charges.

The group's targets included investigative journalist Christo Grozev and fellow journalist Roman Dobrokhotov, both of whom have reported extensively on Russian state affairs. Prosecutors alleged that Dzhambazov was romantically entangled with both women involved in the espionage, which was said to include attempts to manipulate Gaberova into carrying out 'honeytrap' operations.

In one instance, as detailed during the trial, Grozev was tracked from Vienna to a conference in Spain, where Gaberova posed as a friend to gather information. Messages exchanged between Roussev and Marsalek suggested that they plotted to kidnap Grozev, as well as to surveil a US airbase in Germany where Ukrainian troops were believed to be training.

Counter-terrorism officials highlighted the significant risk posed by the group's activities, noting the complexity and scale of the operation. Commander Dominic Murphy from the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command referred to the case as a clear reminder of the threats posed by Russian intelligence, stating, “This was industrial-scale espionage on behalf of Russia.” Intelligence gathered by the group included plans to drop pig’s blood on the Kazakhstan embassy in London as part of an elaborate scheme aimed at winning favour with Kazakh spies, demonstrating the extent of their operations.

The defendants are scheduled to be sentenced in May 2024, and they face up to 14 years in prison for their conspiratorial activities across multiple countries, including the UK, Austria, Spain, Germany, and Montenegro. The findings from this case indicate a growing trend towards using proxy spies for intelligence operations, particularly as Russian intelligence agencies adapt due to heightened scrutiny and expulsions following incidents such as the Salisbury poisoning in 2018.

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

## References

* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/russia-spy-ring-uk-bulgarian-nationals-guilty-b1215375.html> - This article corroborates the conviction of Bulgarian nationals for their involvement in a Russian spy ring and details their sophisticated espionage activities across Europe.
* <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/bulgarian-trio-convicted-conspiring-spy-russia> - This report from the Crown Prosecution Service confirms the guilty verdicts for conspiring to spy for Russia and highlights the group's use of advanced surveillance methods.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/russia-spy-ring-uk-bulgarian-nationals-guilty-b1215375.html> - The article provides additional details about the group's targets, including investigative journalists, and their use of 'honeytrap' operations.
* <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/bulgarian-trio-convicted-conspiring-spy-russia> - This source explains the prosecution's case, which relied on extensive evidence including communications and technical devices found during arrests.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/russia-spy-ring-uk-bulgarian-nationals-guilty-b1215375.html> - The article discusses the group's ambitions for a Novichok-style attack and their plans to assist Russia, further illustrating the scope of their espionage activities.
* <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/bulgarian-trio-convicted-conspiring-spy-russia> - This report emphasizes the collaboration between law enforcement agencies in building the case against the spy ring and the significant threat their activities posed to the UK.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/russia-london-europe-britain-wirecard-b2711141.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/russian-spy-ring-convicted-of-industrial-scale-espionage-on-uk-soil-JW7PH6KRLJNGZK5TEED7SKILEI/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
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