

Russia grants citizenship to Edward Snowden



Snowden has been living in Russia since 2013 to escape prosecution in the US after leaking classified documents detailing government surveillance programmes [File: Brendan McDermid/Reuters]

Moscow, September 27 (RHC)-- Russia has granted citizenship to former U.S. security contractor Edward Snowden. He is one of 75 foreign nationals granted Russian citizenship by the decree published on an official government website on Monday.

Ed Snowden, 39, a former contractor with the U.S. National Security Agency, has been living in Russia since 2013 to escape prosecution in the US after leaking classified documents detailing government surveillance programs. The documents revealed vast domestic and international surveillance operations carried out by the National Security Agency.

He was granted permanent residency in 2020 and said at the time that he planned to apply for Russian citizenship, without renouncing his U.S. citizenship. That same year, a U.S. appeals court found the program Snowden had exposed was unlawful and that the U.S. intelligence leaders who publicly defended it were not telling the truth.

U.S. authorities have for years wanted Snowden to be returned to the United States to face a criminal trial on espionage charges. The move comes at a time when relations between Washington and Moscow are at historic lows over the conflict in Ukraine.

Snowden's lawyer, Anatoly Kucherena, told Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti that the former contractor's wife Lindsay Mills, an American who has been living with him in Russia, will also be applying for a Russian passport. The couple had a child in December 2020, who already has a Russian passport having been born in the country.

Snowden, who has kept a low profile in Russia and occasionally criticised Russian government policies on social media, said in 2019 that he was willing to return to the United States if he is guaranteed a fair trial, something that political observers say is highly unlikely. He has not commented on being granted Russian citizenship.

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