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Then George Papadopoulos became the first tile in the Russian investigation

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George Papadopoulos in Beverly Hills after he was released from prison nine days ago. Photo: Lotta Härdelin

He is the 31-year-old who triggered Robert Mueller's Russian investigation.

DN's Björn af Kleen and Lotta Härdelin meet George Papadopoulos, who has just served his prison sentence and soon publishes his memoirs - about "sabotage of international intelligence services against Donald Trump".

- A story of my life with Trump and Mueller, says Papadopoulos whose defense against the FBI can be used by the Republicans for the next presidential election.

At Avra, a Greek restaurant in the heart of Beverly Hills, is the 31-year-old American who triggered the Russian investigation.

George Papadopoulos, a political consultant born and raised in Chicago, was released from prison nine days ago.

The stay at the Federal Correctional Institution, in Wisconsin in the Midwest, has left no trace on the outside.

Not on the shiny, chunky striped suit, the groomed Mediterranean beard or on his chocolate brown loafers with the gold buckles.

But over giant shrimps and grilled sea bass in Los Angeles's finest neighborhood, opposite the "Pretty Woman" hotel Beverly Wilshire, Papadopoulos still wants to convey a junk farmer's tip to me.

- Whatever you do in life: Never talk to the FBI, he says.

George Papadopoulos was imprisoned for ten days for lying to the FBI about his relations with Russian government contacts during the US presidential election 2016.

Papadopoulos still has to pay 200 hours of community service and has to pay nearly SEK 100,000 in fines.

The day before we are seen, I ask on Twitter if Papadopoulos is available for an interview. Only newspapers that pay, he answers and refers to his "agent". When I offer him a Sunday dinner in Los Angeles, where he now moved to begin his life, he immediately replies:

- Sure!

Beverly Hills is December light and glittery of Christmas decorations.



George Papadopoulos meets up DN for dinner at a Greek restaurant in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles. Photo: Lotta Hårdelin

At the restaurant there are several other guests who also started new life. A woman some tables away, her face wrapped in white bandage after what looks like an extensive nose operation.

- My future life takes place in the entertainment industry, says George Papadopoulos.

He and his wife Simona play themselves in a documentary-like documentary series that is currently being recorded. A New York ghost writer completes a fast-paced autobiography of Papadopoulos's fate, "Deep State Target," the book that comes out in March. The sales text on Amazon describes the book as the first self-perceived testimony from within "America's and international intelligence services' sabotage against Donald Trump". On the cover, Papadopoulos's face is covered with a telescopic sight.

- A story about my life with Trump and Mueller, says Papadopoulos to me.

Which life, anyway.

- Yes, sometimes I wish it wasn't mine.

Papadopoulos is the consultant who wanted so well and still ended up so wrong.



I haven't met Trump in two years. But the man I got to know was a listener

In March 2016, just over six months before the presidential election in November, Papadopoulos landed a post at Donald Trump's foreign policy team, who had difficulty recruiting qualified advisors.

Papadopoulos, then 29, had limited political experience. He had worked, partly as an unpaid trainee, on think tanks in Washington DC and in London, and two months for the Republican candidate Ben Carson's presidential campaign (an almost as extreme politician as Trump; he is currently the US housing minister).

During the employment interview with Trump's campaign, Papadopoulos understood that improved relations between Russia and the United States were a priority for Donald Trump.



Trump's campaign employed George Papadopoulos as a foreign policy advisor.
Photo: Evan Vucci, Evan Vucci / AP

Papadopoulos set out in the world with the goal of arranging a summit between Trump and Putin.

He was going to show his bosses that he was an indispensable part of a future Trump government, a star diplomat in the making. He would dissolve the tie between Washington and Moscow once and for all.

At the end of that month, March 31, 2016, [Papadopoulos is attending a meeting](#) where prospective Minister of Justice Jeff Sessions sits at one side of the meeting table and Donald Trump at the other.

Papadopoulos is located along one long side. The body language testifies that he is on the carve. Straight in the back, intensive listening. This is it.

- When I was sitting in that room, I knew that Trump would win the election, he says. Politics is marketing. And Trump had a clear message. What was Hillary's message? Trump was a listener. A very smart man. It is possible that he has changed. I haven't met him in two years. But the man I got to know was a listener. He listened to everyone before making a decision. I think you are born with a political ability. It's nothing you can learn. Trump was born as a politician.

Already, at the end of March 2016, Papadopoulos had dug gold during its first trips to the Trump campaign in Europe. In Italy, he had met a professor from Malta named Joseph Mifsud, who would prove to be sitting on valuable government contacts in Moscow. When it came to Mifsud that Papadopoulos worked for Trump, the professor began to awaken the 29-year-old and together threw the grand Russian-American friendship plans.



George Papadopoulos says that during a meeting with Trump, he understands that he is the country's future president. Photo: MARK RALSTON

Mifsud presented Papadopoulos to one of Putin's siblings, a young woman from St. Petersburg named Olga Polonskaja (in reality Putin has no siblings in life and no siblings). Papadopoulos also learned to know Ivan Timofey, head of an academic discussion club in contact with Putin. Papadopoulos and Timofeyev exchanged for months about a future meeting between Putin and Trump.

At home in the US, Trump's campaign managers must have found Papadopoulos useful. He was honored to write parts of the draft Trump's [first foreign policy line](#) , held at the Mayflower hotel in Washington DC on April 27, 2016. Papadopoulos succeeded in including some diplomatic lines on Russia, which pleased the 29-year-old's new contacts in Europe. "A state figure", [Mifsud Papadopoulos flattered](#) . Putin's "relative" Olga was pleased with Trump's attitude toward Moscow, which she found "softer" than the other candidates' more upbeat attitude. "This terrible phase of hostility must stop," said Trump in the speech.

I get nervous near government officials. That is why I have taken a break from politics

So far all well in Papadopoulos's comet career. The problem of success is that it rises one at a head. You get warm in your clothes. Relaxes. And start talking. At the end of April, Papadopoulos is in the UK. It is ours in London and Trump unexpectedly goes well with the American polls. Professor Mifsud is now inaugurating George in a great secret. The Kremlin sits on "dirt" about Hillary Clinton in the form of "thousands" of stolen emails from the Democratic Party's leadership layer. A piece of the puzzle that can further strengthen Papadopoulos's shares at the Trump Campaign managers, who hardly shun compromising information about the Clinton hate object.

Does Papadopoulos inform his superiors about the stolen emails and what do they do then? Does the Kremlin urge them to publish them? These are still central issues in the Mueller investigation. We, the public, do not know what Papadopoulos actually reports home. Papadopoulos himself uses the language of the law when he receives that question. "I have no memory of telling you about it," he says today. But what is clear is that George Papadopoulos is beginning to gossip about the stolen Hillary mails with his new found friends in Europe.



When the FBI gets up the eyes of George Papadopoulos, the Russian investigation begins. Photo: Lotta Hårdelin

One evening in May, he drinks gin & tonics with Australia's highest diplomat in London and inaugurates him, Alexander Downer, in secret. Two months later, Wikileaks lets publish parts of the stolen emails that Papadopoulos talked about. Then Downer feels urged to inform the government of the home country of Papadopoulos, the young American who had knowledge of the theft. Australia and the United States are allies. Canberra alerts Washington. The FBI gets up the eyes of George Papadopoulos.

Here, the Russian investigation takes its beginning, the tangle that so far cost US taxpayers about SEK 250 million and uncovered several criminal activities among Donald Trump's previously close employees. The investigation initiated by the FBI on Russian influence on the presidential election is based on Papadopoulos' email queues. He's the first domino. [The New York Times later summarizes](#) : "How the Russian Investigation Commission begins: a campaign advisor, drinks and talk of political dirt". The magazine is aimed at Papadopoulos sitting with Alexander Downer in Kensington Wine Rooms in May 2016.

A backfill that must have been sitting for a long time.

Are you traumatized?

"Who wouldn't be," said George Papadopoulos in Los Angeles. I get nervous near government officials. That is why I have taken a break from politics for a couple of years.

During the summer and autumn of 2016, when Trump was nominated for the Republican presidential candidate and got a little easier to recruit advisors, Papadopoulos gradually slipped into the periphery.

At this time, the FBI's Russian investigation is still a secret. But Papadopoulos also makes public mistakes. In May 2016, he is studying Britain's then Prime Minister David Cameron in [a London Times magazine interview](#). Cameron has called Trump's outcome against Muslims "stupid". Papadopoulos urges Cameron to apologize to Trump. Otherwise, the US and Britain's "special relationship" may be threatened, he suggests. An attack on the highest diplomatic level that the 29-year-old hardly had Trump's mandate to knock out in one of England's largest newspapers.



Papadopoulos is in Washington DC when Trump is installed as president. Photo: John Minchillo

On January 20, 2017, Trump **will** be installed in the White House. Papadopoulos is in place in the capital and celebrates but receives no invitation to a work interview. He returns to Chicago, where he lives with his mother in a house in Ravenswood in the northwestern part of the city. On January 27, a week after Trump has taken the Oval room, the FBI will contact Papadopoulos. He believes they want to ask for a Russian businessman appearing in British agent Christopher Steele's report on Trump's history in Moscow. Instead, they are interested in Professor Joseph Mifsud. Papadopoulos plays down the importance of their relationship. He leaves misleading time about their meetings. When the conversation with the FBI is over, Papadopoulos deletes his Facebook account, where he corresponded with his Russian contacts for months, and changed telephone numbers.

Life goes on. He meets a new girl, Italian Simona Mangiante, who has also been a colleague with Joseph Mifsud on a think tank in London. Simona is blonde with Slavic features. She breaks an accent that some of Papadopoulos's critics want to place northeast of Italy. Simona and George started flirting via LinkedIn and are married today. They spend a long summer together at Mykonos. On July 27, 2017, Papadopoulos flies back to the US. At Dulles airport outside Washington DC, agents sent by Russian investigator Robert Mueller are waiting. As soon as Papadopoulos steps off the plane, he puts his handcuffs on him, seizes

his cellphone, and drives him to an FBI house in Alexandria south of the capital. He sits there for twelve hours.

Did you know what was going to happen when you were on the flight?

- No, then I would not have returned to the United States.

Was this the first time you met Robert Mueller?

- I can't go into that. But yes, it was the first time. Shortly after.

A few months before Papadopoulos is arrested at Dulles Airport, Donald Trump has dismissed James Comey, the then FBI manager. The President states several reasons why, but at least one is about Trump wanting to end the Russian investigation that Comey has now published (the one that George Papadopoulos triggered). When Comey gets fired, Robert Mueller is appointed as a special prosecutor, a service with vast powers.



On July 27, 2017, Papadopoulos flies back to the United States from Greece, as soon as he climbs the plane, the FBI puts handcuffs on him. Photo: Lotta Hördelin

Mueller, a slender 74-year-old golfer, is not a pigeon. He was the FBI's chief between 2001 and 2013. He possesses unusual qualities in today's Washington: a chilly civil servant without the need to appear or be heard in the media. He is a Republican who ruled one of the country's more controversial institutions, the US Security Police, during an extraordinary stormy era: the United States after September 11. Despite the baggage, Mueller seems to have few political enemies. When he is assigned the job as a special prosecutor, both parties are behind him, unusual in this hyperpolarized city.

Robert S Mueller III is Wasp, a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, that is, the leap from the ancient US ruling class, the East Coast-based elite who long ruled the country's political institutions. The class affiliation seems to be reflected in the physics: the highest-most figure, the silvery side-leg, the life-weary view. Former Foreign Minister John Kerry, an old schoolmate of Mueller, has the same customary constitution. Boys formed into leaders in private schools, in the military, through sports. Kerry's nuna has been likened to one of the stone faces on Easter Island, and Mueller radiates the same begging, eternal authority.

In the absence of political games, American journalists have been interested in Mueller's person. The intellectual magazine New Yorker has [named the Prosecutor a style icon](#) and read in social messages in his white-tailed buttondown shirts, discreetly patterned ties and cheap watches (a plastic Casio). The author who wrote Mueller's biography, Garrett Graff, once asked Mueller why he insists on white shirts when others switch with blue. Mueller responded in a "more philosophical way" than he ever expressed himself, according to Graff. When the FBI directed its activities against counter-terrorism, Mueller thought it was important to remind employees of the agency's police roots, including through the white shirt.



When Robert Mueller was awarded the job as a special prosecutor, both parties were behind him. Photo: J. Scott Applewhite

The same applies now in the transferred sense: in a country where the White House struggles to dissolve the boundary between truth and lie, [Robert Mueller has become the symbol](#) of bureaucratic persistence, truth disorder and official correctness. Through the review of the 2016 presidential election but also in the US state apparatus in general. Donald Trump, no matter how much he twists on the matter, has failed to stop Robert Mueller or the Washington DC and New York courts, where the prosecutor dispenses his criminal cases.



Imagine: you step off a plane and are suddenly treated as an international drug terrorist

Few **who have** been questioned **so far** by Mueller have told about the experience publicly. Papadopoulos tells me that for legal reasons he cannot provide any interiors as long as the Russian investigation is in progress. [The Washington Post has tried to give a picture](#) : witnesses are driven to a gloomy glass and cement building in southwest Washington.

They are led into a windowless conference room where Mueller's employees take turns to grill them in shifts: two, three agents at a time armed with thick black binder full of prints of emails and other documents that they want to know more about. (For example, you can think, Papadopoulos Facebook messages.)

Sometimes the long-term self comes into the room, and sits quietly on a chair by the wall and listens. Mueller is the engine of the investigation. But in the interrogation room he is the shadow on the wall, the stone statue.

- I had a wonderful summer, says George Papadopoulos in the days before he met Robert Mueller for the very first time.

- I had been to Mykonos with my new girl. Attached to Ischia and Capri. Three months. Imagine: you step off a plane and are suddenly treated as an international drug terrorist. They have run the same method against the others. They took (Michael) Cohen as he stepped into his office one morning and put handcuffs on him. We are treated as terrorists.



Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer, on his way to court in New York. Photo: EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ

- I have felt a lot of uncertainty, paranoia and fear, he says. I went down ten kilos. When I saw Michael Cohen's face on TV the other day, the purple rings under my eyes, I saw my own face in his.

(Michael Cohen [has said that the FBI responded to him](#) "professionally, politely, and respectfully".)

[Read more: "Of course," Trump knew it was criminal](#)

Seven times, George Papadopoulos has been interrogated by Robert Mueller's investigator.

- Very long time each time, he says. I saw that (Michael) Flynn said he was sitting with them for 70 hours. I have to call my lawyers and ask how long they were doing to me, because it felt like more than 70 hours.

[Read more: Judgment against Michael Flynn is delayed](#)

On October 5, 2017, Papadopoulos acknowledged that he was guilty of crimes in the form of lies for the FBI. Almost a year later, on September 7, 2018, Papadopoulos received his sentence: 14 days in prison. On November 26, he embarked on a cuff criminal institution in Oxford, Wisconsin. He arrived in a black suit with a polo shirt underneath.





On October 5, 2017, Papadopoulos acknowledged that he was guilty of crimes in the form of lies for the FBI. Photo: Lotta Hårdelin

The prison experience is so fresh that Papadopoulos has not figured out how to overthrow his stay into a miserable scream, as he did with many other passages in his strange life.

Was that what you thought in there?

- It was mostly business people who laughed at me: "Are you here for a week?". I was a little joke to them.

On Twitter, Papadopoulos is called a traitor, and the like. If he puts up a picture from a restaurant, he may hear: "How did the drill taste?"

What did the other inmates say to you?

- Everyone knew who I was because my face is so famous. They seemed a little fascinated. They had been sitting there for years.



I don't really understand why I should sit there, really. What fills our punishment for function?

Did you have your own cell?

- Yes, it was like a dorm room. It was a kind of break I suppose. But it's nice to be out again. Get a family. That is our goal now. Enjoy Hollywood, being able to travel outside the US; they took my passport when I was arrested but now I have got it back again. We will go to

Italy and have a proper wedding ceremony. I have not met Simona's parents, or brothers or sisters. I know nothing about her past life.

What did you eat?

- You could order what you wanted. It wasn't like film, not like a regular prison.

What were you thinking?

- Prison reforms, actually. How can one get things to be a little more effective. I don't really understand why I should sit there, really. What fills our punishment for function? How would these days clear me?

The lies unite the Trump employees who are stuck in Robert Mueller's network. They have lied to protect Donald Trump and at the same time misled the congress, the security police, and the public. They have polluted democracy.



George Papadopoulos's former lawyers pleaded that the client did not know what he did in the spring of 2016. Photo: Lotta Hårdelin

Are the employees driven by party political motives? Not necessarily. Between Papadopoulos and Trumpa lawyer Michael Cohen, who in March begins a three-year prison sentence for financial fraud and lies before the Congress, there are parallels. Both are immigrant sons, Cohen has policemen's roots and Papadopoulos's parents were born in Greece. They are grown up in liberal big cities, New York and Chicago, far from the provincial nationalism that Trump speculated in winning the White House.

George Papadopoulos calls himself liberal. He wants to preserve NATO, which he sees as a guarantor of continued American influence in Europe, he says. He does not want to build a wall against Mexico,

one of Trump's most important promises. Did Papadopoulos know what he was doing in the spring of 2016? What political forces did he play with?

Papadopoulos's former lawyers pleaded for not doing so. In September, his then lawyer Tom Breen said that [Papadopoulos is an "idiot"](#), an "unsophisticated" person who committed "stupid, stupid mistakes". Papadopoulos himself agreed and told the judge that he was "deeply ashamed" of obstructing the FBI investigation through his lies about the contacts with Mifsud. The judge was influenced by the argument and shortened the intended penalty from 30 days to 14.



That's what my story is about: I was too young and moved too fast up

But soon Papadopoulos **changed the line of** defense. He kicked his lawyers. He has realized, he says, that he was in fact subjected to a plot by the FBI and their partner organizations in Europe. Professor Mifsud, who told about the stolen e-mails for him, is not a Russian spy, says Papadopoulos. Mifsud was sent out by the FBI, he says, to lay the hook for Papadopoulos. This is because the 29-year-old represented the Trump campaign, which the Obama administration wanted to monitor and control.

This is the price you have to pay, says George Papadopoulos, if you happen to be a diplomatic child. He and Simona struggle daily on social media to establish Papadopoulos reputation. He doesn't want to be "idiot" anymore. He wants to be smart.

- I am at the first level with four heads of government, he says. At 24 I sat in a separate meeting with a foreign minister. When you are so young and meet so many high-ranking people, you awaken the curiosity of the intelligence services and they begin to examine one. If you are not a predictable person then you have to turn into a predictable person. That's what my story is about: I was too young and moved too fast up.



This is the price you have to pay, says George Papadopoulos, if you happen to be a diplomatic child. Photo: Lotta Hårdelin

George Papadopoulos's new line of defense may seem nippy. But it reflects conspiracy theories spread daily by conservative commentators on Fox News, the largest television channel in the United States. One of these voices, Dan Bongino, author of the book "Spygate: The Attempted Sabotage of Donald J. Trump", interviewed [Papadopoulos](#)

this week [on his podium](#) . They put together the puzzle pieces. Papadopoulos, and other accused Trump employees, are abused by a "state in the state". The same story of an intelligence establishment that harasses Trump's employees may characterize the Republican Party's rhetoric for the next presidential election. That says politician Professor Steven Schier.

- What you hear Papadopoulos say will also the Republicans say. Donald Trump is already doing it. The American people today have very different beliefs about what is happening in politics and they adhere to these beliefs in a completely different way than 20, 30 years ago. There is thus a breeding ground for such theories.

There is evidence of "Nixon level" because the Republicans in Congress really should turn the Trump back, says Steven Schier. He refers to the Watergate business in the early 1970s. Sound recordings from within the Oval room then proved that President Richard Nixon paid to silence the witnesses who knew the burglary at the Democrats' party headquarters in the Watergate building in Washington DC. Then Nixon was forced away. Such evidence has not materialized from within the Trump government, yet.

George Papadopoulos says Donald Trump will pass through the Russian investigation.

- Let Robert Mueller finish his job, he says. The president should stop saying that the investigation should be stopped. The more the president's efforts, the more it will hurt him.

George Papadopoulos apologizes and leaves the table. He and Simona have started a quarrel on SMS.

- Sometimes it is even more difficult to get their private together than their professional life.

He disappears into the night, towards the hotel where Julia Roberts once waited for Richard Gere.

Alla åtalade och dömda i Rysslands-utredningen

Hittills har Muellers utredning åstadkommit åtal mot 33 personer och tre företag, på mer än 100 åtalpunkter. Klicka på respektive person för att läsa mer.



Position: Trumps tidigare advokat.

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