

Russia Thwarted Hundreds of Foreign Spies Last Year, Putin Says

April 07, 2014



The headquarters of the Federal Security Service on Lubyanskaya Ploshchad, Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin said Monday that Russian security agencies last year "foiled the activity of 46 staff members of foreign governments' special services and 258 agents."

He said that despite the achievement, "counterespionage operations need to become more effective" as last year "more than 9 million" attempts to compromise websites and informational systems of the Russian government were uncovered, state news agency Itar-Tass reported.

Putin made the comments in an address to a meeting of the Federal Security Service, the main successor agency to the Soviet-era KGB.

He emphasized that "counterespionage has traditionally been one of the most important activities of the Federal Security Service, and this is in fact a very serious area of combat."

He also added that Russia would never allow non-governmental organizations to be used

for "destructive purposes like has happened in Ukraine."

He said NGOs were used in Ukraine to "finance nationalist and neo-Nazi organizations and militants who became the main force in the anti-constitutional overthrow of the government."

Russia in 2012 enacted a law obliging all NGOs that receive foreign financing and are involved in political activities to register as "foreign agents," a term that opponents argued was synonymous with "spy."

The law, which, as proponents point out, uses similar language to the United States' Foreign Agents Registration Act, has been used to suspend the activities of several NGOs, including the independent election monitor Golos.

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