

Putin Slams U.S. Special Forces as 'Unprofessional' for Letting Snowden Slip

May 23, 2014



Protesters hold masks depicting former U.S. National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden during a demonstration in Berlin on Thursday.

ST. PETERSBURG — If the U.S. special services had acted professionally, National Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden would be "rotting in jail," Russian President Vladimir Putin told the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum Friday.

In his keynote speech at the forum, Putin also referred to Snowden as a "champion of human rights" and said the 30-year-old leaker has not shared any secret information with Russia.

Putin suggested that while handing over intelligence might have been a fair trade for Russia's provision of asylum, Snowden "is not our agent, and gave up no secrets."

Putin blamed the United States for the fact that Snowden is still in Russia. Days after leaking thousands of classified U.S. documents to journalists in Hong Kong last summer, Snowden turned up in Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport, from where he planned to fly on to a third country. But then, Putin said, the U.S. stepped in.

The U.S. "scared the whole world," Putin said. "Snowden arrived in the transit zone and it turned out that no-one would take him. If they hadn't terrified everyone, he would have successfully taken off, flown to some other country, they would have nabbed him in transit, and he would long ago have been 'rotting' in jail."

"But they scared everyone and he stayed in the transit zone [in Moscow]," Putin said. "And what are we supposed to do? Russia is not a country that gives up champions of human rights."

Earlier this month, Snowden's lawyer said that his client, who fled to Moscow last year after leaking the United States' intelligence-gathering programs, expects his asylum status in Russia to be renewed this June.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/05/23/putin-slams-us-special-forces-as-unprofessional-for-letting-snowden-slip-a35753>