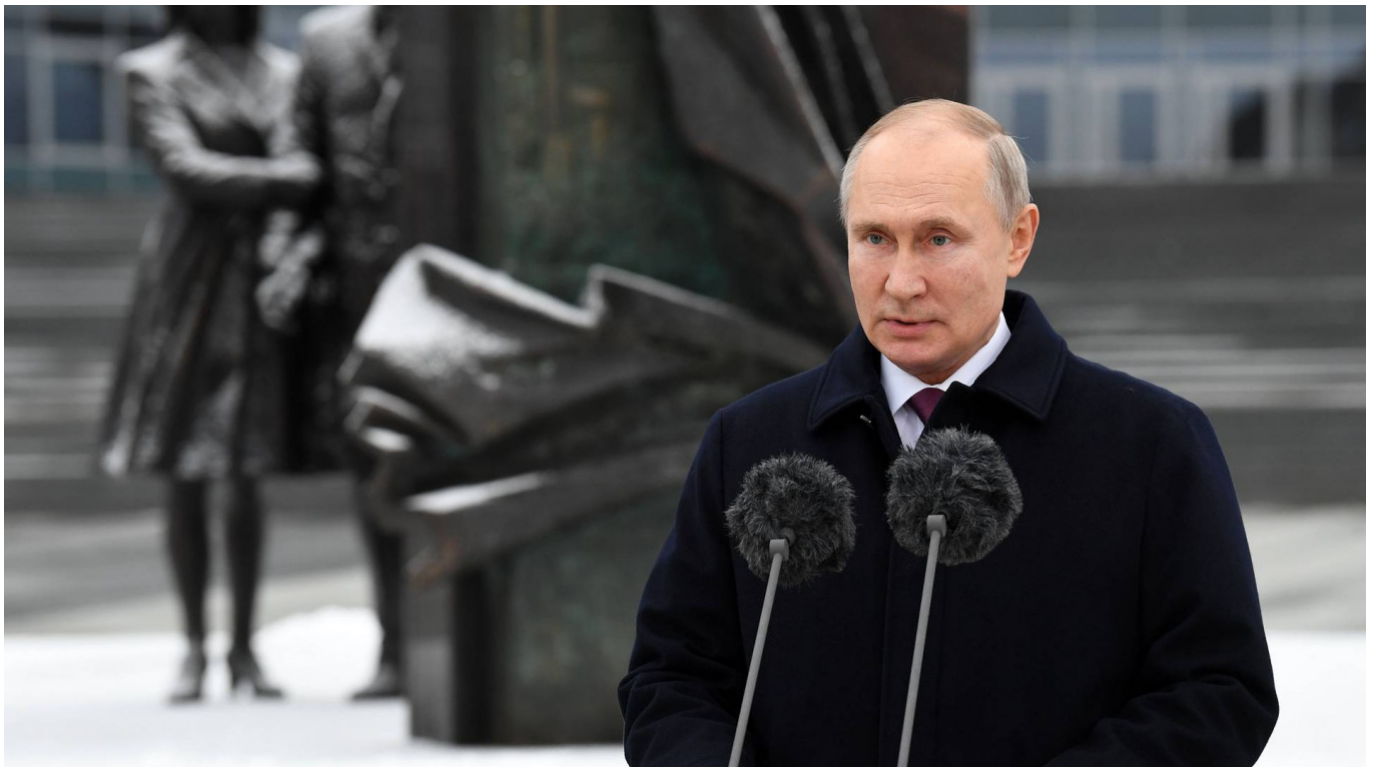


Putin Hails Russia's Spies, Visits Intelligence HQ

By [AFP](#)

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Tass

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday hailed the country's "courageous" spies as he visited the headquarters of the Foreign Intelligence Service to mark its 100th birthday.

Putin, who has spent most of the coronavirus epidemic at his residences outside the Russian capital and on the Black Sea, visited the SVR headquarters in southern Moscow amid the controversy surrounding the work of the country's security services.

SVR, Russia's external intelligence agency, which succeeded the First Chief Directorate of the KGB in 1991, marks its centenary on Sunday. But December 20 is also the day in Russia when the country fetes all members of the security services including those from the FSB domestic intelligence agency.

Speaking outside the SVR headquarters, Putin, himself a former KGB officer, thanked all those

who protect Russia from "external and internal threats" and called them "reliable and courageous people."

"Efficient work of security bodies, which is governed by law and national interests, always was and will be exceptionally important for Russia," he said.

"It's one of the most important guarantees of the sovereign, democratic and independent development of our multinational society," Putin added.

The 68-year-old Kremlin chief praised the work of SVR which he said influenced the course of history of both Russia and the world.

He said he counted on the external intelligence to continue to counter "potential threats" against Russia but in a rare public rebuke also said the service should "increase the quality of its analytical papers."

Addressing members of the FSB domestic intelligence and other anti-terror services, Putin said they should continue to act "decisively".

"It's also necessary to build on the current successes when it comes to work of counter-intelligence," he added.

Putin praised Russian security agents after an investigative report claimed this week that members of the FSB intelligence were behind the poisoning of top opposition leader Alexei Navalny with Novichok, a Soviet-designed nerve agent.

Putin dismissed the joint report led by the investigative website Bellingcat, saying that if the Russian security services had wanted to poison Navalny, "they would have taken it to the end."

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