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Russia's Arms Sales in 2020 'Successful' Despite Pandemic

By AFP

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Denis Grishkin / Moskva News Agency

Russia's arms sales last year were not affected by the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, a senior official said Friday, making it one of the country's only industries to come out unscathed.

"Our order book remained at a level of $50-55 billion," said Dmitry Shugayev, who heads the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation.

"We came out with a highly successful year," he said on the Rossiya 24 news channel, adding that 2020 "was special" because of the pandemic.

Russia did however suffer losses in its so-called "secret" exports of arms and military equipment, falling 15.6% on the previous year, the RBK business daily reported last month citing customs data.

In 2019 and 2018, Russia received orders for its weapons worth $51.1 billion and $55 billion respectively, according to chief executive of arms giant Rostec, Sergei Chemezov.

The country in 2020 suffered losses in other key export industries, notably seeing a 12% drop in energy giant Gazprom's exports to Europe with prices and demand collapsing due to the pandemic.

Russia did not reimpose a national lockdown when a second wave of infections surged late last year, which helped keep its economy's contraction to just 3.1% — a relatively good result compared with many European countries.

Arms sales are a key part of Moscow's push to increase its geopolitical clout from the Middle East to Africa.

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