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St. Petersburg Police Forms Drone-Fighting Unit

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Valentin Yegorshin / TASS

Police in Russia's second-largest city St. Petersburg have formed a special unit for shooting down drones, the city's Interior Ministry said Friday, as concerns have risen over drone attacks on Russian territory amid its war on Ukraine.

The so-called "sky control unit" in St. Petersburg mainly consists of officers who have served in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine which the Kremlin claims to have annexed, the city's Interior Ministry said in a post on the VKontakte social media site.

The move comes "in connection with the introduction of a number of restrictions on the operation of unmanned aerial vehicles in St. Petersburg," the city police said.

Over 40 Russian regions, including St. Petersburg, imposed restrictions on drone flights this month amid a spate of drone attacks on Russian territory, including an intercepted drone strike on the Kremlin, which Moscow blames on Ukraine.

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The new department's employees started performing their duties at St. Petersburg's Victory Day parade on May 9.

"Five sniper pairs and two groups with anti-drone electromagnetic rifles, located on the roofs of buildings in the city center, ensured a calm sky. Additional observation was provided by several ground posts, and mobile squads patrolled the streets to detect UAV operators," the city police said.

Russian authorities have become increasingly vigilant toward drones following the May 3 attack on the Kremlin, which Moscow described as an assassination attempt on President Vladimir Putin. Ukraine denied having any role in the attempted drone strike.

In Moscow, law enforcement agencies have started checking people at metro exits, train stations and airports in addition to inspecting vehicles to search for drones.

The VCHK-OGPU Telegram news channel reported, citing an unnamed source, that the Russian Interior Ministry has received an order to "knock out" all unregistered drones owned by civilians.

Russians started selling off their drones en masse following the bans on drone launches in dozens of regions, the Mash Telegram channel reported, causing prices to drop two-to-threefold.

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