

Alleged FSB Agent Working in Orthodox Church Arrested for High Treason

By [Allison Quinn](#)

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A Moscow court on Monday sanctioned the arrest of an alleged Federal Security Service agent who stands accused of having passed on secrets to American spies while working for the Russian Orthodox Church.

Investigators say the suspect, Yevgeny Petrin, came into contact with U.S. spies in the course of his work, and then began passing secrets to them, according to LifeNews, a news agency known for its alleged ties to Russia's security services.

Yulia Skotnikova, a spokeswoman for Moscow's Lefortovsky District Court, confirmed the arrest in comments to newspaper Kommersant, saying Petrin would remain in custody until at least April. A petition for his arrest had come from Russia's Federal Security Service, she said.

Kommersant cited a member of the Public Oversight Commission, Yeva Merkacheva, as saying Petrin claimed that he worked for the FSB. "In my view, he has a very mysterious story.

According to him, he is a captain of the FSB, which had secretly infiltrated the Moscow branch of the Russian Orthodox Church," Merkacheva was quoted as saying.

Petrin's defense lawyer, Andrei Stebenev, said in comments carried by LifeNews that investigators put pressure on his client in order to extract testimony.

"In the early stages of the investigation, they beat testimony out of him using various methods. Right now we are sending a bunch of complaints, a bunch of petitions. But for now there is no real result," Stebenev said.

Petrin has maintained that any information he passed on was not secret, as it was publicly available and thus did not pose any detriment to Russia's national security, LifeNews reported.

The arrest of Petrin marks the fourth treason case in recent weeks, with three other Russian citizens, Vladimir Golubev, Svetlana Davydova and Gennady Kravtsov, facing the same charges. All four face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of high treason.

Correction: An earlier version of this article misstated Petrin's position, referring to him as a priest rather than a church employee.

Contact the author at a.quinn@imedia.ru

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