

Thousands Submit Questions to Putin Ahead of Annual Call-In Show

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin

The presidential administration received nearly 50,000 calls in the first hours after opening a phone hotline for questions ahead of President Vladimir Putin's call-in show on April 16, a presidential spokesman said, attributing the growth in demand to the “fateful” events of the past year.

The number of calls — 48,670 within the first six hours of the hotline's operation — was eight times more than during the same period in 2014, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, Kommersant reported Friday.

In all, Putin received 2.4 million questions during the hotline's operation last year, according to the Kremlin website, down from a record of 3 million in 2013.

“Last year we were are the start of fateful events. Now a year has passed, which was

accompanied, naturally, by accomplishments and by the arising of some new challenges,” Peskov was quoted as saying. “So, of course, this cumulative effect led to such interest.”

As usual the majority of the questions submitted dealt with social safety nets, housing prices and utility services, but “many questions are connected to crisis manifestations, and again there are many questions dealing with corruption,” Peskov was quoted as saying.

He added that many Russians called the hotline to offer their “words of support” for the president, or to appeal to him to “take a tougher position in everything related to the country's national interests,” Kommersant reported.

Over the past year, Moscow officials and state-run media have characterized Western criticism of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the support for separatists in eastern Ukraine as an assault on the country's security and national interests.

A vast majority of Russians have cheered the Crimea grab, but the enthusiasm has worn off slightly as the costs of integrating the peninsula into Russia along with Western sanctions against Moscow have contributed to a crisis in Russia's economy.

Some of the popular topics raised by this year's callers to the Kremlin included questions about what it would take for Russia to recognize self-proclaimed separatists states in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, according to the Kremlin website.

Other callers turned their sight to the Baltic nations, asking Putin to explain why relations with the three former Soviet states in the region have become “confrontational” and whether relations could be improved.

Putin has held a televised call-in marathon each year of his presidency — a total of 12 times so far. The show typically last several hours.

Peskov declined to say whether this year's heightened interest will lead the president to increase the duration of his call-in show, Kommersant reported.

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