

# Russia's communications interception practices (SORM)

Andrei Soldatov, Agentura.Ru,  
January 22, 2014

# Who we are

- **Agentura.Ru** is the Russian secret services watchdog founded in 2000 as a community of investigative journalists.
- In October 2012 Agentura.Ru, Privacy International and Citizen Lab launched the joint project 'Russia's Surveillance State'. The aims were to undertake research and investigation into surveillance practices in Russia.

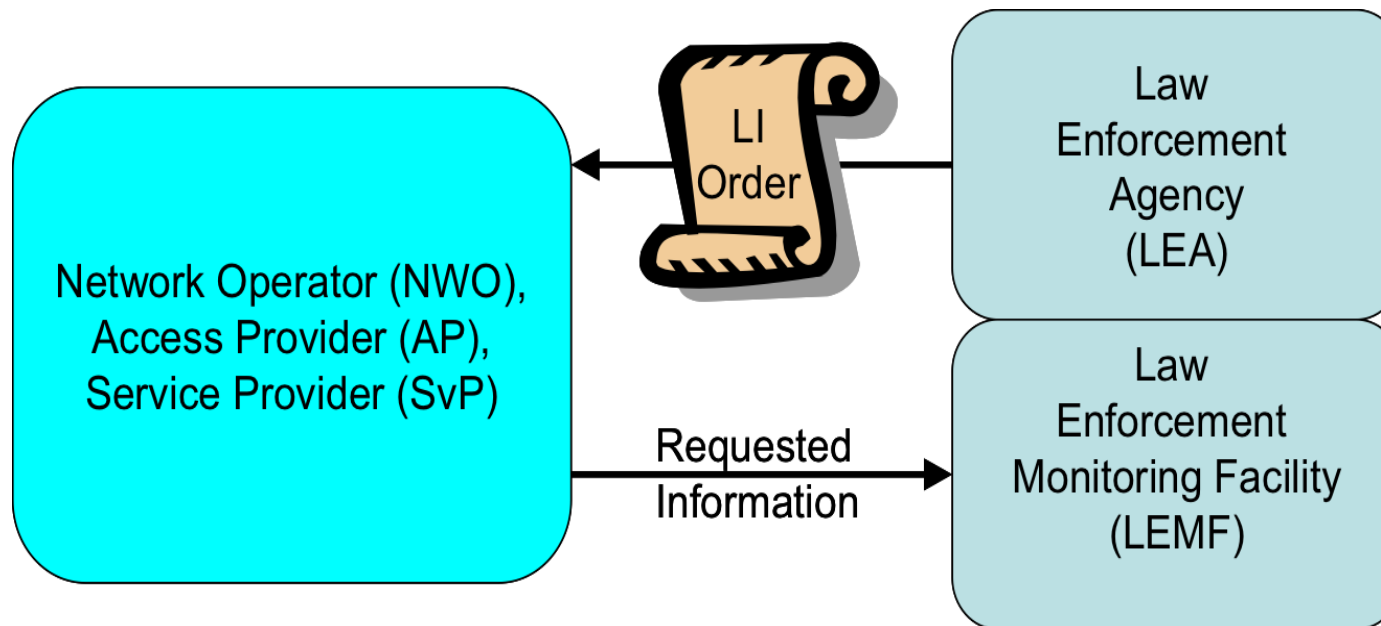
# A bit of terminology:

1. SORM or Systema Operativno-Razisknikh Meropriatiy – the System of Operative-Search Measures on Communications (comms interception)
2. FSB or Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti – the Federal Security Service
3. Operative-Search Measures or ORM – Russian term for communication interception and evesdropping

# Warrant issue

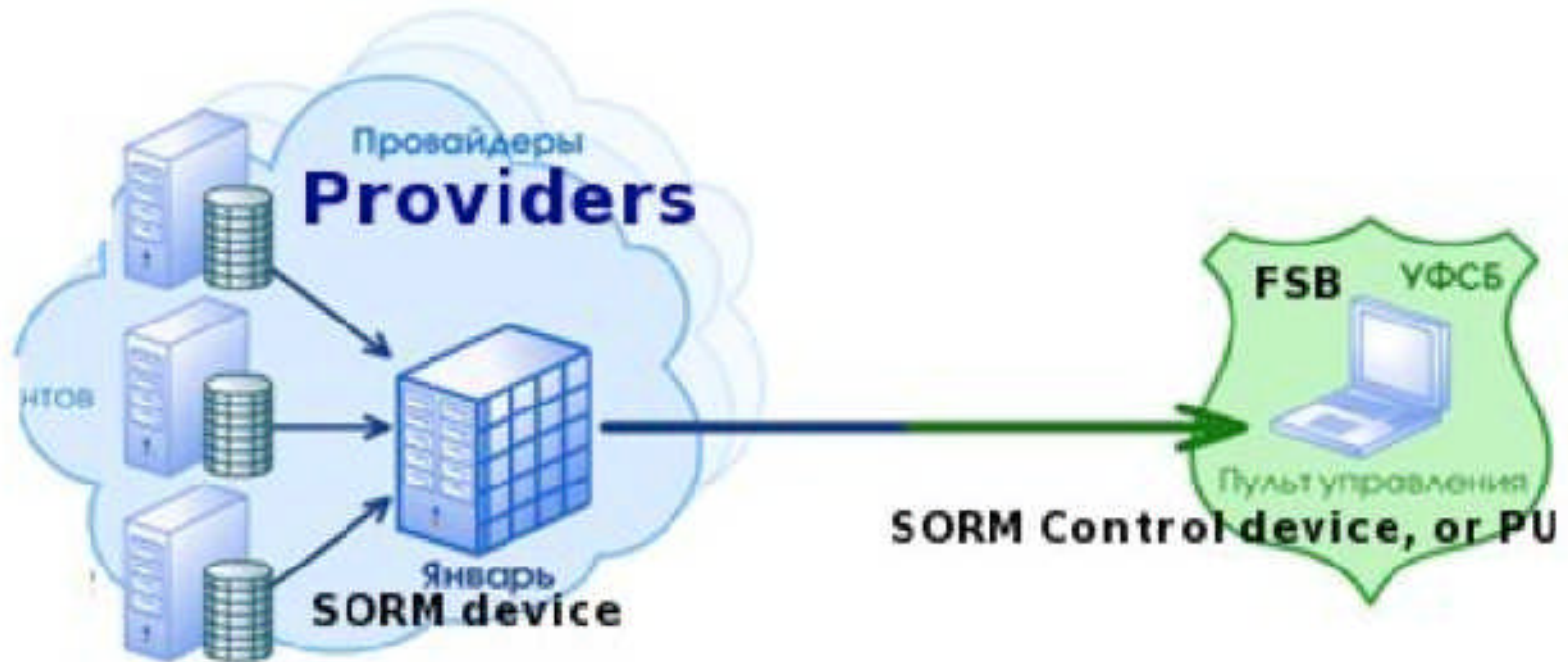
- It's required by law that an FSB operative should get an eavesdropping warrant, but he is not obliged to show it to anyone.
- The providers are required to pay for the SORM equipment and its installation, but they are denied access to the surveillance boxes.
- Thus, the FSB does not need to contact the ISP's staff; instead the security service calls on the special controller at the FSB HQ that is connected by a protected cable directly to the SORM device installed on the ISP network.
- This system is copied all over the country: In every Russian town there are protected underground cables, which connect the HQ of the local FSB department with all ISPs and telecom providers in the region.

# Lawful Interception in Europe



Source: Adapted from ETSI TS 101 331, Definition of interception. See <http://pda.etsi.org/pda>.

# Lawful Interception in Russia



- The FSB has remote access to communications and servers, with no knowledge of an operator or an Internet-Service Provider.

# SORM users

- Eight law enforcement and security agencies:  
the Interior Ministry (MVD), the FSB, the Federal Protective Service, the Foreign Intelligence Service, Customs agency, The Federal Anti-drug Agency, the Federal Prisons Service (FSIN) and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU).
- But it was the FSB that was put in charge of SORM.

# SORM: A growth industry

- According to information obtained from Russia's Supreme Court, the number of intercepted telephone conversations and e-mail messages has doubled over a period of six years, from 265,937 in 2007 to 539,864 in 2012. These statistics do not include the counterintelligence eavesdropping on foreigners.
- Firstly the FSB was put in charge of SORM. But we found out that other secret services started acquiring SORM equipment beginning in the mid-2000s. We've identified three other agencies, the Interior Ministry MVD, the Prisons Service FSIN and the Federal Anti-Drug Agency FSKN which are busy building their own systems of SORM, in the capital and regions.



# SORM vs opposition

- On Nov. 12, 2012 the Supreme Court upheld the right of the authorities to eavesdrop on the opposition. In that case, the court recognized the legality of an FSB operation to wiretap conversations of Yekaterinburg city lawmaker Maxim Petlin because he had participated in a protest rally at which the FSB was criticized.
- The court decided that these were demands for “extremist actions” and approved surveillance and telephone interception.

# SORM in Sochi

- In 2010 it was stated that SORM should be significantly updated for the Sochi Olympic Games.
- Since 2010, according to information of the communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor, Russian authorities have been busy making sure that SORM equipment is properly installed in the Sochi region.

# SORM / the former Soviet Union

- Belarus
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Kazakhstan

Many thanks