

Popular Russian Singer Calls Mafia Allegations 'Absurd'

October 31, 2013



Grigory Leps is known for his low growling voice and Russian chansons. **RaySys**

A representative for popular singer Grigory Leps said that the U.S. Treasury's allegations that he couriers money on behalf of a mafia organization are "absurd."

The U.S. Treasury issued a statement Wednesday saying it has blacklisted three Russians for their ties with an international criminal group, including Leps, whose real name is Lepsveridze. Treasury representative John Sullivan confirmed to RIA Novosti that the Grigory Lepsveridze listed in the statement was a singer.

Maria Serikova, the pop star's public relations director, told Russian News Service that Leps heard about the list through the media and that the news was "unexpected and incomprehensible."

Serikova said that upon hearing the news, the chanson singer said, "The Americans in general should dig up Frank Sinatra and put him in jail."

The U.S. Treasury "designated six individuals and four entities linked to the Brothers' Circle, a Eurasian crime syndicate," according to its statement.

"The key to targeting transnational criminal organizations, such as the Brothers' Circle, is exposing the network behind the group's leaders, which we have done today. We remain determined to continue our systematic effort to disrupt these networks in order to protect the U.S. financial system from abuse by these criminals," undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence David S. Cohen said in the statement.

Three of the six individuals have Russian citizenship, one is a national of former Soviet republic of Uzbekistan and one holds an Israeli passport. The citizenship of the sixth person was not disclosed.

Lepsveridze was put on the list for couriering money on behalf of Vladislav Leontyev, blacklisted under the same executive order last year for being "a key member of the Brothers' Circle and [being] involved in various criminal activities, including narcotics trafficking."

According to information provided by the U.S. Treasury, The Brothers' Circle is one of five transnational crime organizations sanctioned by the U.S., along with the Camorra, the Yakuza, Los Zetas, and MS-13.

The Brothers' Circle comprises leaders and senior members of several Eurasian criminal groups that are largely based in the countries of the former Soviet Union, but which also operate in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, the Department of the Treasury said.

Grigory Leps ranked second in Forbes' 2013 edition of Russia's top 50 celebrities with an estimated earning of \$15 million for the year.

Material from The Moscow Times was included in this report.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/10/31/popular-russian-singer-calls-mafia-allegations-absurd-a-29124>