

Russia Calls Blacklisting of Singer by U.S. 'Unacceptable'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian authorities demand an explanation for Wednesday's blacklisting of popular singer Grigory Leps in connection with the Brother's Circle crime group.

According to human rights chief Konstantin Dolgov, the U.S. Treasury report that links the famous singer and two other Russian citizens to an international criminal organization, is "unacceptable" because it violates "the fundamental principle of presumption of innocence," a statement on the Russian Foreign Ministry's website said.

An unidentified law enforcement official went as far as to question the very existence of the Brother's Circle, saying the authorities have no record of the crime group in their databases.

"All of it looks a lot like a public relations stunt," he told Interfax Friday. "Even the name 'Brother's Circle' has an element of mystery to it," he said.

On Wednesday the U.S. Treasury issued a statement blacklisting Artur Badalyan, Grigory Lepsveridze, Vadim Lyalin, Sergei Moskalenko, Yakov Rybalsky and Igor Shlykov for their reported ties to the Brother's Circle and its leaders Vladislav Leontyev and Gafur Rakhimov.

U.S. authorities believe Leps may have acted as a money courier on behalf of Leontyev, which the singer vehemently denied, calling the accusations "absurd."

A spokesperson for Leps said the singer, who is currently touring Russia, would not alter his schedule despite the American accusations, Interfax reported Friday.

Whether or not Leps' daughter, who is studying in the U.S., will return to Russia is still unclear, Interfax said.

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