

Treasury Targets the “Thieves-in-Law” Eurasian Transnational Criminal Organization

December 22, 2017

Designation also targets 10 individuals and two entities linked to the organization

Washington – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the Eurasian criminal entity, the Thieves-in-Law, along with 10 individuals and two entities linked to the Thieves-in-Law, pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13581, which targets significant transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and their supporters. The Thieves-in-Law is being targeted for its involvement in serious transnational criminal activities. Today’s action generally prohibits U.S. persons from conducting financial or other transactions with these individuals and entities, and freezes any assets they may have under U.S. jurisdiction.

“The Thieves-in-Law is a Eurasian crime syndicate that has been linked to a long list of illicit activity across the globe,” said OFAC Director John E. Smith. “Treasury is designating the Thieves-in-Law as part of a broader strategy to disrupt the financial infrastructure of transnational criminal organizations that pose a threat to the United States and our allies.”

Today’s action is the latest in a series of designations pursuant to E.O. 13581, which supports the National Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime. E.O. 13581 provides OFAC with the authority to impose economic sanctions on TCOs.

The Thieves-in-Law originated in Stalinist prison camps. Its members are initiated or “crowned” after demonstrating an “ideal” criminal biography and take an oath to uphold a code that includes living exclusively off their criminal profits and supporting other Thieves-in-Law. Gatherings of Thieves-in-Law are called “skhodka,” during which decisions are made on issues, such as specific criminal activity, redistribution of criminal spheres of interest, responses to law enforcement operations, crowning of new Thieves-in-Law, and punishment of those who violate Thieves-in-Law traditions and customs. Law enforcement in various countries have attempted to break up such gatherings in order to prevent Thieves-in-Law from coordinating activities by raiding them and detaining the participants.

The Thieves-in-Law has grown into a vast criminal organization which has spread throughout the former Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States, engaging in a variety of crimes, such as money laundering, extortion, bribery, and robbery. These criminals and their activities within the United States have become a target for U.S. law enforcement. In 1995, a Thief-in-Law was arrested in New York and later deported to Russia after serving a nine-year sentence on extortion charges; another Thief-in-Law was sentenced to three years in prison in 2013 after pleading guilty in Manhattan to a racketeering conspiracy. As recently as this year, U.S. law enforcement indicted over two dozen people, including a Thief-in-Law, for their involvement in crimes including acts of violence, fraud, identity theft, and trafficking in stolen goods.

ACTING FOR OR ON BEHALF OF THE THIEVES-IN-LAW

Zakhary Kalashov is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Kalashov is a crowned Thief-in-Law who has participated in meetings with other Thieves-in-Law, including two in 2015 and one in 2016. In June 2006, Kalashov was extradited from the United Arab Emirates to Spain on money laundering charges. Kalashov was deported to Russia in October 2014 after serving over seven years in prison on those charges. Kalashov was then arrested in July 2016 on extortion charges. Kalashov has also been accused of being involved in narcotics and arms trafficking.

Vasiliy Khristoforov is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Khristoforov is a crowned Thief-in-Law with three convictions, who has participated in meetings with other Thieves-in-Law, including ones in 2013, 2015, and 2017. Khristoforov has also used his authority to increase the stature of other Thieves-in-Law.

Kamchybek Kolbayev is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Kolbayev is a crowned Thief-in-Law. Kolbayev has engaged in bribery, and is believed to be involved in human trafficking for forced prostitution and forced labor. Kolbayev was detained in Dubai, United Arab Emirates in 2011 and was found with stolen jewelry. In 2014, Kolbayev completed a sentence in Kyrgyzstan for extortion.

Lasha Shushanashvili is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Shushanashvili is a crowned Thief-in-Law who has participated in meetings with other Thieves-in-Law, including ones in 2009, 2010, and 2013. In January 2012, Shushanashvili was arrested in

Greece on Spanish criminal charges. Shushanashvili was also allegedly involved in issuing instructions to have people killed, and in Georgia, Shushanashvili is accused of extortion.

Vladislav Leontyev is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Leontyev is a crowned Thief-in-Law who has assisted other Thieves-in-Law by helping them acquire travel documents, organize business deals, and advocate on their behalf.

Yuri Pichugin is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Pichugin is a crowned Thief-in-Law who has participated in meetings with other Thieves-in-Law, including ones in 2014, 2015, and 2017. Pichugin has seven convictions, and was arrested by Russian law enforcement in February 2017, along with seven associates, on weapons charges and for participating in a criminal organization.

Vladimir Tyurin is being designated for acting for or on behalf of the Thieves-in-Law. Tyurin is a crowned Thief-in-Law who has participated in meetings with other Thieves-in-Law, including one in 2013 and another in 2015. Tyurin has been sentenced to prison on three separate occasions, and also spent time under house arrest.

PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO THE THIEVES-IN-LAW

Gafur Rakhimov is being designated for providing material support to the Thieves-in-Law. Rakhimov has collaborated with Thieves-in-Law on business, as well as assisted Thieves-in-Law by providing warning of law enforcement issues, arranging meetings, and addressing other problems. Rakhimov has been described as having moved from extortion and car theft to becoming one of Uzbekistan's leading criminals and an important person involved in the heroin trade.

Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov is being designated for providing material support to the Thieves-in-Law. Tokhtakhounov helped to organize a meeting of Thieves-in-Law. Tokhtakhounov has been indicted twice in the United States. He was indicted on charges related to bribery during the 2002 Winter Olympics. He was also indicted in 2013 for his role in an illegal gambling operation. He is currently the subject of an Interpol Red Notice. Tokhtakhounov has been tied to other criminal investigations in Europe as well.

Ruben Tatulian is being designated for providing material support to the Thieves-in-Law. In 2010, Tatulian was appointed as the "overseer" of the Sochi, Russia Thieves-in-Law operation run by a senior Thief-in-Law. In 2015, Tatulian was detained as a participant at a meeting of

Thieves-in-Law in Sochi along with Zakhary Kalashov; one of at least two instances in which Tatulian was detained at a meeting of Thieves-in-Law. In addition, on more than one occasion, Tatulian has assisted Thieves-in-Law who encountered legal problems.

The Vesna Hotel and Spa is being designated for being owned or controlled by Ruben Tatulian. Tatulian is both a shareholder and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Vesna Hotel and Spa.

Novyi Vek - Media is being designated for being owned or controlled by Ruben Tatulian. Tatulian fully owns Novyi Vek - Media.

[A chart detailing Treasury's action against Thieves-in-Law](#) 

[Identifying information on the individuals and entities listed.](#)

####