

# Treasury Increases Pressure on Russian Financier

September 23, 2020

**WASHINGTON** – Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) took further action against the network of Kremlin-connected Russian operative Yevgeniy Prigozhin (Prigozhin), by targeting entities and individuals working on behalf of Prigozhin to advance Russia’s influence in the Central African Republic (CAR). Concurrently, OFAC is targeting those that have supported the Russian Federal Security Service directly, as well as those that assist persons helping designated Russian actors to evade U.S. sanctions.

“Yevgeniy Prigozhin has an international network of supporters to spread his malign political and economic influence around the globe,” said Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin. “The United States will continue to target the ability of Prigozhin to conduct operations globally.”

Prigozhin is the leader and financier of the Internet Research Agency (IRA), the Russian troll farm that was first designated by OFAC in 2018. The IRA conducts operations to exacerbate political tensions and divisions in foreign countries, including the United States. Prigozhin is also believed to be the manager and financier of the Russian private military company (PMC) Wagner, an OFAC-designated Russian Ministry of Defense proxy force, which conducts or has conducted dangerous and destabilizing operations in foreign countries, such as Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, Libya, and Mozambique. Because of his involvement in these activities and his connections to the Russian government, Prigozhin is already designated pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) [13848](#) (election interference); E.O. [13694](#), as amended by E.O. 13757 (cyber activity); and E.O. [13661](#) (activity in Ukraine).

Building on the July 15, 2020 designation of Prigozhin’s mining interests in Sudan, Treasury is exposing Prigozhin’s exploitation of African countries’ natural resources and highlighting the role of the Russian government in coordinating Prigozhin’s operations. Prigozhin has ties to mining, security, and logistics companies in CAR, and his operations in CAR are reported to be coordinated with the Russian Federation’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense.

Today’s action also builds on the U.S. government’s efforts to promote accountability for the Russian government’s intelligence organizations, including the Federal Security Service

(FSB), for perpetrating an array of destabilizing activities such as conducting malicious cyber activities and interfering in elections, by further targeting networks supporting their activities. OFAC previously designated the FSB on March 15, 2018 pursuant to Section 224 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act for engaging in activities that undermine the cybersecurity of individuals and entities on behalf of the Russian government, including targeting U.S. officials. The FSB was also previously designated on December 28, 2016 pursuant to E.O. 13694, as amended, following the Russian government's attempted interference in U.S. elections and processes.

## SANCTIONS TARGETS

Today's action targets eight individuals and seven entities directly involved in furthering Prigozhin's operations in CAR, assisting the activities of the FSB, or engaging in sanctions evasion activities. These designations are being taken pursuant to a variety of authorities, including E.O. 13848; E.O. 13694, as amended; and E.O. 13661.

### Treasury Continues to Hold Prigozhin Accountable

Prigozhin owns or controls two companies that conduct mining operations in CAR: the Russia-based **M Finans** and CAR-based **Lobaye Invest**. M Finans's main lines of business are the mining of precious metals and the provision of private security services. M Finans has also been linked to Concord Catering, a Prigozhin-controlled company that OFAC designated in March 2018 for providing material assistance to the IRA and in 2017 for being owned or controlled by Prigozhin. Lobaye Invest was founded in CAR in October 2017 and specializes in the extraction of gold and diamonds, both lucrative exports of CAR. Both M Finans and Lobaye Invest have been linked to PMC Wagner's operations in CAR. M Finans and Lobaye Invest are being designated for being owned or controlled by Prigozhin pursuant to E.O. 13848; E.O. 13694, as amended; and E.O. 13661.

**Dmitry Sergeevich Sytii** (Sytii) is Prigozhin's employee and the founder of Lobaye Invest. Sytii has also worked for the IRA. **Yevgeniy Khodotov** (Khodotov) has served as the director of Lobaye Invest. **Alexander Yuryevich Kuzin** (Kuzin) is Prigozhin's employee operating in CAR. Sytii, Khodotov, and Kuzin have all been involved in Prigozhin's CAR operations since 2017, and are being designated for their work on behalf of Prigozhin pursuant to E.O. 13848; E.O. 13694, as amended; and E.O. 13661.

## Treasury Further Targets the FSB and Sanctions Evasion Activity

### *Okeanos Targets*

**Okeanos**, a St. Petersburg, Russia-based underwater technology company, has a long history of cooperating with Russian government agencies, including the FSB, in the field of underwater operations. In April 2015, Okeanos provided diving equipment to the FSB and provided support for diving equipment deployed in the Crimea region of Ukraine. As of March 2017, Okeanos' clientele included the FSB and the Russian Ministry of Defense. In September 2018, Okeanos was added to the Commerce Department's Entity List for providing equipment and support to the Russian Navy. Treasury is also targeting several of Okeanos' senior officials who were integral in carrying out the company's operations. These individuals include: Director General, **Elena Nikolaevna Ivanova** (Ivanova); Deputy Director General, **Boris Aleksandrovich Gaykovich** (Gaykovich); Marketing Director, **Nadezhda Leonidovna Kuchumova** (Kuchumova); and Spokesperson, **Vladislav Yuryevich Zanin** (Zanin).

Okeanos is being designated for having provided material and technological support to the FSB. Ivanova, Gaykovich, Kuchumova, and Zanin are being designated for having acted for or on behalf of Okeanos. These actions are being taken pursuant to E.O. 13694, as amended.

### *Optima Freight OY Targets*

Following Treasury's designation of Divetechnoservices in June 2018 for procuring underwater equipment and diving systems for the FSB, Divetechnoservices utilized **Optima Freight OY** (Optima Freight), a Finland-based freight forwarding company, to acquire underwater equipment in an effort to evade U.S. sanctions. In July 2018, more than a month after its designation, Optima Freight facilitated the shipment of diving equipment on behalf of Divetechnoservices. Optima Freight had also assisted Divetechnoservices' efforts to acquire underwater technologies prior to its designation. As of mid-January 2018, Optima Freight assisted Divetechnoservices' efforts to acquire an underwater diving system valued at over \$150,000. Optima Freight is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13694, as amended, for having materially assisted Divetechnoservices.

Throughout the course of this activity, Optima Freight was managed and controlled by **Nikita Gennadievitch Kovalevskij** (Kovalevskij). As of September 2020, Kovalevskij is the owner of Optima Freight and has served as its Managing Director since 2011. Kovalevskij is also the Managing Director of three other Finland-based freight forwarding companies — **GCH Finland**

**OY** (GCH Finland), **Unicum Trade OY** (Unicum Trade), and **ACEX OY** (ACEX). Kovalevskij is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13694, as amended, for having acted for or on behalf of Optima Freight, while GCH Finland, Unicum Trade, and ACEX are being designated pursuant to the same authority for being owned or controlled by Kovalevskij.

“Nikita Kovalevskij, and his company, Optima Freight, through an illicit scheme, violated U.S. export laws in the acquisition of sensitive, controlled U.S. maritime technologies,” said Stacey R. Moy, Special Agent in Charge of the Counterintelligence Division, FBI Washington Field Office. “The FBI remains committed to aggressively investigate and stop Russia from covertly pilfering U.S. innovation.”

Today’s designations represent the collective efforts of Treasury, FBI, Department of Justice, and Commerce to counter those who serve to harm U.S. national security.

As a result of today’s designations, all property and interests in property of these persons that are in or come within the possession of U.S. persons are blocked, and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with them. Additionally, any entities 50 percent or more owned by one or more of these designated persons are also blocked. Finally, non-U.S. persons who engage in certain transactions with the persons designated today may themselves be exposed to sanctions.

[View identifying information on the individuals and entities designated today.](#)