

# John Podesta's Buddy Runs Part Of The Russian Mafia Says Moscow Press

## Deputy Head of Russian Central Bank Linked to Moscow Mafia – Reports

By [John R. Schindler](#) and Ivan Schnegler

The deputy head of Russia's Central Bank provided instructions to members of the Moscow-based Taganskaya crime syndicate on how to launder money through banks and real estate in Spain, according to a report by the Bloomberg news agency on Tuesday.

Torshin reportedly occupied a higher position in the organization than its leader Alexander Romanov, who called the Central Bank deputy head “godfather” or “boss,” Bloomberg reported, citing a report by Spanish investigators.

The allegations are based on recordings of phone conversations between Romanov and Torshin in 2012 and 2013, and documents seized from Romanov's villa in Spain. Torshin denies any connection to the Taganskaya syndicate, claiming that he had “purely social” ties to Romanov.

Torshin claims that he met Romanov at the beginning of 1990s and that they later worked together at the bank. He told Bloomberg he hadn't spoken to Romanov since he was arrested in 2013.

Romanov was sentenced to four years in prison in Spain in May over illegal transactions worth 1.65 million euros (\$1.83 million) and \$50,000. Torshin was appointed deputy head of Central Bank in January this year. Before that, he was a senator in the United Russia party representing the republic of Marii-El.

Bloomberg noted that Torshin wasn't charged by the Spanish authorities. According to an unidentified Spanish official, “prosecuting Torshin isn't worth the effort because Russia doesn't cooperate in cases involving high-ranking officials.”

In June, the Spanish Civil Guard detained six Russian citizens and a Ukrainian suspected of money laundering. The move was described by the media as “a new blow to the Russian mafia in Spain.” According to the El Mundo newspaper, the suspects had ties to United Russia officials.



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. (Photo: Jeff Swensen/Getty Images)

The revelations of the so-called [Panama Papers](#) that are roiling the world's political and financial elites this week include important facts about Team Clinton. This unprecedented trove of documents purloined from a shady Panama law firm that arranged tax havens, and perhaps money laundering, for the globe's super-rich includes juicy insights into how Russia's elite hides its ill-gotten wealth.

Almost lost among the many revelations is the fact that Russia's biggest bank uses [The Podesta Group](#) as its lobbyist in Washington, D.C. Though hardly a household name, this firm is well known inside the Beltway, not least because its CEO is Tony Podesta, one of the best-connected Democratic *machers* in the country. He founded the firm in 1998 with his brother John, formerly chief of staff to President Bill Clinton, then counselor to President Barack Obama, Mr. Podesta is the very definition of a Democratic insider. Outsiders engage the Podestas and their well-connected lobbying firm to improve their image and get access to Democratic bigwigs.

Which is exactly what [Sberbank](#), Russia's biggest financial institution, did this spring. As [reported](#) at the end of March, the Podesta Group registered with the U.S. Government as a lobbyist for Sberbank, as required by law, naming three Podesta Group staffers: Tony Podesta plus Stephen Rademaker and David Adams, the last two former assistant secretaries of state. It should be noted that Tony Podesta is a big-money bundler for the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign while his brother John is the chairman of that campaign, the chief architect of her plans to take the White House this November.

Sberbank (Savings Bank in Russian) engaged the Podesta Group to help its public image—leading Moscow financial institutions not exactly being known for their propriety and wholesomeness—and specifically to help lift some of the pain of sanctions placed on Russia in the aftermath of the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine, which has caused real pain to the country's hard-hit financial sector.

It's hardly surprising that Sberbank sought the help of Democratic insiders like the Podesta Group to aid them in this difficult hour, since they clearly understand how American politics work. The question

is why the Podesta Group took Sberbank's money. That financial institution isn't exactly hiding in the shadows—it's the biggest bank in Russia, and its reputation leaves a lot to be desired. Nobody acquainted with Russian finance was surprised that Sberbank wound up in the Panama Papers.

Since the brothers are destined for very high-level jobs if the Democrats triumph in November, their relationship is something they—and Clinton—need to explain.

Although Sberbank has its origins in the nineteenth century, it was functionally reborn after the Soviet collapse, and in the 1990s it grew to be the dominant bank in the country, today controlling nearly 30 percent of Russia's aggregate banking assets and employing a quarter-million people. The majority stockholder in Sberbank is Russia's Central Bank. In other words, Sberbank is functionally an arm of the Kremlin, although it's ostensibly a private institution.

Certainly Western intelligence is well acquainted with Sberbank, noting its close relationship with Vladimir Putin and his regime. Funds moving through Sberbank are regularly used to support clandestine Russian intelligence operations, while the bank uses its offices abroad as cover for the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service or SVR. A NATO counterintelligence official explained that Sberbank, which has outposts in almost two dozen foreign countries, "functions as a sort of arm of the SVR outside Russia, especially because many of its senior employees are 'former' Russian intelligence officers." Inside the country, Sberbank has an equally cosy relationship with the Federal Security Service or FSB, Russia's powerful domestic intelligence agency.

Ukraine has pointed a finger at Sberbank as an instrument of Russia's aggression against their country. In 2014, Ukraine's Security Service [charged](#) Sberbank with "financing terrorism," noting that its branches were distributing millions of dollars in illegal aid to Russian-backed separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine. Kyiv's conclusion, that Sberbank is a witting supporter of Russian aggression against Ukraine, is broadly supported by Western intelligence. "Sberbank is the Kremlin, they don't do anything major without Putin's go-ahead, and they don't tell him 'no' either," explained a retired senior U.S. intelligence official with extensive experience in Eastern Europe.

In addition, Ukrainian intelligence has [alleged](#) that the FSB collaborated with Sberbank in the bombings of two of the bank's branches in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, in June 2015. The attacks caused no casualties but got [major coverage](#) in Russian state media as "proof" of Ukraine's instability and violent anti-Russian nature. Although the notion that Russian spies would plant bombs as a provocation, what the Kremlin terms [provokatsiya](#), may sound outlandish to those unacquainted with espionage, in fact Russian spies have been doing such things since tsarist times. What I've termed "[fake terrorism](#)" is a longstanding Kremlin core competency, and it can only be pulled off with logistical support, including with finances.

Predictably, Sberbank has [blown off](#) the Panama Papers revelations as nothing of consequence, but the fact that they are an arm of the Kremlin and they do plenty of shady things in many countries is a matter of record. As is the fact that the Podesta Group is their lobbyist in America.

Among the Sberbank subsidiaries that the Podesta Group also represents are the Cayman Islands-based Troika Dialog Group Limited, the Cyprus-based SBGB Cyprus Limited, and the Luxembourg-based

SB International. As [reported](#) this week by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, a consortium of journalists exploring the Panama Papers leak, Sberbank and Troika Dialog are used by members of Mr. Putin's inner circle to shift public funds into sometimes questionable private investments. In other words, this is top-level money laundering of a brazen kind. As the OCCRP stated plainly, "Some of these companies were initially connected to the Troika Dialog investment fund, which was controlled and run by Sberbank after the bank bought the Troika Dialog investment bank. Troika and Sberbank declined to comment."

Adding to shadiness of all this, the Podesta Group is playing along with the useful charade that Sberbank is simply a private financial institution, rather than the state-owned bank that it is, since that would require the lobbyists to register as agents of the Russian government under the Foreign Agent Registration Act.

John and Tony Podesta aren't fooling anyone with this ruse. They are lobbyists for Vladimir Putin's personal bank of choice, an arm of his Kremlin and its intelligence services. Since the brothers Podesta are presumably destined for very high-level White House jobs next January if the Democrats triumph in November at the polls, their relationship with Sberbank is something they—and Hillary Clinton—need to explain to the public.

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