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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Residents Send Biscuit 'Aid' Package to Ukraine's Donbass

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Residents in central Russia have decided to help those living in Ukraine's war-torn east by sending a Soviet-era pop star to deliver a batch of biscuits to the region.

"The Tula [region] has never shied away from doing good, and it has never left anyone in the lurch. We want to support the residents of Donbass and send them our traditional Tula sweets," governor Vladimir Gruzdev said Monday in an online statement.

According to Gruzdev, the "pryaniki" — traditional Russian gingerbread biscuits — will be delivered by crooner Iosif Kobzon, who will perform a charity concert while on a visit to Ukraine's Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

Kobzon, who hails from Donetsk and is known as the Russian Frank Sinatra, said Monday that he had experienced no problems crossing into the country, despite the fact that Kiev has forbidden him from traveling to Ukraine.

"I am going home, and in my homeland my compatriots are waiting for me," he was cited as

saying by Russia's state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

The 77-year-old singer found himself banned from Latvia and later Ukraine after he signed an open letter supporting Russia's annexation of Crimea earlier this year.

Kobzon, who is also a State Duma deputy for the ruling United Russia party, was reportedly planning to unveil his version of a national anthem for the separatist-held region, known as the Donbass, on his visit to eastern Ukraine.

More than 30 artists have so far submitted hymns for Novorossia, RIA Novosti reported, with residents of the separatist territory intending to select their favorite song by next year.

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