

Russia Accuses Major Vodka Distiller of Funding Ukraine Army

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Global Spirits founder Yevhen Chernyak. **Valery Melnikov / Kommersant**

Russia has [added](#) the Ukrainian owner of a popular vodka brand to its wanted list on suspicion of financing Ukraine's armed forces.

Russia's Investigative Committee said Monday it had launched a criminal investigation into Yevhen Cherniak, the founder of Ukraine's Global Spirits holding — which produces Khortytza vodka — on charges of sponsoring terrorism.

Cherniak is accused of transferring 500 million rubles (\$5.5 million) to the Ukrainian army between February and April 2022, as well as 90 million rubles (\$1 million) worth of military equipment in June 2023.

In 2021, Cherniak was [ranked](#) Ukraine's 19th wealthiest businessman, with a net worth of \$470 million.

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Two of Cherniak’s Russian associates have been detained on suspicion of bribery, Russia’s Investigative Committee said.

A database of Moscow’s Zamoskvoretsky District Court listed the owner of two Russian distilleries, [Alexander Bespalov](#), and the CEO of one of the distilleries, [Andrei Lazutin](#), as suspects in the bribery case.

The Investigative Committee said it was looking to seize the assets of Cherniak’s Russian businesses “in the nearest future.”

Bespalov was [reported](#) to have taken over Cherniak’s distilleries “Russky Sever” and “Rodnik i K” in April 2022.

Sources told the Kommersant business daily at the time that the takeover was a mere “formality” that would allow Cherniak to deny any Russian business presence during wartime.

Kommersant listed Khortytza and Morosha — both Global Spirits products — as Russia’s top two popular vodka brands in 2021.

Global Spirits [said](#) it had revoked its product and distribution licenses in Russia after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and has filed a lawsuit in Cyprus in connection with the improper use of its intellectual property.

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