

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002971/24  
to the Commission**

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(16 December 2024)

*Subject:* The environmental hazard posed to the Baltic Sea by Russia's shadow fleet

Over a thousand days after Russia started its brutal invasion of Ukraine, Russia continues to operate a shadow fleet that provides its war machine with a constant flow of cash.

These ships not only benefit Russia economically but also pose a significant risk to the waters they navigate in.

A third of Russia's seaborne crude oil exports pass through the Danish straits that give access to the Baltic Sea and ports in Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, all of which are Member States of the EU.

These exports are often carried by outdated and uninsured tankers, which are far more likely to cause spills than their modern counterparts.

The Baltic Sea has an average depth of 52 meters. In comparison, the Gulf of Mexico, where the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill took place, has an average depth of 1 615 meters. Thus, any potential environmental hazard in the Baltic Sea would unquestionably lead to a major disaster.

In accordance with the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, what measures will the Commission take to prevent de facto Russian ships from navigating the Danish straits and thus posing an enormous environmental hazard to the Baltic Sea and several Member States?

Submitted: 16.12.2024

**Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission**  
(28 February 2025)

The Commission highlights that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

Coastal and flag States have to exercise their rights and fulfil their obligations in accordance with Unclos. The international legal regime regulating the passage of ships through straits is embodied in Unclos.

While exercising rights of transit passage, ships must, *inter alia*, comply with generally accepted international regulations, procedures and practices for the prevention, reduction, and control of pollution from ships.

Moreover, according to Articles 192 and 210 *et seq.*, States have the obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment and cooperate on a global and regional basis for the same purpose.

Moreover, under Unclos, flag States are responsible for ensuring that vessels, including shadow fleets, sailing under their flag comply with international insurance and certification requirements, vital for accountability and preventing environmental risks in the particularly sensitive sea area of the Baltic Sea.

Denmark, as the coastal State responsible for the Danish Straits, has the authority under Unclos to adopt measures to prevent environmental hazards and ensure compliance with international regulations within its territorial seas.

Member States are also required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive<sup>(1)</sup> to include significant acute pollution events in their marine strategies.

Where such pollution events occur, it is the prime responsibility of Member States to intervene and this includes cooperation with regional bodies such as Helcom to monitor and manage maritime activities that could pose risks to the Baltic Sea.

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<sup>1</sup> Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy, OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19-40.