

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-000195/25
to the Commission
Virginijus Sinkevičius (Verts/ALE)
(17 January 2025)**

Subject: Enhancing EU maritime surveillance to fight Russia's shadow fleet

The Russian shadow fleet has emerged as a critical challenge to international sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine. This clandestine fleet, comprising hundreds of ageing tankers, allows Russia to continue exporting oil despite Western restrictions. These vessels, operating with opaque ownership structures and dubious safety standards, pose significant environmental and security risks. The Russian shadow fleet can also potentially be used for sabotage operations on critical undersea infrastructure. Recent incidents in the Baltic Sea have raised alarm about these vessels being used to deliberately damage underwater cables. There are crucial steps for Member States and the G7 to take, such as lowering the oil price cap, prohibiting ship-to-ship transfers in EU waters and expanding sanctions to target more vessels.

Additionally, at EU level:

1. What concrete steps is the Commission taking to enhance EU-wide maritime surveillance capabilities? Specifically, how does the Commission plan to leverage resources from the European Maritime Safety Agency and EU satellite programmes to provide more comprehensive monitoring support to Member States, complementing existing NATO efforts in the Baltic Sea?
2. How does the Commission intend to reinforce the capacity of port authorities to conduct more thorough and frequent inspections of suspicious ships possibly involved in price cap evasion?

Submitted: 17.1.2025

**Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission
(27 March 2025)**

1. The Union Maritime Information and Exchange System (SafeSeaNet)⁽¹⁾, hosted in the European Maritime Safety Agency, provides the maritime picture and surveillance to all Member States via the Integrated Maritime Services (IMS) in a fully protected domain. Member States already have full access. The IMS already allow Member States to track and trace any vessel by use of ship positioning systems (AIS, LRIT, etc.) in near real time.

The IMS support to Member States could also be customised with additional information, on request, such as earth observation images (e.g. Copernicus), images from Remotely Operated Air (Drones) and/or Underwater Vehicles (ROVs).

The same system is used to support Member States in the case of detected illegal ship-to-ship transfers or turning off the ship's identification systems.

2. The EU port State control system⁽²⁾, as just strengthened in the revision of 2024, has a sophisticated targeting system aimed at inspecting substandard ships. Given that the EU already has an embargo on seaborne oil of Russian origin, any ship, irrespective of flag, cannot sail to any Member State port. The above-mentioned IMS support Member States in monitoring this prohibition.

Under the EU sanctions and restrictive measures legislation⁽³⁾ in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, the EU has the power to designate specific vessels, including vessels that are part of Russia's shadow fleet, engaging in deceptive and high-risk shipping practices contrary to international standards and which seeks to circumvent the EU/G7 Oil Price Cap. To date, the EU has designated a total of 153 vessels. These vessels are subject to a port access ban and a ban on provision of services.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2002/59/EC on Vessel Traffic Monitoring, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2002/59/oj/eng>

⁽²⁾ Directive 2009/16/EC on port State control (OJ L 131, 28.5.2009, p. 57), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/16/oj/eng>

⁽³⁾ Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP and Regulation (EU) 833/2014 OJ L 229, 31.7.2014, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014D0512> and <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/833/oj/eng>