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All ships passing through European waters must now provide proof of insurance

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Estonian government



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The European Commission has adopted another key measure to crackdown on the so-called shadow fleet passing through its waters. The amendment to the Vessel Monitoring Directive now requires all vessels, including those merely passing through European Union waters without entering an EU port, to provide insurance information.

“By requiring that all vessels operating in our vicinity are properly insured, the EU’s ability to monitor and, if necessary, investigate maritime activities is strengthened, addressing risks posed by uninsured or unsafe vessels,” the EC stated in a release.

Director-general for mobility and transport, Magda Kopczyńska, stated: “This is a targeted measure with potentially great impact, enhancing the preparedness of the EU’s coastal states.”

The number of vessels hit by sanctions surpassed 1,000 late last year with data from S&P Global Market Intelligence showing that more 800 of these ships do not have confirmed insurance.

Moreover, the average age of sanctioned ships – 21 years – is some eight years older than the global average, adding to growing concern that the sprawling so-called shadow fleet could lead to multiple costly environmental catastrophes.

In the wake of several near disasters involving ageing ships from Russia's shadow fleet, as well as a number of subsea cables being cut by ships dragging their anchors, countries across Europe have been taking action to tackle the risks imposed by the dark fleet of tankers.

This has seen many ships face sanctions, while NATO and a number of Baltic states have been running a naval operation called Baltic Sentry since January to crack down on subsea attacks.

Since February, the Danish Maritime Authority has been carrying out port state controls on tankers it deems high risk that anchor off Skagen in the far north of the country, a popular anchorage.

Also this year the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) activated an advanced UK-led reaction system to track potential threats to undersea infrastructure and monitor the Russian shadow fleet. The JEF is a UK-led Northern European multinational military partnership. The naval operation named Nordic Warden harnesses AI to assess data from a range of sources, including the Automatic Identification System (AIS) ships use to broadcast their position, to calculate the risk posed by each vessel entering areas of interest.

Earlier this month, Estonian authorities detained an 18-year-old tanker (pictured) for flying a false flag, the first time a Baltic littoral state has taken such action against Russia's shadow fleet.