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Russian Fuel Supplies to Syria Continue

By The Moscow Times

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LONDON — A fresh delivery of Russian gas oil has reached a government-controlled port in Syria this month, according to shipping sources and tracking data, adding to a string of cargoes that have flowed into the war-ravaged country this year.

Delivering refined oil products to Syria is not explicitly prohibited by sanctions, but the European Union has blacklisted the state's oil trading and distribution firms.

Since Syria announced it had set up new private firms to import oil products at the start of the year, trade has boomed. About 20 shipments of gas oil and heating fuel reached the state-controlled port Banias last month.

The latest shipment was supplied to third parties by top Russian oil producer Rosneft, according to shippers. The Russian oil giant said it sells products for loading at its ports and is not responsible for their final destination.

"We are selling oil products from Tuapse on a FOB [free-on-board] basis, and therefore

Rosneft has responsibility for the cargo only until it is loaded into a tanker," a Rosneft spokeswoman said.

"After that, it is the buyer who becomes responsible for the cargo including its destination."

Most cargoes arrive aboard Greek or Italian-managed vessels from Lebanon, Turkey or the Black Sea.

The Kemal Ka loaded 11,500 tons of gas oil at the Russian port of Tuapse at the end of March and delivered the cargo to Banias in the first week of April, shipping sources said and tracking data showed.

At current prices, the cargo would have been worth about $10 million, but market sources said trade with Syria is more lucrative because few firms are willing to do business with President Bashar Al-Assad's increasingly isolated state.

One shipper estimated the freight rate for deliveries from the Black Sea to Syria to be about 205 percent of the worldscale rate set as a reference for deliveries along that route.

The Kemal Ka is listed as part of a fleet owned by Akbasoglu Shipping Group in Istanbul, according to the firm's website.

"Unfortunately, we are not able to give you any information on the subject voyage," the chartering manager wrote in an e-mailed response to queries, declining to identify the firm or firms chartering the vessel.

The rise in deliveries has ended months of isolation that have damaged the Syrian economy but has drawn criticism by observers, who say the fuel could be used to fuel army vehicles.

The European Union has said that enforcing sanctions is the responsibility of member states but that it would remain vigilant on effective implementation of measures.

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