

# Russian Oil Majors Suspected of Price-Fixing

By [The Moscow Times](#)

November 05, 2014



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Three of Russia's largest oil companies are being investigated on suspicion that they colluded to push up domestic fuel prices, the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service said Wednesday.

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"This situation was one of the reasons for the rise in prices in the retail segment of the oil products market," Federal Anti-Monopoly Service official Dmitry Makhonin said in a statement posted on the body's website.

The cost of gasoline in Russia, one of the world's biggest producers of crude oil, has risen

by up to 10 percent this year, several percentage points above the level of inflation.

Federal Anti-Monopoly Service head Igor Artemyev said Oct. 10 that trades on the St. Petersburg exchange had been uncovered where companies sold identical quantities of fuel to one another for no reason other than to push the price up, Interfax reported.

"From our analysis it seems that there were a large quantity of deals between vertically integrated oil companies and their subsidiaries," Makhonin said Wednesday.

Price controls imposed on domestic fuel in 2011 ahead of presidential elections caused gas shortages and lines of cars at petrol stations in some regions. At the time, then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin accused oil companies of colluding to create shortages in order to maximize profits.

Urals crude, the Russian oil benchmark, has fallen almost 25 percent since June highs to its lowest level for four years.

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