

# Norway Releases Russian-Crewed Ship After Cable Damage

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Ruud Coster / marinetraffic.com

Police in Norway said Friday they had released a Russian-crewed cargo ship seized over suspected involvement in damage to a fiber-optic cable in the Baltic Sea, having found no evidence linking it to the incident.

It was the latest development in a series of suspected acts of sabotage that many officials believe form part of a Russian "hybrid war" against Western allies of Ukraine since Moscow launched its invasion in February 2022.

The Norway-flagged "Silver Dania" was sailing between St. Petersburg and Murmansk when a Norwegian coastguard ship stopped it late Thursday off the coast of Tromso in northern Norway.

The seizure came after Sweden and Latvia said Sunday that a fiber-optic cable linking the

Swedish island of Gotland to Ventspils in Latvia had been damaged — the latest of several similar incidents in the Baltic in recent months.

"No findings have been made linking the ship to the act," police attorney Ronny Jorgensen said in a statement.

"The investigation will continue, but we see no reason for the ship to remain in Tromsø any longer," he added.

Nations around the Baltic Sea have scrambled to bolster their defenses over the suspected sabotage of undersea cables in recent months.

## **'Nothing wrong'**

The ship's owner rejected any wrongdoing as Norwegian police searched the ship and questioned the all-Russian crew, following a seizure request from Latvia.

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Jorgensen, the police prosecutor, had said a crew member was suspected of involvement in the cable damage, which he described as "aggravated vandalism."

The Silver Dania is owned by Norwegian shipping company Silver Sea, whose chief Tormod Fossmark told AFP that "We sailed near Gotland... but we did not cast anchor.

"We did nothing wrong," he added. "Norwegian authorities have brought us into port to clear us of any involvement."

The Russian Embassy in Oslo had told AFP by email that none of the sailors had been placed under arrest nor had they contacted the embassy for assistance.

## **Bulgarian ship under investigation**

On Sunday, the Swedish coastguard seized a Bulgarian ship, the Malta-flagged "Vezhen," off Sweden's southeastern coast in connection with the same cable incident.

Swedish prosecutors have opened an investigation into "aggravated sabotage," and images of the vessel published by Swedish media appeared to show that one of its anchors had a broken arm.

Alexander Kalchev, CEO of Navibulgar, the Bulgarian maritime shipping company that operates the Vezhen, denied any involvement.

"I am convinced that we cannot say... that this was a malicious act," he said.

But prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist told Swedish news agency TT on Friday that he was confident the Vezhen was involved.

"I think I can say, on very solid grounds, that it is this ship that has damaged the cable," he

said.

"Our work is continuing... The ship is still seized and there are various investigative measures being taken, including technical examinations," he said.

The incident is the latest in a series affecting cables in the Baltic Sea amid heightened tensions between Russia and the West since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Finland and Sweden, which both border the Baltic Sea, have dropped decades of military non-alignment to join NATO as concern about the region's security mounts.

Russia had warned both countries of repercussions if they joined the alliance.

In September 2022, a series of underwater blasts ruptured the Nord Stream pipelines that carried Russian gas to Europe. The cause is yet to be determined.

In October 2023, an undersea gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia was shut down after it was damaged by the anchor of a Chinese cargo ship.

In November 2024, two telecom cables in Swedish waters were severed, and on Dec. 25, the Estlink 2 electricity cable and four telecom cables linking Finland and Estonia were damaged.

In response, NATO launched a Baltic Sea patrol mission in mid-January to secure critical underwater infrastructure.

Frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, submarines and drones are involved in the Baltic Sentry patrols.

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