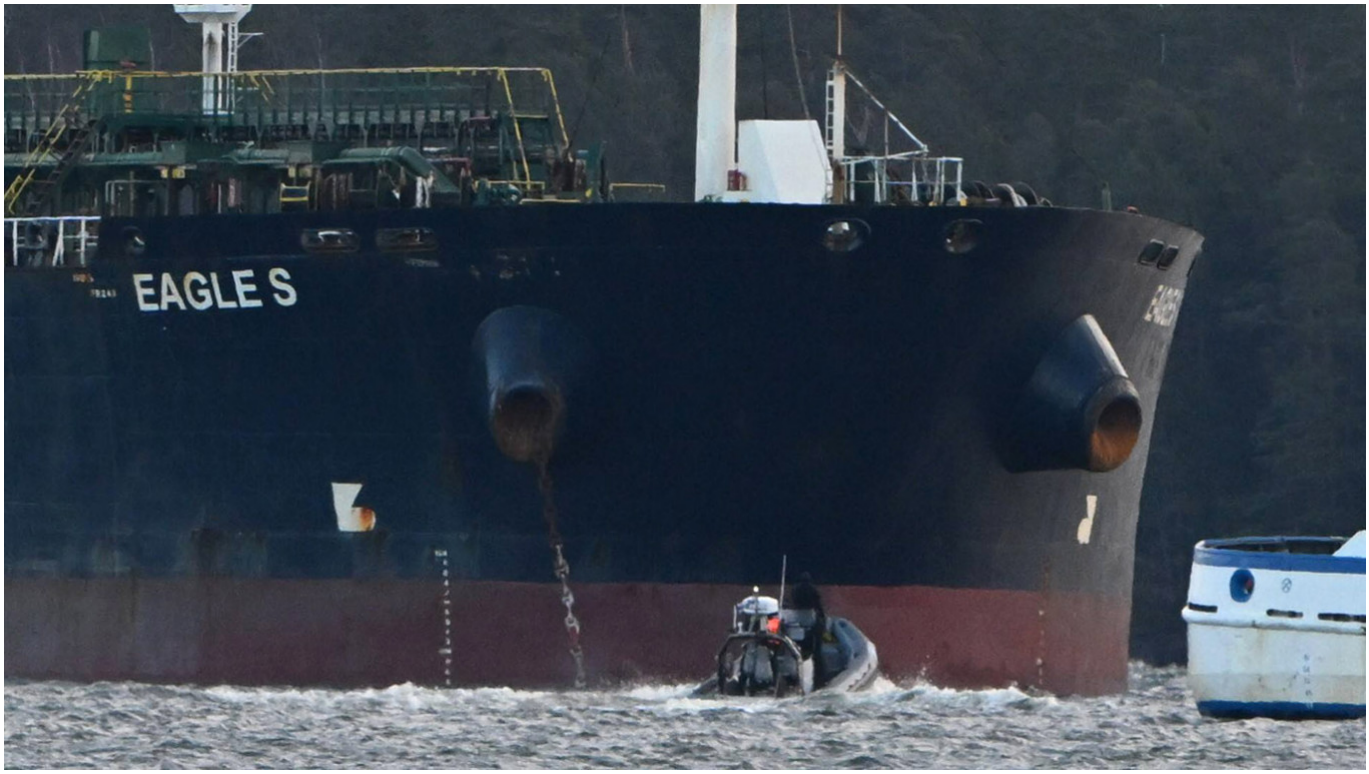
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Captain Denies Intentionally Dragging Anchor That Cut Baltic Cable

By AFP

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The seized oil tanker Eagle S in Porvoo, Finland. **Jussi Nukari / IMAGO / TASS**

The captain of a ship believed to belong to Russia's so-called shadow fleet on Friday denied intentionally dragging an anchor that damaged Baltic Sea cables in an alleged act of sabotage.

Captain Davit Vadacthkoria, a Georgian national, and two senior officers of the Cook Islands-registered oil tanker Eagle S are accused of dragging the ship's anchor on the seabed for around 90 kilometers (56 miles), damaging five undersea cables in the Gulf of Finland on Dec. 25, 2024.

They testified this week in the Helsinki District Court, where they stand accused of "aggravated criminal mischief and aggravated interference with communications."

Prosecutors say the crew neglected their duties intentionally but the defense has insisted the damage was an accident.

Vadacthkoria told the court on Friday the crew had seen no indication that the anchor had fallen from the ship.

"There was no reason to doubt that it was not in order," he said.

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Vadacthkoria said security checks conducted on board had not indicated anything "critical" before the ship departed the Russian port Ust-Luga on Dec. 25.

He said he was "truly sorry."

"As captain, I don't want you to think that I'm not taking responsibility for my actions. I came here to tell the truth," he said.

Several undersea Baltic cables were damaged last year, with many experts calling it part of a "hybrid war" carried out by Russia against Western countries.

Moscow is accused of using its clandestine "shadow fleet" to dodge sanctions imposed by Western allies over Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

The defense said that on the day of the cable cuts, the ship had to stop and reduce speed at sea due to a problem with the main engine amid rough weather.

The defendants said that Finnish authorities contacted Eagle S on the day of the incident to ask about the ship's anchors and that the crew responded they were secure.

"If a ship drags an anchor behind it for several hours for 90 kilometers, is it really possible that no one would notice?" prosecutor Mikko Larkia asked the court at the start of the hearings.

The prosecution has said it plans to seek prison sentences of at least two and a half years.

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