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EU Seeks Ways to Step Up Checks on Russia's 'Shadow Fleet'

By AFP

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dpa

The European Union is looking to increase the ability of its member states to carry out inspections on Russia's "shadow fleet" of aging oil tankers, officials said on Monday.

France — which briefly detained one of the vessels recently — has called for tougher actions to crimp the key source of revenues for Russia's Ukraine war chest.

The 27-nation bloc has already blacklisted hundreds of tankers used by Moscow to help circumvent restrictions on its lucrative crude exports.

Brussels is now pitching a new proposal to sign agreements with states where the ships are formally registered to facilitate checks.

"We are discussing with the member states how to better coordinate our actions regarding the shadow fleet," EU top diplomat Kaja Kallas said at a meeting with foreign ministers.

“We should think about it more — to be more creative.”

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Under the proposal seen by AFP, the EU's diplomatic arm wants member states to agree on a declaration that would allow Brussels to sign deals with flag states.

“EU Member States increasingly demonstrate a renewed momentum for more robust enforcement actions tackling the shadow fleet,” the document circulated by Brussels said.

“The EU could support Member States in their efforts if they agree to grant the EU the right to negotiate agreements on their behalf for pre-authorized boardings for inspections.”

The EU estimated that the Russian “shadow fleet” currently comprises “anywhere from 600 to up to 1,400 vessels.”

Countries along the Baltic Sea have complained that not enough is being done by EU countries in the Mediterranean to screen Russian vessels as they pass.

But EU officials have been wary of calls to step up checks on the “shadow fleet” out of fear that it could set a precedent for other countries to target European vessels around the globe.

Brussels said in the document that it has already stepped up its outreach to countries where these ships are registered.

It cited the example of Panama — one of the world's largest ship registries — which has agreed to remove all vessels under EU sanctions.

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