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Turkish Shipping Company Ends Russia-Linked Voyages After Tanker Explosions

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Turkish-owned tanker M/T Mersin. **seanews.com.tr**

Turkish tanker manager Besiktas Shipping said Wednesday it would halt all operations involving Russia, a week after one of its ships was struck by a series of explosions off the coast of Senegal.

"We have decided to cease all shipping operations involving Russian interests," the company said in a statement. "Effective immediately, we will no longer undertake any Russia-related voyages."

The Mersin, a Panamanian-flagged tanker operated by Besiktas and carrying nearly 39,000 tons of fuel, was hit by four external explosions while anchoring off Dakar last Thursday, the company said. Water entered the engine room, but the crew brought the situation under control, preventing injuries or environmental damage, according to Besiktas.

The suspension of operations involving Russia comes as Turkey has reported three Russia-linked tankers coming under attack in the Black Sea in recent days.

A Ukrainian security source told AFP that naval drones had struck two of those vessels on Friday, claiming they were "covertly transporting Russian oil."

Related article: Turkey Says Another Tanker Was Attacked in the Black Sea

President Vladimir Putin condemned the attacks as "piracy" and warned that Moscow could retaliate by striking Ukrainian ports and vessels.

"I hope the Ukrainian military and political leadership, as well as those who back them, will think twice about whether this practice is worth continuing," Putin told reporters on Thursday.

Besiktas said it has complied with Western sanctions and the oil price-cap mechanism targeting Russian exports, but described the security environment as having "escalated considerably," making risks to its ships and crews "untenable."

"As the safety of our personnel and assets is our highest priority, we are halting all such operations," the company said.

The Mersin is not listed under UN or EU sanctions, though two other Besiktas-owned ships are subject to Ukrainian sanctions.

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