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EU Sanctions Target Russia's 'Shadow Fleet' Backers and Disinformation Network

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Nicolas Tucat / AFP

The European Union on Monday imposed a new round of sanctions on 23 individuals and entities linked to Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" of oil tankers, as well as figures accused of spreading disinformation and carrying out cyberattacks against EU member states.

Among those targeted is Murtaza Lakhani, a Pakistani-Canadian oil trader described by Bloomberg as a key facilitator of Russian crude exports despite Western sanctions.

On Monday, Lakhani said he would step down from all managerial roles at companies he owns, calling the EU's measures "unfounded."

Bloomberg reported in 2023 that he had helped Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin establish a network of companies to keep Russian oil flowing to global markets.

Four other individuals, including two Azerbaijani nationals, were sanctioned for their roles in

companies facilitating Russian oil exports. The EU also added four firms to the blacklist, two of which are based in the United Arab Emirates, while the others are located in Vietnam and Russia.

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In a separate tranche of sanctions, the EU targeted individuals accused of being involved in disinformation and cyber operations. Among them is John Mark Dougan, a former U.S. Marine and Florida deputy sheriff who fled to Russia in 2016 and later obtained Russian citizenship.

European intelligence documents cited last year by The Washington Post said Dougan had worked with Russia's GRU military intelligence service to spread information aimed at undermining former Vice President Kamala Harris' presidential bid last year.

Eleven other Russian nationals were sanctioned for their alleged roles in Kremlin-aligned media platforms, think tanks or a GRU-linked cyber unit accused of attacks on European targets.

The EU also designated Russia's 142nd Separate Electronic Warfare Battalion, which it accused of manipulating GPS signals in several European countries.

The sanctions list further includes the International Russophile Movement, which EU officials said has amplified "destabilizing narratives" globally on the Kremlin's behalf.

Those targeted face asset freezes within the European Union, and EU citizens and companies are barred from conducting business with them.

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