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Finland Seizes Cargo Ship Suspected of Damaging Undersea Cable

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The cargo vessel Fitburg. **Wolfgang Berthel / Marine Traffic**

Finnish police said Wednesday that they had seized a cargo vessel suspected of damaging a telecommunications cable linking Helsinki and Tallinn earlier in the Gulf of Finland.

The Finnish Border Guard identified the ship as the Fitburg, a 132-meter-long cargo vessel sailing under the flag of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The ship was traveling from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Haifa, Israel, when it was intercepted.

Fourteen crew members from Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were detained for questioning, National Police Commissioner Ilkka Koskimaki told reporters.

Russia's embassy in Finland said it was ready to provide assistance to the Russian sailors who were detained.

Finnish police said the Fitburg was suspected of being "responsible for the damage" to a data cable owned by the Finnish telecommunications company Elisa and located within Estonia's

exclusive economic zone.

Elisa said it detected a fault in the cable earlier on Wednesday and notified Finnish authorities, adding that the damage had not disrupted services, which were rerouted.

A Finnish Border Guard patrol vessel and helicopter located the Fitburg in Finland's exclusive economic zone, where its anchor chain was found lowered into the sea, police said. Authorities ordered the vessel to stop, raise its anchor and proceed to Finnish territorial waters, where it was seized.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Western officials and security experts have increasingly viewed suspected cable sabotage in the Baltic Sea as part of a broader campaign of so-called "hybrid warfare" targeting NATO countries.

"Finland is prepared for security challenges of various kinds, and we respond to them as necessary," President Alexander Stubb said in a statement posted to X.

Finnish police said they were investigating the incident as "aggravated criminal damage, attempted aggravated criminal damage and aggravated interference with telecommunications."

Robin Lardot, head of Finland's National Bureau of Investigation, said a technical inspection of the Fitburg was underway and that authorities were in contact with the ship's flag state.

Deputy Prosecutor General Jukka Rappe told Finnish broadcaster Yle that he had ordered a preliminary criminal investigation, while noting that the possibility of an accident had not been ruled out.

Police said they were coordinating with multiple national and international authorities, including officials in Estonia.

On Thursday, Yle, citing customs officials, reported that the Fitburg's cargo contained steel products subject to Western sanctions.

The seizure follows a similar incident on Christmas Day 2024, when the Cook Islands-registered oil tanker Eagle S dragged its anchor across the seabed, damaging five undersea cables in the Gulf of Finland.

In October, a Helsinki district court ruled it lacked jurisdiction to prosecute three senior officers from that vessel, saying the case should be handled by the ship's flag state or the defendants' home countries. Finnish prosecutors have appealed the decision.

AFP contributed reporting.

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