

Europe: Stop the shadow fleet and cut off the revenues to Putin's war machine

Saturday 26 October 2024, by [ANDERSSON John](#), [FRITZON Hélène](#), [KUHNKE Alice](#), [SJÖSTEDT Jonas](#) (Date first published: 19 October 2024).

We can and must do more for Ukraine. One of the most important measures is to cut off the revenues that are financing Russia's illegal war. Not one more drop of oil should be imported from Russia. If the sanctions are to have an effect, the EU must act to stop the Russian shadow fleet that transports oil on rusty ships through the Baltic Sea, writes Jonas Sjöstedt, Alice Kuhnke and Hélène Fritzson.

International support for Ukraine is crucial to ensure that the fight against Russia's illegal invasion is not lost. This includes financial and arms support, but also stopping the revenues that are financing Putin's war. It is vital that the EU does not waver in its support if Ukraine is to resist the Russian aggression.

While the EU supports Ukraine, member states continue to finance Russia by importing oil and gas. For Sweden, this involves Russian fossil gas, LNG, which continues to be imported into Sweden. It is devastating that the government has not acted to put a stop to this. The government is sanctioning Russia with one hand and fuelling Putin's war chest with the other. Not one more ship should be allowed to dock in Swedish ports.

The G7 sanctions against Russia are based on a price cap on Russian oil, but this is being circumvented by shipping via vessels belonging to what is known as the 'Russian shadow fleet'. The shadow fleet consists of outdated, rusty and often uninsured ships with unclear ownership. The oldest vessels are 42 years old. 38 per cent of the vessels are older than 20 years. The state-owned shipping company Sovcomflot owns about a third of the vessels. The rest are owned by unscrupulous fortune seekers looking for quick returns. The shadow fleet's ships are loaded with oil, which is resold at a higher price on the world market.

The Centre for Eastern Studies, OSW, estimates that between 30% and 50% of Russia's crude oil exports pass through the Baltic Sea. We are dealing with huge revenues that goes straight into Putin's war machine. Since 2023, around 2,500 Russian oil tankers have travelled through the Baltic Sea, most of them belonging to the shadow fleet. The trade conducted by using these ships has a direct impact on the war. To cut off the flow of money to Russia, the EU needs to stop these huge tankers from carrying oil off the Swedish coast every day.

The shadow fleet is a way for Russia to circumvent sanctions and not only brings money to Putin's war chest, but also poses a significant danger to the environment. To make it harder to track where the oil comes from, it is sometimes transferred from ship to ship at sea. This is a risky manoeuvre, which can lead to oil spills and leaks. It is only a matter of time before an environmental disaster occurs in the Baltic Sea.

In Sweden, the Left Party, the Social Democrats and the Greens have long pushed for an end to the Russian shadow fleet, and recently the Parliament voted in favour of a proposal that the EU should

now act to stop the ships from transporting oil through the Baltic Sea. Cutting off Russia's access to financing would be a significant setback for its ability to wage its illegal war against Ukraine.

When European Parliament voted in 7-10 October, our three party groups jointly proposed a resolution calling on EU member states to take concrete steps to stop the shadow fleet. But when the resolution was brought to the negotiating table, the party groups of which the Moderates, Sweden Democrats, Christian Democrats, Centre Party and Liberals belonged to opposed it. This is an incomprehensible position, which goes against the interests of Ukraine as well as of Sweden and the rest of the EU. The Left Party, the Social Democrats and the Green Party will not give up on this. At the next session at the end of October, we will propose the same resolution again. Until then, we hope that the right-wing parties in Sweden and other member states will take the issue more seriously.

Sweden and the EU can and must do more to help Ukraine fight against the illegal Russian invasion. For EU member states to support Ukraine on the one hand and buy oil from Russia on the other is like to give with one hand and take away with the other. If we are serious about doing everything in our power to support Ukraine, we need to stop the shadow fleet and get rid of Russian oil.

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P.S.

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