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Answer given by Mr Hoekstra
on behalf of the European Commission
(29.11.2024)

The Commission is aware of the risks mentioned by the Honourable Member. These risks are monitored and assessed by the Member States, supported by the maritime surveillance services hosted in the European Maritime Safety Agency.

The Member States have unanimously agreed to prohibit, since April 2022, vessels flying the Russian flag from accessing EU ports and locks. Since April 2023, vessels certified by the Russian Maritime Register of Shipping are also subject to these restrictions. While there is a possibility for case-by-case derogations, e.g., for ships in need of assistance, these exceptions are granted only after thorough assessment by the competent authorities of the Member States to ensure they remain aligned with sanctions objectives, ensuring highest safety standards both at sea and on land, and protection of the marine environment. Additionally, the EU has a general trade embargo on oil of Russian origin. Consequently, EU ports and infrastructure have minimal exposure from the remaining Russian fleet.

In addition to listing individual ships, a number of actions have been taken to address the risk of the dark fleet. The focus has been on increasing transparency by requesting relevant safety information. Diplomatic efforts complement these initiatives, particularly by engaging with flag States that enable dark fleet operations. The EU is also advocating for stronger international cooperation through the International Maritime Organization.

As announced in the Political Guidelines 2024-2029 of the President of the Commission, security as well as competitiveness and safety are the main aspects that the future EU Ports Strategy will examine. The Commission is currently at the early stages of preparing this initiative.