

ESPO requests consistent application of EU port ban on Russian vessels

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The European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) has asked for consistent and transparent application of the recently imposed EU port ban on Russian-flagged vessels. The ban was adopted on April 8th as part of the fifth round of EU sanctions on Russia, but, due to the multi-lingual nature of all EU publications, the convolution of the language and the pari-passu ranking of all languages, the implementation of the ban suffers from a danger of inconsistent implementation.

While the sanction package refers to a ban on Russian-flagged vessels from EU ports, there were a number of exceptions. These included ships carrying agricultural and food products, humanitarian aid, and energy – the last category of which made up by far the largest part of Russian exports by ship to EU ports.

The sanctions measures also exempt all Russian-owned, -financed or -managed vessels that are flagged outside of Russia.

While ESPO endorsed the new sanctions and condemned Russia's action in Ukraine, it called on European leaders to ensure a uniform application of the sanctions across the bloc. It said that this would keep implementation harmonized and would maintain a level playing field among competing ports. It would also prevent "port shopping" by Russian ships.

The British Ports Association (BPA) has called for a formal government list of all vessels affected by sanctions.

ESPO also called for the European Maritime Safety Agency to draft a uniform list of banned Russian ships. ESPO said that this would eliminate any guesswork when it came to enforcement and would ensure that all ports were banning all the same ships. ESPO also said that any such list should take into account any vessels that de-Russified themselves post-February 24th.

ESPO also called on the EU authorities and national governments to assign enough staff and resources to the task of enforcement.

“The ban on Russian vessels from EU ports as well as the import and export bans on different categories of goods implies a lot of additional checks to be done in ports to control and determine which vessels and cargo are covered by the ban and which ones are to be exempted,” said ESPO. “Blocked cargo and ships could create additional congestion in ports and in terminals in ports, which are already facing the consequences of a saturated supply chain.”