Kremlin suspected of flying drones over Europe using Russian shadow fleet

On September 28, 2025, French naval commandos made additional discoveries after boarding the *Boracay* off the French coast—possibly because of the ship's suspected link to the drone incidents over Denmark. The French commandos found that the ship had a Chinese captain but also happened to be carrying two Russians employed by the Moran Security Group, a Russian private military company founded by former Federal Security Service officers. One of the Russians also previously worked for Russia's Wagner Group private military company.

Interviews revealed that the Russians were charged with "gathering intelligence, protecting the vessel and ensuring the captain strictly adhered to Russian interests." That provided "direct evidence of a shadow-fleet vessel linked to Russian intelligence structures," according to the IISS report.

On March 30, 2026, a French court sentenced the Chinese captain in absentia to one year in prison and issued an arrest warrant after convicting him of failing to comply with orders to stop his ship. The court also ordered the captain to pay a $172,000 fine.

The European response

The full report goes into much more detail about the movements of individual shadow fleet vessels during various drone incidents. But the overall picture of the possible Russian

drone campaign suggests that the European response has been fragmented and uncoordinated for the most part so far.

The European Union is working to develop a European Drone Defence Initiative (EDDI) that would enable member countries to deploy interoperable counter-drone technologies for detecting, tracking, and shooting down or otherwise neutralizing drones. But the system is not expected to be fully functional until the end of 2027.

The IISS report also warns that “no amount of hardware will compensate for the absence of political authority to use it,” and suggests that European governments need to better coordinate to establish legal clarity around rules of engagement for drone incursions.

Then there is the “hardest” problem of maritime accountability, according to the IISS report. That will require European governments to be more willing to investigate and stop Russian-linked ships and shadow fleet vessels from loitering near European coasts while launching drones with “effective impunity.”

https://arstechnica.com/gadgets/2026/07/kremlin-suspected-of-flying-drones-over-europe-using-russian-shadow-fleet/