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PRESS RELEASE

Chinese business will use the Russian Northern Sea Route to ship cargo to Europe. Bellona warns EU politicians about the climate and security risks

For immediate release

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Environmentalists from the Bellona Foundation have sent an open letter to EU politicians warning of plans of a Chinese-controlled company for a transit voyage via the Northern Sea Route (NSR) from China to Europe, specifically the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Gdansk. This could set a precedent for greater use of the route for transit, in accordance with the strategic plans of Russian authorities. The Russian infrastructural operator of the Northern Sea Route – the state nuclear corporation Rosatom – is a direct participant in the war in Ukraine.

Bellona strongly discourages the use of the Northern Sea Route and cooperation with entities that wish to do so for four reasons:

- **It is harmful to the climate, and creates an unacceptable risk of pollution to the Arctic environment.**
- **The route is unsafe for ships and crews operating in the area.**
- **Russia could potentially use Chinese vessels to advance its hybrid war against Europe.**
- **All activity along the NSR gives Russian authorities more opportunities to finance their war efforts in Ukraine and hybrid operations against the EU-infrastructure.**

*Using the Northern Sea Route harms the global climate. Soot emissions from shipping in Arctic waters accelerate ice melt and add to the global impact of CO_2 emissions. It also helps Russia to expand its extractive industries in the Arctic and receive export income fueling the war in Ukraine – **Ksenia Vakhrusheva, Arctic advisor, Bellona Environmental Transparency Center***

*The Northern Sea Route is unsafe for the commercial fleet because of increasingly unpredictable ice conditions due to floating ice, more extreme weather, changes in currents and wave patterns, and poorly updated nautical charts – **Ekaterina Blokova, Arctic advisor, Bellona Environmental Transparency Center***

But this is not only about the Arctic — these actions directly affect European ports and security.

Bellona Europa is an international, independent and non-profit organisation that meets environmental and climate challenges head on. We are solutions-oriented and have a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to assess the economics, climate impacts and technical feasibility of necessary climate actions. To do this, we work with civil society, academia, governments, institutions, and industries.

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The first voyage of the vessels is planned to start on September 20th, 2025. According to the Singapore's Sea Legend Shipping company, controlled by Chinese investors, all cargo space is already sold out.

Context:

In Russian strategic documents, the Arctic seas, the Northern Sea Route, and the continental shelf are referred to as key national priorities, critically important for the country's economy, meaning export income from extractive industries, mainly oil and gas, and security, meaning political and military dominance in the region.

Under these conditions, environmental and climate concerns receive scant attention, sharply increasing the risk of accidents with serious environmental consequences and inadequate or delayed response efforts. The lack of transparency regarding negative environmental impacts and the emergence of a shadow fleet of oil tankers are clear indicators of this problem.

More on Russia's industrial and political expansion in the Arctic, it's environmental costs and risks of the shipping along the Northern Sea Route is in Bellona's recent report "The Northern Sea Route".

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About us:

The Bellona Environmental Transparency Center, based in Vilnius, is an investigative group within the Bellona Foundation that operates as an independent non-profit solution-oriented environmental NGO. Our team monitors and analyses Russia's environmental impact within and across borders with a special focus on nuclear and radiation safety and security, climate change, and industrial pollution in the Russian Arctic. Our website: etc.bellona.org

On 18 April 2023 the Russian general prosecutor's office declared Bellona to be an undesirable organisation.

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