

H.E. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels, Belgium

18 March 2026

Dear Madam President,

As MED5 Heads of States and Government, we are writing to bring to your attention an escalating maritime and environmental threat in the Mediterranean involving the Russian LNG carrier Arctic Metagaz (IMO: 9243148, previous name: Metagas Everest), that reportedly suffered explosions and a fire stemming from an unidentified and unattributed incident.

Currently located in international waters and drifting in international waters in the vicinity of Malta and Italy, the vessel presents the Union with a dual challenge: the management of an ongoing maritime safety and environmental risk, alongside the operational constraints arising from the interaction between the EU sanctions regime, which provides for exemptions in situations involving maritime safety and environmental protection, and restrictive measures imposed by other jurisdictions that may not provide for comparable exemptions.

We are closely monitoring the increasing frequency of attacks on vessels in both the Mediterranean and Black Sea, regardless of their operational status or their position under EU restrictive measures. Irrespective of the specific origin of these events, such incidents pose immediate risks to maritime safety and the marine environment. Investigation and accountability in accordance with international law are essential.

Given the scale and immediacy of the risk, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) will be key in ensuring a coordinated Union-level response as an essential framework for mobilising collective EU capabilities in support of maritime safety and environmental protection.

The precarious condition of the vessel, combined with the nature of its specialised cargo, gives rise to an imminent and serious risk of a major ecological disaster in the heart of the Union's maritime space. In this context, we look to the European Commission to facilitate the mobilisation and coordination of Member States and existing EU-level mechanisms, with the goal of ensuring their more efficient, better coordinated and faster response, including through the operational engagement of the relevant EU agencies, notably the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). Such engagement should provide specialised support, including enhanced maritime surveillance, pollution monitoring capabilities, and technical expertise aimed at preventing or mitigating environmental damage, as well as effective information sharing to ensure shared situational awareness.

Beyond the immediate maritime safety and environmental dimensions, this situation raises serious concerns from a sanctions' enforcement perspective. The case of the Arctic Metagaz, a documented component of the Russian "shadow fleet", illustrates how such vessels, through the circumvention of EU restrictive measures and international standards, and the broader impact of incidents affecting maritime traffic in the region pose serious risks to maritime safety, environmental protection, and maritime traffic in the Mediterranean and beyond. Allowing such practices to persist not only exposes the Union to serious ecological harm, but also risks undermining the integrity, effectiveness and deterrent value of the EU sanctions regime, underscoring the need for determined and coordinated action at Union level.

These cases and the associated risks they are posing to our waters, the affected Member States, the life of seafarers and the freedom of navigation, highlight the need for swift, coordinated, and visible Union-level European response as a matter of utmost priority. In this respect, we intend to raise these issues at the European Council meeting this week and are prepared to cooperate with the Commission to ensure a swift, European-led resolution, as well as in the relevant Council formations and we stand ready to engage without delay to ensure the safety and security of the Mediterranean.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Abela
Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta

Giorgia Meloni
President of the Council of Ministers of
the Italian Republic

Pedro Sánchez
President of the Government of Spain

Kyriakos Mitsotakis
Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic

Nikos Christodoulides
President of the Republic of Cyprus

Copy: H.E. António Costa, President of the European Council