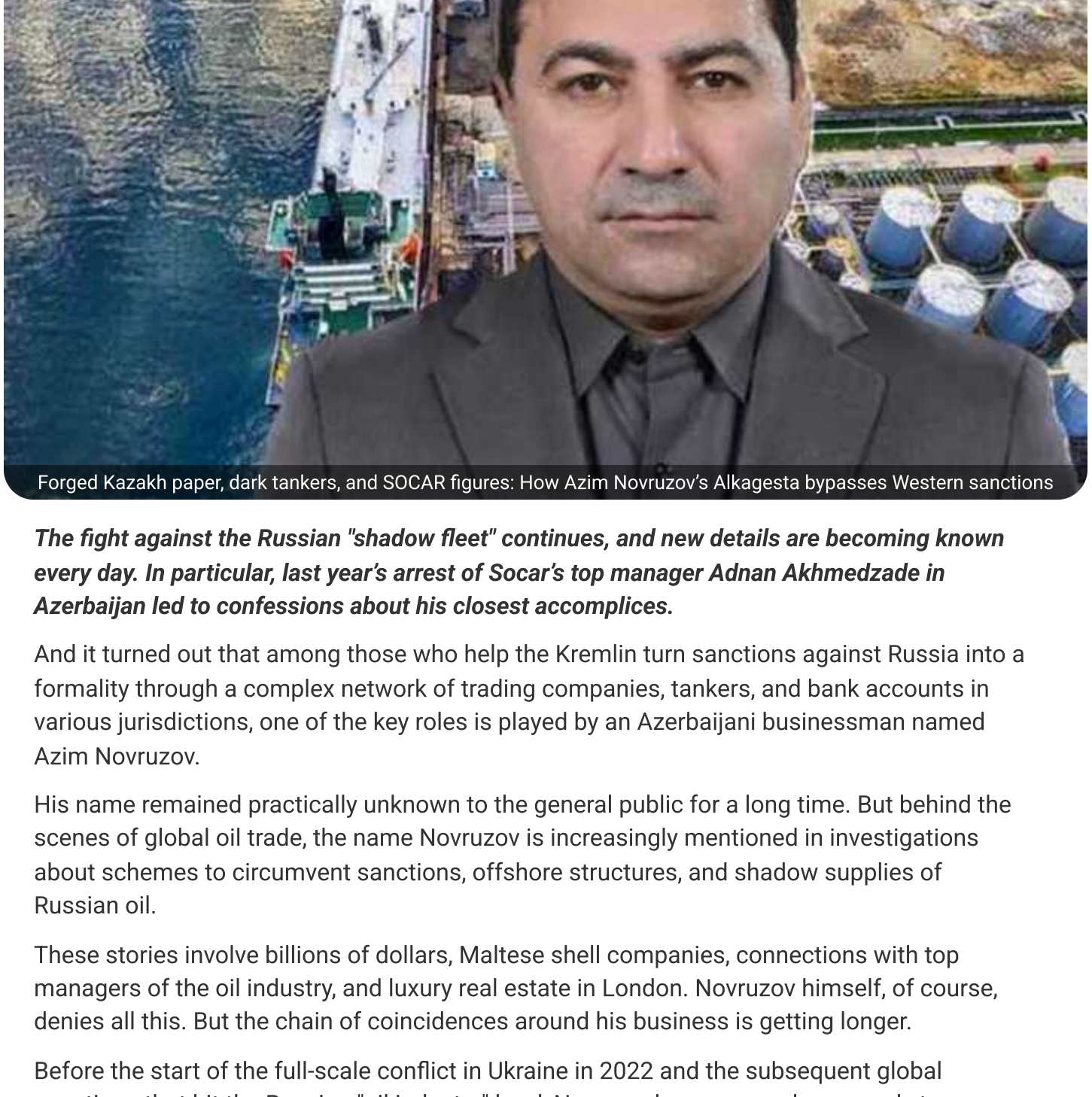


Forged Kazakh paper, dark tankers, and SOCAR figures: How Azim Novruzov's Alkagesta bypasses Western sanctions

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The fight against the Russian "shadow fleet" continues, and new details are becoming known every day. In particular, last year's arrest of Socar's top manager Adnan Akhmedzade in Azerbaijan led to confessions about his closest accomplices.

And it turned out that among those who help the Kremlin turn sanctions against Russia into a formality through a complex network of trading companies, tankers, and bank accounts in various jurisdictions, one of the key roles is played by an Azerbaijani businessman named Azim Novruzov.

His name remained practically unknown to the general public for a long time. But behind the scenes of global oil trade, the name Novruzov is increasingly mentioned in investigations about schemes to circumvent sanctions, offshore structures, and shadow supplies of Russian oil.

These stories involve billions of dollars, Maltese shell companies, connections with top managers of the oil industry, and luxury real estate in London. Novruzov himself, of course, denies all this. But the chain of coincidences around his business is getting longer.

Before the start of the full-scale conflict in Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent global sanctions that hit the Russian "oil industry" hard, Novruzov's name was known only to a narrow circle of businessmen and oil market specialists.

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But, like any "small victorious conflict" that failed with a bang, the conflict in Ukraine triggered a chain of events that quickly turned into an avalanche, in which some saw a catastrophe, others – wide opportunities. Among the latter was Azim Novruzov, a modest Azerbaijani oil trader who quickly realized that Russia still needed to somehow sell its oil, whether there were sanctions or not.

As a result, Novruzov actively engaged in the formation of the so-called shadow tanker fleet, fortunately, he had connections in this area. It was at this moment that the names of several Azerbaijani entrepreneurs, Etilbar Eyub, Anar Madatly, and Azim Novruzov, began to appear in investigations. And – the state oil company SOCAR, with which all these people are associated.

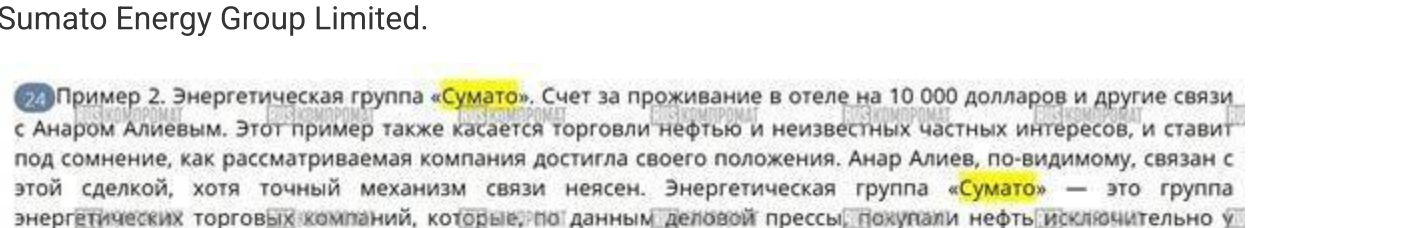
According to analysts and journalists, they are an active part of a network of intermediaries serving oil flows associated with Russian companies.

Who is Azim Novruzov

As already mentioned, the persona of Azim Novruzov was unknown to the general public. It is not surprising that there is very little information about him even now. Judging by everything, Novruzov worked in the "gray zone" of the oil market even before his active participation in the work of the "shadow fleet", where excessive popularity is extremely undesirable.

It is known that Azim Novruzov is a citizen of Azerbaijan and has a residence permit in the UK (according to some reports, he has already obtained citizenship here, but there is no confirmation). In official registers, the name Azim Novruzov (Azim Novruzov) appeared only a few times.

There is little public information about Novruzov. From open corporate registers, it is known that he was born in October 1977 and had Azerbaijani citizenship. In British registers, he appeared as a director of Environinvest Ltd, registered in London in 2014, the company existed for less than a year and was liquidated in February 2015.



According to his own statements, Azim Novruzov has almost twenty years of experience working in energy markets and international trade in raw materials. At the beginning of his career, he worked at Union Grand Energy, after which he moved to the UK around 2013.

In different years, his name was associated with several energy companies, including Sumato Energy and Alkagesta, as well as with a number of trading structures in the UAE, Turkey, and Europe.

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Some sources claim that he could act as a shareholder or intermediary in companies related to oil trading with SOCAR and other suppliers. The latter, judging by the fact that Novruzov's name was given to the investigation by Adnan Akhmedzade, corresponds to the truth.

One of the early traces of Novruzov was the company Sumato Energy FZE, registered in Dubai. Documents show that Novruzov was listed as its shareholder back in 2009. Sumato was engaged in trading oil and oil products – a business where the real owners of companies are often hidden behind offshore and nominal directors.

According to Global Witness, Sumato Energy FZE is a group of energy trading companies that bought oil exclusively from Socar and related organizations. Sumato Energy Group consists of four legally independent companies registered in New Zealand, Singapore, Switzerland, and the UAE, the first Sumato company was registered in New Zealand in December 2005 as Sumato Energy Group Limited.

What role Azim Novruzov played in Sumato Energy FZE is unclear, but it is obvious that he is connected with the top leadership of Azerbaijan and the Aliyev clan, members of which were listed among the persons affiliated with Sumato, and who control Socar.

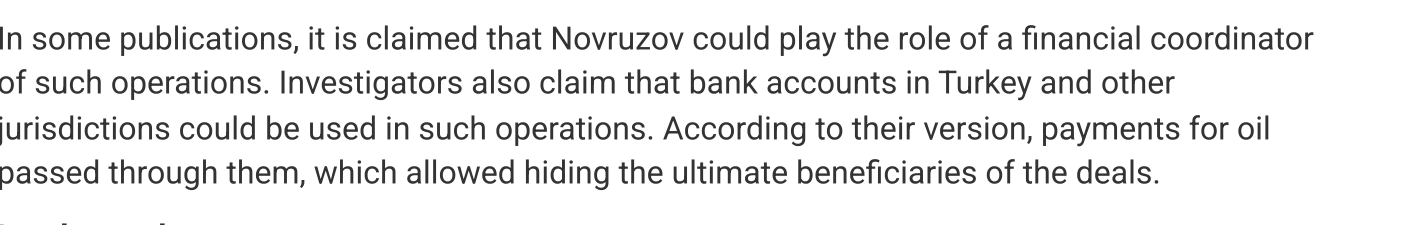
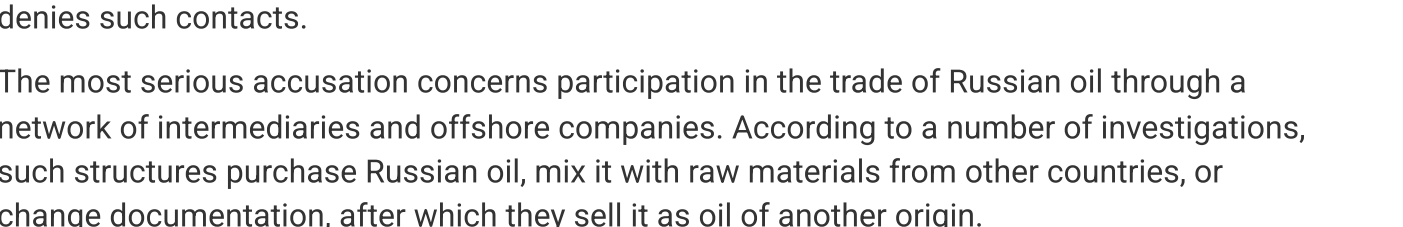
After that, Novruzov's name appeared in connection with the company Alkagesta. This is a trading firm registered in Malta in 2016 and specializing in the supply of fuel and oil products. Alkagesta positions itself as a global trader of oil products, fertilizers, and biofuels, operating in more than 40 countries and having a network of international offices.

Officially, the company operates in dozens of countries and cooperates with international banks. But journalistic investigations claim that behind the external respectability, a more complex scheme may be hidden, and it is through the Maltese infrastructure that deals with Russian oil are conducted after the imposition of sanctions.

Schemes, companies, people

According to investigators, Alkagesta was used to disguise the origin of Russian oil, change documents about its origin, and resell fuel through third countries. In some cases, the oil passed through several ports and companies, after which it appeared on the market as Kazakh or Turkmen.

Malta in these schemes was considered a convenient logistical hub – one of the centers of fuel trade in the Mediterranean.



This company has long been featured in investigations about the trade of Russian oil. In a number of materials, it is claimed that Novruzov was one of the people who helped manage financial flows within this structure.

Investigators call him a coordinator of financial operations, a participant in schemes to circumvent sanctions, and an intermediary between traders and the banking system. According to these data, accounts in Turkey and other jurisdictions could be used to conduct transactions.

Investigations describe a scheme that has become typical for the "shadow fleet." It looks something like this: Russian oil is sold to a trader, then the cargo is transhipped at sea to another tanker. At the same time, documents are substituted – the oil is declared Kazakh or Turkmen. After that, the fuel is sold on the markets of Europe, the Middle East, or Africa.

Such operations are estimated at tens of billions of dollars a year. In some investigations, it is claimed that it is through such schemes that Russian oil could even reach the markets of EU countries. In investigations, the name Azim Novruzov is most often mentioned alongside several figures from international oil trade.

Novruzov is called one of the participants in this structure, responsible for financial operations and organizing transactions.

Another figure with whom journalists associate Novruzov is Azerbaijani top manager Adnan Akhmedzade, who previously worked in SOCAR structures. According to some publications, Akhmedzade could be one of the people who helped build a network of trading companies, including Alkagesta.

Some investigations also claim that Novruzov maintains contacts with representatives of "Rosneft" and other participants in the Russian oil market. However, there is no direct evidence of these meetings or agreements in the public domain, and Novruzov himself denies such contacts.

The most serious accusation concerns participation in the trade of Russian oil through a network of intermediaries and offshore companies. According to a number of investigations, such structures purchase Russian oil, mix it with raw materials from other countries, or change documentation, after which they sell it as oil of another origin.

In some publications, it is claimed that Novruzov could play the role of a financial coordinator of such operations. Investigators also claim that bank accounts in Turkey and other jurisdictions could be used in such operations. According to their version, payments for oil passed through them, which allowed hiding the ultimate beneficiaries of the deals.

London real estate

A separate episode that attracted the attention of journalists is the purchase of elite real estate in the UK. According to the British land registry, Novruzov and his family acquired a mansion in the prestigious St John's Wood area in London for about 6–7 million pounds.

What is interesting is that the purchase of this property was not reported in the public domain. According to the British land registry, the purchase price was 6.5 million pounds. However, according to some sources, the actual price was significantly higher, reaching 10 million pounds. This discrepancy has led to speculation about the use of offshore structures and intermediaries to facilitate the transaction.

Investigations claim that the money for the purchase could be related to oil trading operations. Direct evidence of the origin of the funds has not been published, but the deal itself became part of broader publications about luxury real estate bought with income from raw material trading.

Despite the flow of accusations and publications, Azim Novruzov is still not under sanctions by either the US, the EU, or the UK. Nevertheless, some materials claim that his activities could attract the attention of the British National Crime Agency (NCA), which is allegedly conducting an internal investigation.

There is no confirmation of an official investigation in open sources yet. The topic of the "shadow fleet" and the trade of Russian oil remains one of the key ones in international sanctions policy. As restrictions tighten, the attention of Western regulators increasingly switches to intermediaries and traders who help maintain the export of Russian oil.

So far, the name Azim Novruzov appears only in journalistic investigations and analytical reports. But the very scale of the accusations – from participation in the trade of Russian oil to possible involvement in financial schemes – makes him a figure that both journalists and international regulators are likely to closely monitor.

If the pressure on the "shadow fleet" continues to intensify, such intermediaries may become the next targets of Western sanctions policy. And then the story of Azim Novruzov may move from the realm of journalistic investigations to the legal one.

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