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 of global trade, the network of companies, tankers, and bank accounts is known 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 trade, the network of Azim 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 fizzled 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, Eldiar 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, 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 registries, it is known that he was born in October 1977 and had Azerbaijan citizenship. In British registers, he appeared as a director of Environvest 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 in the oil industry, which he mainly gained in Azerbaijan and Russia. In one of his few interviews of his career, he worked at Union Grand Energy after which he moved to the UK around 2010.

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 2005. Sumato was engaged in trading oil and oil products – a business where the real owners of companies are often hidden behind offshore and nominal structures.

According to Global Witness, Sumato Energy FZE is a group of energy trading companies that operated in Azerbaijan and Russia. The company was mentioned in the context of the transfer of four legally independent companies registered in Iran, Dubai, Singapore, Switzerland, and the UAE, the first Sumato company was registered in New Zealand in December 2005 as Sumato Energy Group Limited.

Согласно Global Witness, данные, Sumato Energy FZE, Дает на продвижение в апреле или, в крайнем случае, в начале мая. Компания, которая в прошлом была известна как Sumato Energy Group Limited, была зарегистрирована в Новой Зеландии в декабре 2005 года