

Norway against Russian hybrid activities

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At a press conference held on 25 October, the Norwegian Police Security Service (*Politiets sikkerhetstjeneste*, PST) announced that it had taken over an investigation into the activity of unidentified unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in the vicinity of the country's critical energy infrastructure facilities (drilling rigs, refineries, gas plants and ports). The deputy director of PST said it is still unclear why so many UAVs have been observed or who is sending them. Earlier, between 21 and 25 October, law enforcement *officers* detained seven Russian nationals who were attempting to cross the Norwegian-Russian border at the Storskog crossing in the north of the country. They were transporting UAVs and memory cards with a large number of recordings of facilities related to the extraction, transmission and processing of oil and gas in Norway. In addition, PST arrested a Brazilian national suspected of spying for the Russian Federation.

Oslo takes UAV activity near national critical infrastructure seriously. Already on 26 September, the Petroleum Safety Authority Norway (*Petroleumstilsynet*) issued a warning and called for increased vigilance in connection with the UAV sightings, and the police opened an investigation into the matter. Following the acts of sabotage on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, Norway has deployed its Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard to patrol the continental shelf region and the Home Guard (*Heimevernet*) to secure critical energy infrastructure on land.

Commentary

- The Norwegian service's actions indicate that Moscow is behind the suspicious activity around the country's energy infrastructure. It is most likely they using UAVs to apply even stronger pressure on the West by creating a sense of permanent threat and generating escalation potential in the energy sector during rising energy prices. This year, Norway became the third largest exporter of oil to the EU (after Russia and the US, with about 9% of the market), and is the second largest seller of gas to this market (after Russia, with about 24%). Next year, Oslo will maintain gas production at a level similar to the current one and plans to increase oil production by 15%.
- Long-term observation of individual facilities can lead to the reconnaissance of their protection systems and thus enable possible sabotage to be planned and executed. In this way, Russia has forced the Norwegian authorities to undertake moves involving considerable human and material resources to increase the security of the energy infrastructure, with a small outlay in terms of personnel and money.

- Recent detentions indicate extensive Russian agent activity in Norway. One Russian detained at the border was carrying three passports (two Russian and one Israeli). The border guards reported that the man had entered the country using each of the documents over the past six months, but had not used any of them when he left the country. The Brazilian national arrested on suspicion of espionage, on the other hand, was working as a researcher at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø in the north of the country.
- Following the acts of sabotage on the Nord Stream pipelines, further incidents are being reported indicating that Russia is taking steps that could lead to a breach in the security of energy infrastructure not only in Norway. Individual UAVs have also started to be observed in Denmark and Finland. The UK, Germany and France have joined in militarily in deterring and signalling allied support for Oslo. Frigates and patrol aircraft from these countries are involved in monitoring the Norwegian continental shelf in the North Sea.