

# Russia fails in bid to return to IMO top table

Country comes last in vote for executive body for second time in two years



IMO Assembly members vote on council seats on Friday. Photo: IMO

**Paul Peachey**

TradeWinds correspondent London



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Russia has failed in its bid for an immediate return to a key decision-making body at the International Maritime Organization after being booted off two years ago following its invasion of Ukraine.

Russia came last in a secret ballot that pitted 11 countries for the 10 seats earmarked for major shipping nations on the IMO's executive body, the council, for the next two years.

The successful countries all secured more than 140 votes from member states in a vote at the London headquarters of the regulator on Friday. Russia received 87 votes.



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Ukraine had pleaded with IMO members to reject Moscow’s candidacy, saying its armed aggression was a “flagrant violation of the law of the sea”.

Since the February 2022 invasion, Ukraine said, hundreds of Russian attacks on port facilities had damaged more than 38 ships and killed or injured 118 civilians.

It also highlighted the expansion of the shadow fleet that it said was an attempt to abuse “universally recognised standards of maritime safety and pollution prevention in pursuit of its malicious political objectives”.

Russia urged member states to ignore Ukraine’s appeal, accusing the country of a “manipulation” of the facts and citing its own attacks on Russian shipping.

Russia said it was the victim of a politically motivated campaign that had “nothing in common with the principles and goals” laid down in IMO rules.

But members voted overwhelmingly to keep Liberia in place, after the major flag state and sole African representative on the ballot replaced Russia on the council two years ago.

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The vote involved the same countries as the 2023 vote, with China, Greece, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Norway, Panama, South Korea, the UK and US all retaining their places on the council.

Until the 2023 vote, Russia had been one of nine countries with an unbroken membership of the council since 1960, along with India, Japan, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, the UK and US.

The council supervises the work of the IMO and monitors its work programme and budget.

The UK “successfully campaigned to keep Russia off the council by working closely with international partners and lobbying other assembly members,” according to a statement from the UK Department for Transport.

Kier Mather, UK minister for aviation, maritime and decarbonisation, said: “The UK is a proud maritime nation, and I’m delighted we’ve been re-elected to the Council of the International Maritime Organization - a strong vote of confidence in our leadership on safety, security, and sustainability in global shipping.

“At home, we’re backing that ambition with £448 million to clean up UK shipping whilst creating skilled jobs and boosting growth in coastal economies.”

This council will also elect the secretary general when Arsenio Dominguez completes his first four-year term of office at the end of 2027.

Dominguez, who has faced criticism from Moscow for what it sees as increased politicisation of the organisation, could stand for a second term.

When Russia announced it was standing for the council, it repeated claims that the IMO had been put under external pressure and “begun to deviate from its equidistant and impartial role in international affairs”.

A further round of votes later on Friday will decide a further 30 places involving countries eligible because of their interests in international seaborne trade or to ensure a geographical spread of members. Russia is not part of those votes.



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The council election caps a turbulent year for the IMO after its landmark Net-Zero Framework was delayed for at least a year in the face of fierce opposition led by the US and Saudi Arabia.

Delaying the policy became a personal goal of US President Donald Trump.

The vote that led to a one-year delay was a serious blow for supporters of the IMO carbon levy plan to raise billions for green investments and turn the industry net zero in or around 2050.