

Gun Boat Free On Promise To Skip Syria

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The  **Moscow Times**

NICOSIA, Cyprus — A reportedly Russian-owned ship suspected of carrying ammunition to Syria will be allowed to leave Cyprus after giving assurances it will change its destination, authorities said Wednesday.

Media reports said the cargo ship, which had left St. Petersburg on Dec. 9, was carrying up to 60 tons of ammunition and was heading to the Syrian port city of Latakia. It docked off Cyprus on Tuesday amid rough seas.

"It has been decided that the vessel will be released after the ship decided to change its destination and will not go to Syria," government spokesman Stefanos Stefanou told state radio.

He declined to comment on the cargo, specify the reasons for the ship switching course or name its new destination.

The Foreign Ministry said the ship carried a "dangerous" cargo and had been going to Syria and Turkey.

"It was established that there was no violation of the relevant EU restrictions on Syria," it said in a statement, referring to EU sanctions on Syria.

The Politis daily reported that the vessel, named by authorities as the M/V Chariot flying the St. Vincent and Grenadines flag, was carrying ammunition of various calibers and that the recipient was the Syrian Defense Ministry.

Another newspaper, Simerini, said initial reports suggested that the vessel was carrying 35 tons of explosives, weapons and munitions.

In 2009, Cyprus confiscated munitions from a ship sailing to Syria from Iran for violating U.N. sanctions.

Several Russian warships called at the Syrian port of Tartus on Sunday in what most observers called a show of Moscow's support for Damascus.

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