

Iranians Blocked at Astrakhan Port

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia is taking legal action to block companies controlled by Iran from acquiring the strategic Astrakhan port on the Caspian Sea in violation of United Nations sanctions, the Russian competition watchdog chief said.

"We know that these companies, through a certain chain, are under the direct control of the government or structures close to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Igor Artemyev, head of the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service, told reporters Tuesday. "Ports are strategic assets."

After the Russian government blocked a deal two years ago, the Iranian-controlled companies bought a significant stake in the port from its Russian owners and now control at least 25 percent, Artemyev said. Russia is working on annulling the deal, which contravenes United Nations sanctions against Iran imposed over its disputed nuclear program, he said.

Five nations share the Caspian: Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The five littoral states have failed to agree on the maritime boundaries of the Caspian Sea

after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union in 1991.

"The Iranians have provoked Russian anger with their actions here," Alexei Malashenko, a Middle East analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center, said by phone. "Relations are already difficult."

A Russian court has already banned Astrakhan Port from paying dividends and conducting share transactions, the service said in a statement. According to the court decision, the companies affected are Khazar Sea Shipping Lines, South Way Shipping Agency and Azores Shipping. The companies, whose contact details were publicly unavailable, couldn't be reached for comment.

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