

Naval Blockade of Crimea to Start 'Shortly' – Crimean Tatar Leaders

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A naval blockade of the Kerch Strait, separating Russia-annexed Crimea from the Krasnodar region in the Russian mainland, could begin “at the end of 2015 or the beginning of 2016,” according to Lenur Islyamov, one of the leaders of the Mejlis, the Crimean Tatar representative body, the Lenta.ru website wrote Wednesday quoting an interview given by Islyamov to the 112 Ukraine TV channel.

“I can't give any details, but I would like to say that we have been preparing for [launching the blockade] using all the strength and resources we have. The soonest possible date is the end of 2015, or early 2016,” he was quoted as saying.

According to Lenta.ru, Islyamov had mentioned the possibility of launching a naval blockade repeatedly since the start of December.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry published on Wednesday a statement accusing Russia of “large-scale appropriation of property and natural resources” in the Black Sea region, referring to two oil rigs worth \$353.7 million stationed off the Ukrainian coast near Odessa being towed into Russian territorial waters.

The accusations came amid uncertainty over the fate of the Chernomorneftegaz oil and gas drilling company, an affiliate of Ukraine's oil giant Naftogaz seized by the Crimean regional parliament following the peninsula's annexation by Russia in March 2014.

Ukraine declared that it would call on international courts to order the seizure of Chernomorneftegaz assets, to which Russia allegedly responded by dispatching its navy to help tow away the platforms, the Meduza.io news site reported Wednesday.

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