Who owned the chemicals that blew up Beirut? No one will say

Shipping records show the ship loaded ammonium nitrate in Georgia in September 2013

The Rhosus arrived in Beirut in November but never left

The empty ship eventually sank where it was moored in 2018

The cargo, packaged in large white sacks, was worth around \$700,000 at 2013 prices,

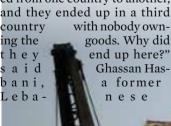
Reuters | Moscow/Dubai/London

claim it.

There are many unanswered week's huge, deadly blast in the its voyage as a series of unfortu-Lebanese capital, but ownership nate events. should be among the easiest to

Clear identification of ownership, especially of a cargo as and was meant to deliver it to dangerous as that carried by the an explosives maker in Mozam-Moldovan-flagged Rhosus when bique. But before leaving the it sailed into Beirut seven years ago, is fundamental to shipping, two crew members say they the key to insuring it and settling disputes that often arise.

But interviews and trawls for documents across 10 coun- Grechushkin, to make an untries in search of the original ownership of this 2,750-tonne take on extra cargo. consignment instead revealed umentation, secrecy and a web span the globe.





Men walks near site of blast in Beirut's port area

position figure.

Those linked to the shipment and interviewed by Reuters all denied knowledge of the cargo's original owner or declined to n the murky story of how answer the question. Those who a cache of highly explosive said they didn't know included ammonium nitrate ended the ship's captain, the Georgian up on the Beirut waterfront, fertilizer maker who produced one thing is clear — no one has the cargo and the African firm ever publicly come forward to that ordered it but said it never paid for it.

The official version of the questions surrounding last Rhosus' final journey depicts

Shipping records show the ship loaded ammonium nitrate in Georgia in September 2013 Mediterranean, the captain and were instructed by the Russian businessman they regarded as the ship's de facto owner, Igor scheduled stop in Beirut and

The Rhosus arrived in Beirut an intricate tale of missing doc- in November but never left, beof small, obscure companies that over unpaid port fees and ship the matter. defects. Creditors accused the goods. Why did dockside warehouse, according for its authenticity. to official accounts.

was unable to contact Grechush-

The empty ship eventually sank where it was moored in 2018, according to Lebanese customs

The Rhosus' final movements sands and leaving 250,000 people homeless.

Among the still-unanswered monium nitrate and did they when the Rhosus was impounded? And if not, why not?

Uninsured

laws, commercial vessels must such as environmental damage, loss of life or injury caused by a coming tangled in a legal dispute ing to two sources familiar with house, with a locked and barred

"Goods were being transport-ship's legal owner, listed as a Boris Prokoshev, said by phone to knocks on the door. ed from one country to another, Panama-based firm, of aban-from his home in Sochi, Russia, and they ended up in a third doning the vessel and the cargo that he had seen an insurance with nobody own- was later unloaded and put in a certificate but could not vouch

because it had agreed to only pay on delivery, according to its

fertilizer maker Rustavi Azot about the cargo. A Cypriot police LLC, which has since been dis-spokesman said an individual, solved. Its owner at the time, whom he did not name, had been are under fresh scrutiny after businessman Roman Pipia, told questioned at the request of Inthe ammonium nitrate caught Reuters he had lost control of fire inside the warehouse and the Rustavi ammonium nitrate exploded last week, killing at plant in 2016. UK court docu- in November 2013 with a leak least 158 people, injuring thou- ments show that the firm was and in generally poor condition, forced by a creditor to auction off its assets that year.

The factory is now run by an-lems. questions: who paid for the amother firm, JSC Rustavi Azot, which also said it could not shed ever seek to reclaim the cargo light on the cargo owner, according to the plant's current first deputy director, Levan Burdiladze.

FEM said it had ordered the Under international maritime shipment through a trading conventions and some domestic firm, Savaro Ltd, which has registered companies in London have insurance to cover events and Ukraine but whose website is now offline.

A visit to Savaro Ltd's listsinking, spill or collision. Yet the ed London address on Mon-Rhosus was uninsured, accord- day found a Victorian terraced door, near the fashionable bars The ship's Russian captain, of Shoreditch. No one responded

The Russian

As grief and anger over the blast turn to civil unrest in

deputy prime minister and op- Associates, did not respond to um nitrate, Fábrica de Explo- ready turned its sights back to requests to identify the cargo's sivos Moçambique (FEM), was the Rhosus and Grechushkin, to port officials in Seville. He original legal owner. Reuters not the cargo owner at the time the man the crew considered as

A security source said Grespokesman, Antonio Cunha Vaz. chushkin was questioned at his The producer was Georgian home in Cyprus last Thursday terpol Beirut.

captain Prokoshev said. It had already been beset with prob-

In July 2013, four months



the inner workings of Savaro's trading business said it sold fertilizer from ex-Soviet **Union states to clients** in Africa. Ukrainebased businessman Vladimir Verbonol is listed as director of Savaro in Ukraine, according to Ukrainian corporate data base **You Control**

before docking in Beirut, the ship was detained for 13 days by port authorities in Seville, Spain, after multiple deficiencies including malfunctioning doors, corrosion on the deck area and deficient auxiliary engines were found, according to shipping data. It resumed sailing after inspection firm Maritime Lloyd issued a cargo ship safety construction certificate, which would have involved a survey of the ship, the data showed.

Teimuraz Kavtaradze, an inspector at Georgia-based Maritime Lloyd, which does not rank among the most prominent and widely-used inspection firms, said he could not confirm whether or not the firm had provided any inspection documents said he was working for Maritime Lloyd in 2013 but that other staff and the management had since changed.

Paris MoU, a body of 27 maritime states under whose authority the detention was carried out, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Moldova, where the Rhosus The Rhosus arrived in Beirut is registered, lists the owner of the ship as Panama-based Briarwood Corp, a certificate of ownership seen by Reuters shows. Reuters was not immediately able to identify Briarwood Corp as a Panamanian registered company. Panama's maritime authorities did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The ship's charterer, Teto Shipping Ltd, is based in the Marshall Islands and was dissolved in 2014, according to International Registries, which says it provides shipping registry services to the Marshall Islands.

The captain passed an email address that they had been using for Teto Shipping, but requests for comment to the same address went unanswered. The captain said he regarded Grechushkin and Teto as the same

