

Ukraine's Black Sea ports battle through adversity

Trade volumes in Ukraine's Black Sea ports are growing, despite ongoing conflict and delays to a potential ceasefire.

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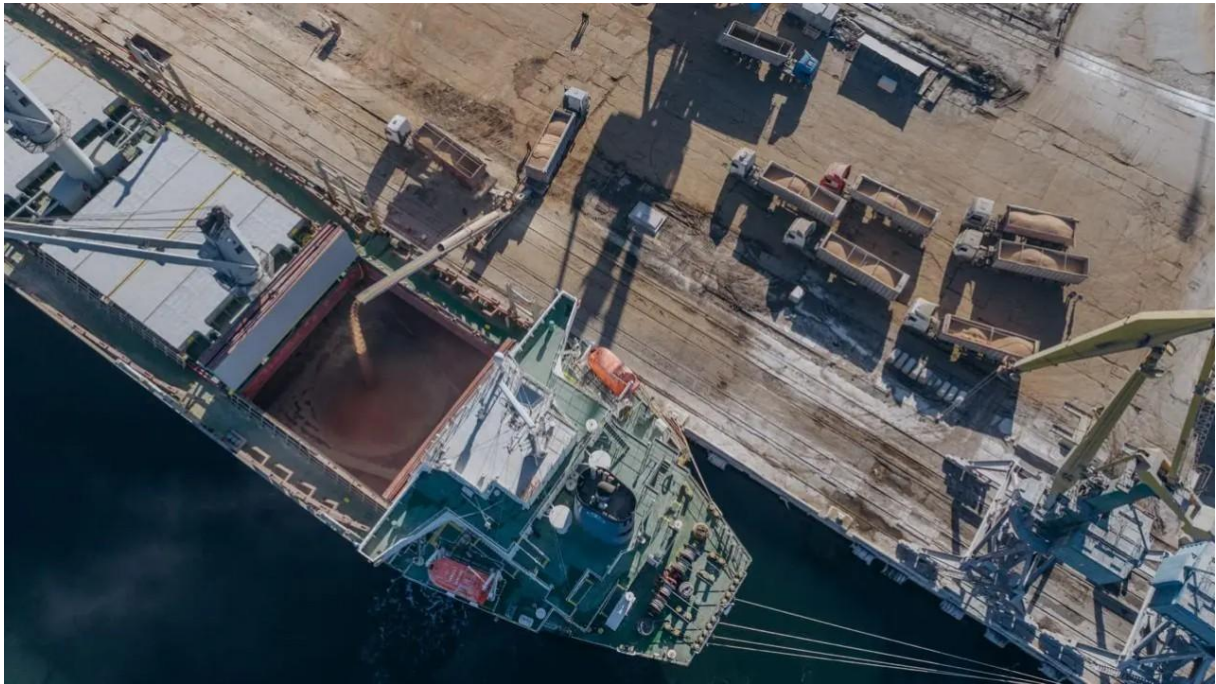


Image: Odessa Sea Port Administration

As the discussions over a lasting ceasefire continue to make the headlines, Ukraine's Black Sea ports and terminals are showing a resilience in their operations despite the continued attacks on its facilities.

In the latest round of talks a ceasefire in the Black Sea was agreed, but [Russian](#) president Vladimir Putin has introduced what some call "stalling tactics" by requiring Europe to lift Russian [sanctions](#) before the ceasefire enters into force.

European leaders have so far declined to lift sanctions, saying it is not the right time for such a move, and over the weekend it has emerged that [US](#) president Donald Trump is losing patience with Putin, and is considering secondary sanctions.

Meanwhile, trade on the Black Sea has continued to grow according to Odessa-based transport consultancy Informall.

Regional Ukrainian ports increased volumes by more than 77% in 2024 as the success of Black Sea operations was translated into on the water freight exports and imports from the southern Ukrainian cluster of terminals.

Informall, in its latest report, expects 2025 will see a further ramping up of freight through Ukraine's southern ports this year, with 2026 seeing close to 700,000 teu handled, a figure that may be exceeded should a lasting ceasefire be agreed.

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Under conflict conditions, Ukraine handled 133,000 teu through its Odessa regional ports including transshipment and empty containers, according to Informall. A total of 41.21% of full containers were imported, while exports accounted for 58.79% of the volume.

Import volumes to Ukraine increased by 153.61% compared to 2023, while exports increased by 47.07%, compared to the same period. Informall estimates that laden containers totalled 64.87%, while empty boxes accounted for the remaining 35.13%.

Analyst at Informall, Alexander Khromov, told Seatrade Maritime News: “To my mind, the Black Sea deal will not have a severe impact on shipping in Ukraine; it seems like it is needed to show a quick win for Trump to the world. The only positive momentum of that deal may be increased security for vessels and lower risks of them being shelled, however, no one knows how the situation will develop.”

Any wider deal to end the fighting across Ukraine could also see a return of large scale agricultural exports, which were the mainstay for many countries in the Middle East and Africa before the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

However, even with the limited levels of trading, Informall said the level of trade is critical: “The return of reliable shipping routes acts as a crucial artery, facilitating the movement of essential goods and providing a much-needed boost to international commerce involving Ukraine. This development suggests a growing confidence in the stability and potential of Ukraine's maritime infrastructure, attracting international businesses and fostering hope for further economic recovery.”

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According to Informall, the impetus for developing the humanitarian corridor following Russia's suspension of the grain corridor, came from a small local freight forwarder who deployed a small fleet of vessels to tranship containers between the Romania's Constanta port and Ukraine's Chornomorsk port, south of Odessa.

Such was the success of the forwarders' services that [Maersk](#) and [MSC](#) also recognised the potential of the trade and deployed their own vessels in support of the export trade, primarily.

In October last year, Maersk established its new service linking its facility in Port Said, at the Mediterranean end of the [Suez Canal](#) to Chornomorsk, significantly improving transit times, volumes and efficiency.

Informall acknowledges that the current volumes do not compare with the pre-war levels of freight handling, but the company understands that the latest data shows a significant increase and points to a better future.

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“We understand that Washington needs to show to the US quick wins at the global scale, with the most modest efforts. A Black Sea deal is such a case. But actually, Ukraine's humanitarian corridor successfully operated from immediately after the grain corridor, brokered by the UN and Türkiye was halted [in mid-2023]. Our assumption is the current deal, brokered by US, will add certain security and sustainability to an already existing arrangement,” said Vassily Vesselovsky, CEO and chairman at Informall.