

“Blue corridor” for foreign ships in the Ukrainian ports generates no takers

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West of England Club noted late last week that a number of sources were reporting an announcement by the Russian authorities that they would open humanitarian corridors to allow foreign vessels trapped in Ukrainian ports to leave.

The Russian Ministry of Defence was said to have announced the opening of a corridor 80nm long in a south westerly direction from an assembly point 20nm off the port of Ilyichevsk. It is 3nm wide and operational from 08:00 to 19:00 local time starting late last week.

There were however reports of mines having been sown in the areas around Ukrainian ports and the potential for some of these to have separated from their tethers and present a threat to shipping moving in the corridor. The Club noted that it was unable to verify those reports and Members with vessels affected were strongly advised to seek local advice.

<https://www.westpandi.com//Publications/News/March-2022/Ukraine-Conflict-potential-humanitarian-corridors>

Meanwhile, early indications the morning after the announced showed no movements by the many foreign ships stranded in Ukrainian waters.

Data from shipping platform Sea/ showed there were just under 100 ships which had been left marooned in Ukrainian waters a month on from the start of Russia's invasion.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) had said earlier last week that there were more than 1,000 seafarers of at least 20 nationalities still stuck in the war zone.

One issue that made the “blue corridors” difficult to realize had been the number of mines laid in positions around the Black Sea, most densely in front of Ukraine’s largest port, Odessa.

Russian forces removed and relocated five bulkers that were berthed at the captured port of Berdyansk. “Residents reported that some of them were fully loaded and some partially loaded. According to observers they were taken away by Russian tugs on March 15th.

Russia claimed that 10 ships were involved in ferrying arms and ammunition into the port.

One reason the vessels were moved out was to allow those 10 vessels in. One of them was the **Saratov**.

Unfortunately for the Russians the Saratov then caught fire and exploded on Thursday March 24th, just days after Russian state media released video footage of military cargo operations at the pier. The Ukrainian Armed Forces confirmed in a social media message that the Russian vessel had been “destroyed”, without giving details about how the destruction had occurred. Footage of the incident shows plumes of white smoke emanating from the Saratov before it exploded. The fire appears to have evolved into a much larger conflagration over the span of 10 minutes, with the smoke increasing and tall columns of flame occasionally visible. (See YouTube video, below). Secondary explosions followed for an extended period of time, consistent with combustion of a cargo of munitions rather than a missile strike.

Two other Ropucha-class tank landing ships – which had been berthed nearby – were seen exiting the port shortly after the blast. One appeared to have sustained limited damage to its superstructure.

Long shot of unfolding conflagration at:

[VIDEO](#)