

Cargo ship at Port of Mariupol sinks after hits from Russian shells

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General cargo ship **Azburg** (IMO 9102899), which had been berthed in Mariupol Port, Ukraine since the Russian invasion on February 24th, and which IMN reported yesterday April 6th as having been fired at by Russian military forces at around 22:40 local time on April 4th, has sunk.

The Azburg was one of about a half dozen foreign-registered ships believed to have been trapped in the port for the past six weeks. Russia blamed Ukraine for the sinking of the vessel.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine and the Ukraine Border Guard Service both reported that a vessel in the port had issued a distress call reporting that it had been hit and was on fire. The Border Guard said that the captain of the vessel issued a distress call reporting that his vessel was on fire after being shelled. He said the bridge of the vessel was destroyed and that they had been hit in the engine room and were taking on water. He was ordering the crew to abandon ship.

Ukraine's maritime border guard were said to have helped evacuate the 12 crew to safety. At least one of them was injured. The Border Guard then reported that the fire was spreading on the ship and that it was sinking in the harbour. Because of the continuing bombardment of Mariupol by Russian forces, they said it was impossible to conduct a rescue operation for the vessel.

There was some initial confusion on the identity of the vessel as the Ukrainian reports said it was a vessel registered in the Dominican Republic, but the vessel has later been identified as the Azburg, registered in Dominica. Although owned and managed out of Malta (according to Equasis), the ISM manager is based in Kherson, Ukraine, so the Russian claim that the vessel was owned and manned by Ukrainians could be true on the manning side.

The Dominica flag registry confirmed that “on 4th April 2022, around 22:40 [local time], the vessel was heavily fired upon by Russian armed forces after intentionally shelling the vessel twice a day earlier. Specific characteristics of firing on the vessel remain unknown, crew reported shelling, bombing and repeated hits by missiles, causing a fire in engine room. [The] administration received information that as a result of the attack and spreading fire, m.v. AZBURG sank . . . The crew managed to evacuate and found refuge on board neighbouring vessels. One person was found wounded and received medical assistance.”

The Azburg had departed Burgas, Bulgaria on February 17th and had arrived in Mariupol on February 23rd.

The Ukrainian Interior Ministry claimed that the vessel was struck during “shelling from the sea” by Russia. Russian news agency Tass confirmed the reports that a vessel was on fire in the port but said it might have been caused by Ukrainian nationalists who they said were now trapped in the industrial area at the port in the city.

The Ukraine Shipping Magazine reports that there are four other foreign-registered vessels still in the port of Mariupol. They said the vessels, which remain with their crews, are registered in Malta, Jamaica, and Liberia.

1995-built, Dominica-flagged, 6,142 gt Azburg is owned and managed by MSCO Global Ltd of Valletta, Malta. ISM manager is Denprtrans PC of Kherson, Ukraine.