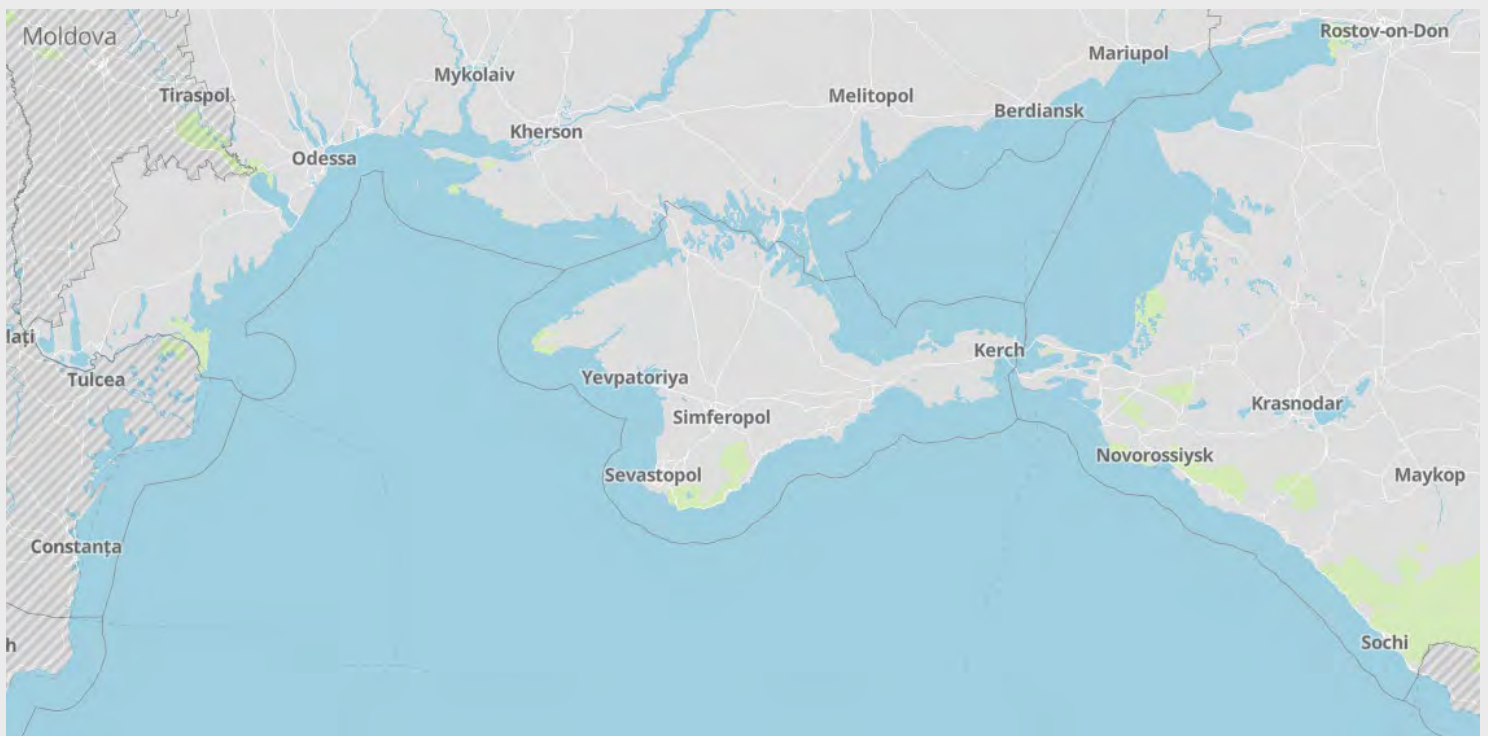


# Northern Black Sea and Russia Ports Threat Assessment

## Port operations and security overview

Date and time of latest intelligence included in this report: 31 August 2023 - 09:00 UTC



## RiskIntelligence

Risk Intelligence A/S  
Strandvejen 100  
2900 Hellerup  
Denmark

Tel: +45 7026 6230  
riskintelligence.eu

# Overview of current situation

## Black Sea:

During the past reporting period, one of the most notable events was the departure of the vessel the PRIMUS, which left Odessa on 26 August. This follows the previous successful south-bound transit of the JOSEPH SCHULTE, which also departed from Odessa port, 10 days earlier on 16 August. Although both vessels appear to have used the 'humanitarian corridor' as announced by the Ukrainian Navy, on 10 August. Both cases are too different, both with individual circumstance, which, at present, does not indicate a general operational proof of concept of the corridor. Both transits are notable given the ongoing situation of the no longer operational Black Sea Grain Initiative. Additionally, the Russian and subsequent Ukrainian announcements of warning merchant vessels against transiting to Ukrainian and Russian Black Sea ports, as vessels would be seen as parties to the war and potential military targets. Any future similar voyages are likely to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and likely to differ from each other.

It is understood that the corridor, announced by the Ukrainian Navy, is primarily for the evacuation of vessels in the Ukrainian Black Sea ports and it is worth noting that the Ukrainian Navy, when announcing the corridor, also stressed that the regional war risks had not diminished. A chart of the announced corridor, as published in the Annex to the IMO Circular Letter No.4748, can be found in Annex 2 of this report.

There remains a heightened presence of military assets in and around the NW Black Sea, where the threat from military operations in this area is considered severe. Aside from the ongoing threat of reported sea-mines in the Black Sea, the sea had been largely spared, but does now appear to be part of both Russian and Ukrainian objectives and the previous incidents continue to underline the volatile nature of the general security situation and how it can change rapidly. Since the Russian withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative on 17 July 2023, the overall security picture for general commercial maritime operations in the Black Sea, has increased in intensity and continues to be dominated by the war in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Danube ports are reported open and operating, with some operational disruption and delays. The impact of reported attacks on Ukrainian Black Sea and Danube port infrastructure is likely to complicate operations to varying degrees.

Thousands of landmines were uprooted, after the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam, and there have been reports of landmines washed-up along

the shoreline of the Dnipro River, as well as the Black Sea coastlines of Odessa and Mykolaiv regions. These are predominately light anti-personnel or anti-vehicle mines, as these have a plastic shell and are relatively lightweight. These landmines are unlikely to be a significant threat to larger vessels. Reports of drifting naval mines at sea, and mine disposals on or near Black Sea coasts continues. While a connection to the war is likely, the exact origin of individual mines is uncertain. There is also doubt about the potential number of mines deployed in the Black Sea, but known sightings and ongoing efforts of disposals, highlight that mines are a threat. Storms in the area often lead to new sightings as mine become untethered from anchors and begin to drift and also increases the possibility of further dispersing sea-mines in the Black Sea.

The Ukrainian Sea of Azov ports (Mariupol and Berdyansk) are still controlled and operated by the Russian military and occupation authorities. While the Russians have announced the ports to be open and being rebuilt, technical intelligence indicate very limited traffic. Vessels given access into these ports are known to have transported stolen Ukrainian cargo, most notably steel and metal products, as well as grain. Incidents of long-range attacks and sabotage in both cities are known, but unverified.

The Sea of Azov is still assessed to be limited in access for normal commercial maritime traffic. Previous attacks on the bridge across the Kerch Strait, have reportedly halted traffic for a number of days. Similar situations are likely to occur again, in the event of a future attack. Russia has announced that vessels which have loaded anywhere outside of Russia, will not be permitted to pass through the Kerch Strait. Disruption and delays to transits of non-Russian-flagged vessels are known to occur. Direct targeting of Russian (proper) ports, port cities, or nearby areas is generally considered unlikely, although the potential targeting of Russian Black Sea ports is assessed to be more likely. Russian Black Sea ports are understood to be operating at ISPS level 2.

The current threat picture for the Black Sea can be assessed as transitioning into a "post grain-initiative" reality, where both Russia and Ukraine are attempting to impact the trade to both countries' Black Sea connected ports. The degree to which this will evolve further and escalate the current security situation, is unclear – although an uptick in various attack on coastal installations does appear to support this. Conflict related implications when operating in the Black Sea are therefore likely to continue – with continued increased naval presence and activity, congestion and delays when transiting

the regional straits and rivers, congestion at other regional ports due to volume of diverted traffic, impact of sanctions on trade to and from Russia, and complications with crew changes.

## **BSGI: Black Sea Grain Initiative**

It has been reported that Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan will visit his Russian counterpart in Moscow for two days, with grain exports reported to be on the agenda. However, under current circumstances any renewal of the previously agreed initiative, looks unlikely.

Prior to the Russian withdrawal on 17 July, regular operations of the Black Sea Grain Initiative had been heavily disrupted, with very limited overall traffic and cargo throughput. UN data shows that some days no vessels arrive at, or depart from, the designated Ukrainian ports, and Pivdenny had not seen traffic since early May.

Much of the disruption was, according to reports, that Russian inspection teams were actively disrupting the inspections of ships at Istanbul before they entered the corridor, and when they returned from Ukraine. According to official Russian sources, this was done to protest, and apply pressure to, the UN over the missing implementation of Russian ammonia exports, which was also part of the initiative.

Further information regarding past vessel movements and goods transported, as part of the BSGI, can be found on the UN dedicated website below<sup>1</sup>.

<https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/vessel-movements>

### **BSGI Outlook**

As BSGI operations remain suspended, there is, at present, no clear outlook regarding any future incarnation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Any future variation or incarnation of the, or a grain export arrangement, would ideally include some form of security guarantees or measures for the vessels involved.

Any attempt by the remaining parties to the BSGI (Ukraine, Turkey, the UN) to revive the BSGI without Russian approval is still assessed as unlikely, and no doubt also part of the reason for Russia targeting the grain facilities in the affected ports. unlikely to be successful. Any Western naval escorts also remain very unlikely to materialize due

to the escalatory nature of such a move – or confidence that Russia will not target vessels transiting a corridor, which considerably raises the threat profile for any transiting vessels.

It is still unclear if or how Russia would act in practice, to vessels attempting to enter Ukrainian Black Sea ports, following its withdrawal from the BSGI. It is possible that the Russian Black Sea Navy will actively deny any further traffic by attempting a blockade of the Ukrainian NW Black Sea area. Russia may rely on the (re)announced prohibition of navigation north of 45-21N in the NW Black Sea to prevent any potential trade with Ukraine. Any overt threats, real or not, are likely an attempt to influence insurance prices, in the wider Black Sea and make any trade north of 45-21 untenable for commercial operations. Another scenario related to this, may be Russian forced inspections of vessels trading not only in the NW Black Sea, but also off the Ukrainian Danube ports. In this case, there may be increased threat for maritime trade near the conflict area. Still, it seems less likely that Russian Naval capabilities at this point can uphold such a blockade or inspection regime, especially with Ukrainian anti-ship capabilities in place throughout the region.

The Ukrainian Navy announced, 'Humanitarian Corridor', as circulated by the IMO, should not be seen as direct replacement of the BSGI. As it is announced as a temporary maritime route in the north-western part of the Black Sea. The actual operational practicality of this temporary route remains to be seen.

Exporting additional Ukraine agricultural produce via the land-routes – such as Poland, Bulgaria, Romania or expanding the current capacity of the Danube continues to be explored as well as any other possible means.

### **Ukraine:**

Port information is located in the port table p.6-7.

While Russian long-range missile and drone attacks against critical infrastructure continues, focus can shift and broaden depending on any Ukrainian offensive operations. Therefore, a greater focus on other types of infrastructure may be seen in future attacks. This will likely be a potential issue for future port operations. Russia may also limit the strategic bombing and use the long-range precision weapons against military targets closer to the front-line or target western weapon shipments inside Ukraine.

---

<sup>1</sup> Risk Intelligence is not responsible for third party content.

With the Ukrainian offensive underway, increases in Ukrainian strikes targeting Russian-held infrastructure and logistics hubs have continued. This may also include strikes against port facilities in occupied areas, as well as maritime targets in occupied Crimea.

The main efforts of the Ukrainian offensive are reported to be concentrating in the south but with a continued focus on the Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions. In case of a breakthrough in Kherson Oblast and Zaporizhzhia Oblast towards Crimea and the Azov Sea, Russian priorities regarding operating the ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol, as well as securing Crimea, may change.

Martial law is in effect throughout Ukraine and was recently extended until 15 November 2023, with some local night-time curfews in place. All Ukrainian ports are operating at ISPS level 3 in accordance with the communication to the IMO by the Ukrainian authorities.

## **Russia:**

Port information is located in the port table p.6-7.

The extent to which present circumstances within Russia will ultimately affect the war in Ukraine, is still unclear. With the ongoing Ukrainian counter-offensive, there continues to be an increase in strikes and sabotage against Russian infrastructure, logistics hubs and recruitment centers inside Russia. This has included oil terminals near ports. Such attacks are likely to continue for as long as Ukraine need to keep a high pressure on Russian forces and supply-lines – likely going into the Autumn of 2023.

Previous attacks against Ukraine maritime and port infrastructure following the termination of the BSGI is likely to drive more Ukrainian like-for-like targeting of Russian ports and maritime infrastructure. As the early August attacks against a Russian cargo transport near Kerch and a Russian naval vessel in Novorossiysk.

Ukraine has increasingly signaled readiness to attack Crimea and Kerch, in an effort to isolate the Sea of Azov and Russian Black Sea ports from maritime traffic through area denial and an increased tempo of attacks in the region.

This means that the immediate threat towards Russian Black Sea ports has increased.

While direct targeting of proper civilian vessels is generally assessed as unlikely – though incidents as a result of specific circumstances cannot be ruled out – collateral damage or mistaken targeting is possible, especially as Ukraine are willing to

attack regular “civilian” cargo transport vessels operated by the Russian military.

It is uncertain to what degree countermeasures and security will impact operations in Russian ports. However, reports indicate that the Russian authorities have increase security in Feodosia over fear of UKR naval drones. Specifically, there now is a ban on entering the waters closer than 1km of the Port of Feodosia in small vessels and crafts. This adds to previous reports of gunfire in Feodosia and various reports of drone sightings, which are known to result in the closure of the Kerch Strait Bridge. There are also known reports of Russia potentially sinking some vessels in the Kerch Strait, as an attempt to create a bulwark against the Ukrainian naval drones. While it is unknown what this may mean for maritime operations, it highlights that Russia are stepping up security and are taking the threat of Ukrainian drones extremely seriously.

With the ongoing Ukrainian counter-offensive, there has also been an increase in strikes and sabotage against Russian infrastructure, logistics hubs and recruitment centers inside Russia. This has included oil terminals near ports. Such attacks are likely to continue for as long as Ukraine need to keep a high pressure on Russian forces and supply-lines – likely going into the Autumn of 2023. Reports continue to note the issues with Russian spoofing of AIS signals in the Black Sea.

Extra scrutiny against crew, and passengers from the West in Russian ports, has previously occurred. Examples of such ports outside of the Black Sea are, in the Baltic Sea, Kaliningrad, Ust-Luga and St Petersburg, in the north Murmansk and in the east Vladivostok. Extra focus against is expected against Ukrainian crewmembers, who are required to be brought ashore and questioned by Russian authorities before berthing. Some crews on merchant vessels in the Black Sea, are known to have been questioned on attitude towards Russia and the invasion of Ukraine. Content on phones and electronic devices, as well as messages on social media and other text services may be investigated to establish anti-Russian sentiment.

Reports of activism against vessels transporting cargo to or from Russia are known. This is predominately when vessels with Russian cargo call European or western ports. Similarly, there have been previous incidents of vessels carrying oil and gas products from Russia being targeted by environmental/peace activists at sea or while underway as recently illustrated by the cruise ship calling at Batumi. Port workers and industrial action in the form of refusal to service the vessels once it lands in Western ports, is also likely. Hacktivists targeting companies trading with Russia cannot be ruled out.

## Outlook:

Ukrainian military operations indicate an increased focus on establishing the kind of area control which, aside from retaking area control from Russian, will support the operational and security aspects of the corridor announced by the Ukrainian Navy. This is, in particular, regarding military operations in the north-western area of the Black Sea and the Crimean Peninsula.

Any future voyages similar to that of the JOSEPH SCHULTE and the PRIMUS are expected to be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, with individual circumstances also having varying degrees of influence.

Although any definite outcome of the Turkey/Russia meeting, seems unlikely, it is positive that talks are happening in the first place.

The volatility in relation to operating in the Black Sea is likely to continue as part of a broader strategy by both Ukrainian and Russian forces, although the intensity may lesson depending on objectives and wider political and diplomatic developments.

The Ukrainian offensive is likely to include future drone, including naval-drones and long-range strikes against Russian logistics infrastructure and storage sites to disrupt Russian supply-lines and operations. Much of this is focused on the Sea of Azov and Crimea, and future major attacks against maritime infrastructure, such as the July attack on the Crimea Bridge, are possible, to keep the pressure on Russian exports from the area.

Although Russia is likely to continue targeting Ukrainian Danube port infrastructure, it remains unclear if this is a strategy Russia would systematically enforce in relation to its threat of seeing vessels transiting to Ukrainian ports as potential military targets – however, as the case involving the SUKRU OKAN, proved, any excuse may be explored. The volatile nature of the war means that the security situation can change at relatively short notice and without prior warning. Any major successful offensive operations by both Ukrainian and Russian forces are likely to have a wider impact on the general security situation, including the maritime domain.

Although the Russian authorities appear to rule out any future “official” mobilization of Russian citizens, other means are being utilized, such as recent legislative changes, so that conscription age now focusses on the largest segment of male citizens.

Future sanctions towards Russia may affect the overall security dynamics of the Black Sea. If further sanctions mount, Russia could still respond by

restricting Russian ports for vessels affiliated with or connected to EU/NATO/Western countries or flags. In such a scenario, any effect on vessels in Russian ports is uncertain, although detention of vessels could be a possibility – threats of this have been reported. Russian authorities might do extensive checks and controls of western vessels as a form of harassment.

The war in Ukraine has proven it can take on additional dimensions – with the likely example of the sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines in the Baltic Sea, in late September 2022 – this means that additional hybrid-warfare means may be used not just in relation to Ukraine and the Black Sea, but also elsewhere in the world- especially where the international tensions between Russia and the West/NATO are prevalent. These may include, but are not limited to, harassment, espionage, cyberattacks, and sabotage of and against maritime assets and infrastructure. This has the potential to affect maritime security in a negative way.

**Annex 1 – Illustration of reported mined areas**

**Annex 2 – Announced temporary corridor from UKR Black Sea ports**

**Annex 3 – Reported Kerch Strait inspection area**

**Annex 4 – Incidents**

## Ukraine and northern Black Sea ports

Refer to the following page for definitions and information on sanctions/commercial restrictions

Port	Current port situation	Current local situation	Operations	Security
<b>Odessa</b>	Black Sea Grain Initiative related operations are suspended. Status of other cargo operations is unverified but are generally thought shut down.	Russian strikes have occurred against targets in the Odessa Oblast, including some direct targeting of Odessa city and port facilities. Further targeting and increased focus as part of military operations cannot be ruled out.		
<b>Pivdenny</b>	BI Black Sea Grain Initiative related operations are suspended. Status of other cargo operations is unverified but are generally thought shut down.	Located in the Odessa Oblast where Russian strikes have taken place, including in the nearby city of Yuzhny. Further targeting in the area and increased focus as part of military operations cannot be ruled out.		
<b>Mykolaiv</b>	Closed. Cargo operations suspended for commercial operations.	In control of Ukrainian forces, but strikes and shelling, by Russian forces, of targets in or near the city, has been reported.		
<b>Mariupol</b>	Disputed operational status.	Controlled by Russian forces and part of annexed territory. Actual operational status is disputed with Russian authorities reporting the port to be open, although this is with very limited traffic prioritized by the Russian state. Reports indicate rebuilding of the port facilities by Russian military and contractors.		
<b>Chornomorsk</b>	Black Sea Grain Initiative related operations are suspended. Status of other cargo operations is unverified but are generally thought shut down.	Russian strikes have occurred against targets in the Odessa Oblast. Further targeting in the area and increased focus as part of military operations cannot be ruled out.		
<b>Ukraine Danube ports</b>	Operating but delays are to be expected.	Russian strikes have occurred against the port of Reni and Izmail but Ukraine Danube ports of Reni, Izmail, Reni and Ust-Dunaisk are still reported operating and handling ship calls via the River Danube, and the Sulina and Bystre Canals. ISPS Level 3 is in place, as communicated by the Ukrainian authorities. Delays and congestion have been reported in relation to port and canal operations. Future attacks cannot be ruled out.		

Port	Current port situation	Current local situation	Operations	Security
<b>Kerch Strait</b>	Open for navigation within but closed for unauthorised transit. Impact of additional transit restrictions is uncertain. Additional security measures in place.	Ports located within the Strait are reported to be operating. Russia has announced transit restriction of vessels which are not loaded in Russian ports. Future strikes against the Kerch Strait Bridge are possible. Attacks are less likely to directly target commercial maritime traffic, although collateral damage cannot be ruled out. Ukrainian attacks against naval or state-affiliated vessels, and port infrastructure, using naval drones or cruise missiles, is possible. Scrutiny against crew is possible *. See Annex 2 for reported Kerch Strait inspection area.		
<b>Russian Black Sea ports</b>	Open with restrictions. Additional security measures in place.	Ports operating at ISPS level 2, some operational delays possible. Collateral damage to vessels may occur in case of incidents. Scrutiny against crew is possible *. Ukrainian attacks against naval or state-affiliated vessels, and port infrastructure, using naval drones or cruise missiles, is possible.		
<b>Russian Sea of Azov ports</b>	Open with restrictions, although Sea of Azov is currently closed to unauthorized navigation by the Russian authorities. Additional security measures in place.	Ports operating at ISPS level 2, some operational delays possible. Collateral damage to vessels may occur in case of incidents. Scrutiny against crew is possible *. Ukrainian attacks against naval or state-affiliated vessels, and port infrastructure, using naval drones or cruise missiles, is possible.		
<b>Russian Baltic Sea</b>	Open.	Scrutiny against crew is possible *.		
<b>Russian North</b>	Open.	Scrutiny against crew is possible *.		
<b>Russian East</b>	Open.	Scrutiny against crew is possible *.		
<b>Maritime Humanitarian Corridor (Black Sea Grain Initiative)</b>	Suspended on 17 JULY 2023.	Further information can be found on the UN dedicated website: <a href="https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/updates">https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/updates</a> **		
<b>Constanta</b>	Open.	Operating, with additional cargo diverted to Constanta due to closed Ukrainian ports. Congestion should be expected, and although this is being managed, it could lead to delays.		

\* Constraints and demands related to vessels with Ukrainian crewmembers. Russian crew with previous military service may be questioned by authorities withheld as part of Russian mobilization efforts. \*\* Risk Intelligence is not responsible for third party content.

# Operations and Security definitions

## Operations:

**Green** – Operations in the area are ongoing normally with no significant issues.

**Yellow** – Some delays or disruptions in the area may be expected, which could be due to limitations to, for example, port operations and/or congestion in the area, or other difficulties with access or operating at the required ISPS level or complying with other procedures either at port or offshore.

**Red** – Operations have been significantly disrupted and ports or areas might be closed or only partially operating due to restrictions, blockades, lack of functioning infrastructure, personnel disruptions, and access concerns, or other issues preventing all or most operations.

## Security:

**Green** – The area is secure and there are no direct or indirect security threats in the port vicinity or offshore area. Low threat to vessels/personnel.

**Yellow** – There are no direct security threats but there are possible indirect threats in the vicinity, particularly but not limited to conflict taking place in proximity either on land or offshore. Moderate threat to vessels/personnel.

**Red** – Direct threats are possible to the port or area and/or its immediate approaches, including collateral damage in the immediate area or direct attacks that could target infrastructure and vessels at berth/anchorage/underway. High threat to vessels/personnel.

## Note on sanctions and commercial restrictions

Sanctions and commercial restrictions are being imposed on Russia in response to its invasion. These sanctions are evolving and will affect ongoing business operations in many complex legal ways. Sanctions are being applied to individual Russians, business entities, and to certain Russian export products (such as oil products). There are also restrictions on specific nationalities (such as US citizens) engaging in certain activities, restrictions on payments (in certain currencies and through certain institutions), and restrictions on Russia's import of particular dual-use items and technologies. Port entry bans for Russian vessels are being implemented (in the UK, for example).

The fine print of sanctions and restrictions might affect chartering arrangements in unexpected ways, depending on the connection to Russia. These issues, as well as insurance issues for operating in war risk areas, are not covered in this report and might need to be assessed separately to reduce the risk of exposure.

*Advice given and recommendations made do not constitute a warranty of future results by Risk Intelligence or an assurance against risk. Recommendations made are based on information available at the time of writing. No express or implied warranty is given in respect of any judgment made or to changes or any unforeseen escalation of any factors affecting any such judgement.*

*Documents are for the benefit of the recipient only and may not be disclosed to any third parties without the prior written consent of Risk Intelligence; such consent not to be withheld unreasonably. The recipient agrees to indemnify Risk Intelligence against any claims and any resulting damages that may be caused by any unauthorised disclosure of such documents.*



# Annex 1:

## Reported mined areas



*Risk Intelligence (Illustration for visual guidance only)*

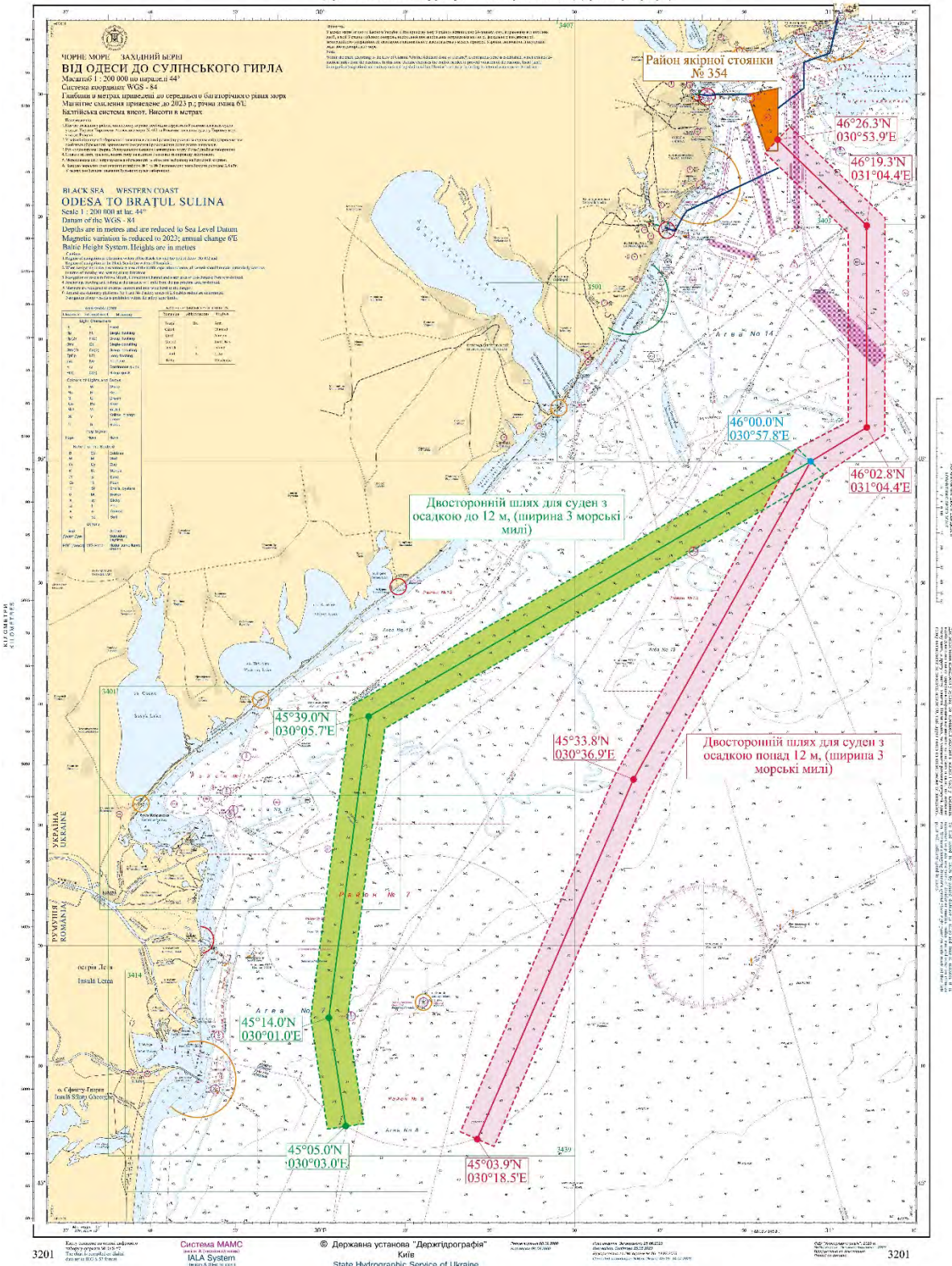
NAVAREA III: See above for visual guidance on mined areas according to the Spanish flag administration (NAVAREA III 0092).

Mined areas are most likely a combination of deeper sea mines and shallow water mines for anti-amphibious operations as well as on beaches. Mines in the sea are most likely cabled or anchored and under control.

Please also note that active NAVAREA III warnings include a warning of possible drifting mines (NAVAREA III 0122) for Northwest, West, and Southwest areas of the Black Sea.

# Annex 2:

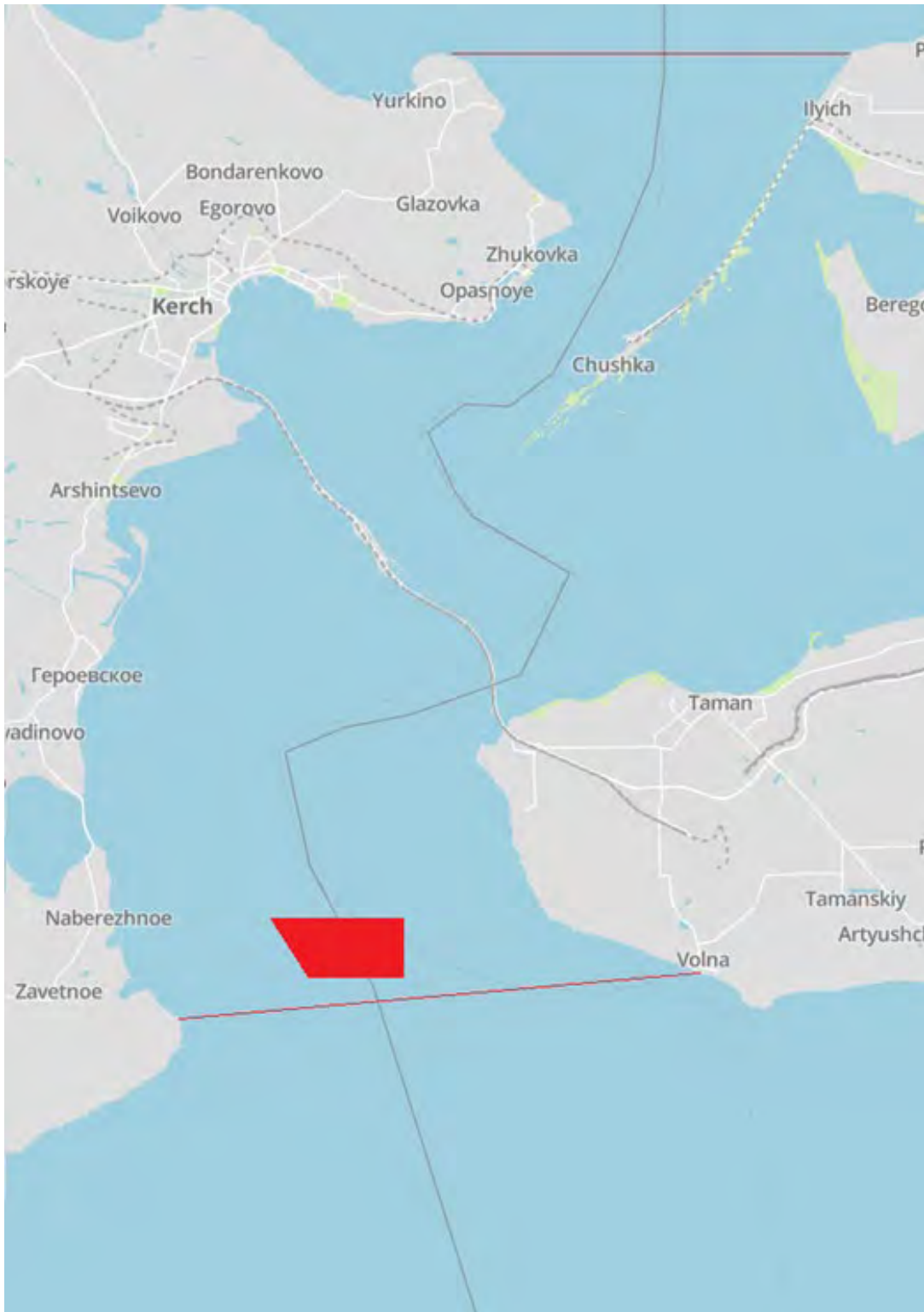
## ПРОЄКТ ВНЕСЕННЯ ТИМЧАСОВИХ ЗМІН ДО СРР "ПІДХОДИ ДО ПОРТІВ ОДЕСА, ЧОРНОМОРЬСЬК ТА ПІВДЕННИЙ" (пропозиції МІУ з урахуванням пропозицій Держгідрографії)



The above chart shows the announced temporary routes for civilian vessels to and from Ukrainian Black Sea ports. The Ukrainian Navy emphasizes that war risks, including mines, remain. Further details can be found in the IMO Circular Letter No.4748 (Source: IMO Illustration for visual guidance only)

# Annex 3:

Reported Kerch Strait inspection area, as announced by the Russian authorities 02 August 2023



*Risk Intelligence  
(Illustration for  
visual guidance  
only)*

## Annex 4:

### **Incidents:**

No maritime related incidents recorded during the past week.