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VDR demands safe passage for ships stranded in Ukraine

At least 60 ships with more than 1,000 seafarers in ports in the war zone / “Shipping must not become a bargaining chip” / Association supports EU sanctions regime

The German Shipowners’ Association (VDR) is calling for all the ships of the international merchant fleet that are stranded in the war zone of the Black Sea be allowed to depart in a protected manner. Even more than a month after the beginning of Russia’s most recent invasion of Ukraine, the VDR estimates that more than 60 merchant ships from various nations – including several vessels of German shipping companies – are stranded in ports on the Ukrainian coast. In addition, it notes that supplying the crews with provisions is becoming increasingly difficult. “We demand that the ships be allowed to sail from the ports at the earliest opportunity and without threat of attack,” said VDR President Gaby Bornheim. “The ships must be granted safe passage so that they can sail out of the war zone with their crews unharmed.”

Bornheim added that the VDR is therefore calling on the Russian side, in particular, to facilitate the “blue corridors” proposed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), stating: “It is an unacceptable state of affairs that – in addition to the Ukrainian population – more than 1,000 seafarers on board merchant vessels in the war zone have to fear for their lives. Ships and their crews must not become bargaining chips in this war of aggression.”

If merchant ships berthed in Ukrainian ports were to sail out to sea, they would currently face considerable dangers, such as from mines and possible shelling by warships lying off the Ukrainian coast. At least five merchant ships are reported to have already fallen victim to attacks in recent weeks, one of which sank.

Against this background, the VDR President once again condemned Russia’s attack on Ukraine, stating: “Russia’s violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine is unacceptable to us.” This has prompted the Association, she continued, to back the position of Germany’s government, the EU, the United States and other allies regarding sanctions. “We support robust economic measures in response to the invasion,” she said. “The more clearly such sanctions regulations are defined and the less room for interpretation they offer, the better we can manage them in shipping.”

About the German Shipowners’ Association

The German Shipowners’ Association (*Verband Deutscher Reeder, VDR*) is responsible for representing the common business and social policy interests of German shipping companies at federal and state government level as well as in relation to European and international bodies. Founded in 1907, the VDR merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners in 1994. With a membership of around 200, the VDR represents the majority of Germany’s merchant fleet. For more details, visit www.reederverband.de.

Press photographs of Dr Gaby Bornheim: <https://www.reederverband.de/en/press/press-images.html>

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