

Chornomorsk Concession Advances Ukraine's Maritime Recovery

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Executive Summary: Ukraine advanced the concession of Chornomorsk seaport's First and Container Terminals on June 25, admitting four applicants to the next stage as Kyiv seeks foreign operators to modernize a port central to its exports.

- Russia's war against Ukraine, Black Sea security gaps, and mutual long-range strikes make investors hesitant, and port operator DP World has left its Pivdennyi terminal. Alternative routes cannot fully replace sea exports, and the Baltic route costs more.
- Kyiv is reducing investor risk with state guarantees and backing from the International Finance Corporation and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Closer ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could further reassure investors.

Russian and Ukrainian drone strikes continue to make shipping though the Black Sea troublesome and places security risks on ports (see EDM, September 25). At the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdańsk on June 25, the Ukrainian government announced the pre-qualification results for the concession of the First and Container Terminals at Chornomorsk Seaport. Four applicants were admitted to the next stage of the competitive dialogue: APM Terminals B.V., the Mariner and TAS consortium, Yilport Holding Anonim Şirketi, and the Abu Dhabi Ports Company PJSC and SKF Holdings U.K. LTD consortium (Ukrainian Ministry for Recovery, Infrastructure, and Transport, June 25). Before Russia's war against Ukraine, the Black Sea gave Ukraine fast, cheap access to markets in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and, via the Suez Canal, to Asian markets. Since the war began, however, only three Ukrainian ports—Odesa, Chornomorsk, and Pivdennyi—have been operating, while ports such as Mykolaiv and Mariupol are either nonfunctional or operating at limited capacity (The Polish Institute of International Affairs, July 10, 2025).

At the start of the war, Russia maintained superiority over Ukraine in the Black Sea, enabling it to block Kyiv's most crucial ports and hit its strategic maritime infrastructure. After repeated attempts, Ukraine neutralized this threat by deploying missiles alongside air and naval drones, inflicting severe damage on Russia's Black Sea Fleet and reducing its ability to target Ukrainian facilities (The Odessa Journal, April 17).

Kyiv has invested in rebuilding its maritime transport potential by attracting foreign investors and major logistics companies. Chornomorsk is re-emerging as a key port that may foster further Ukrainian exports to Europe. Kyiv's promotion of the port aims to modernize and expand its terminal infrastructure (Ukrainian Shipping Magazine, February 3). The port is a strategic transport hub situated at the intersection of key international trade corridors. Its terminal could open new maritime routes to Greece and other Mediterranean countries, positioning the port as a vital gateway for expanding regional connectivity and trade (Ukrainian Ministry for Recovery, Infrastructure, and Transport, August 19).

Security gaps in the Black Sea, the ongoing war with Russia, and mutual long-range strikes make potential investors hesitant to invest further in Ukrainian maritime infrastructure. DP World, one of

the world's largest port operators, quietly left the Ukrainian container terminal in the port of Pivdennyi earlier this year, though it had entered the market in 2020 (Latifundist Media, March 18). Ukraine has explored transporting grain through Baltic Sea ports. Initial assessments indicate that this route would add approximately \$100 per ton to export costs, while overall volumes would remain relatively limited (Ukrainian Shipping Magazine, September 24).

Ukraine prepared the Chornomorsk port lease project with the direct support of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The project includes a risk structure and guarantees of state support (Interfax-Ukraine, August 19, 2025).

Ukraine's determination to rebuild and develop its seaport sector underscores the industry's resilience despite war-related devastation. Even amid ongoing clashes in the Black Sea, the sector has maintained significant cargo volumes and reinforced its importance to the country's economy and regional trade. The country's pragmatic approach to leasing the port of Chornomorsk to major international operators is unsurprising. Abu Dhabi ports could bring exceptional value to Kyiv, given its rapidly expanding portfolio of 36 ports and terminals worldwide and a 47 percent surge in revenue. The company entered the Black Sea region in April by signing a framework agreement with the administrator of Romania's Port of Constanța to explore large-scale brownfield and greenfield projects aimed at linking European trade to Middle Corridor routes (Abu Dhabi Port Group, April 14).

Kyiv remains committed to sustaining trade operations in the Black Sea amid drone strikes while actively seeking potential investors and operators. At the same time, Ukraine's deep military ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) suggest a continued partnership with the alliance to strengthen naval capacity and enhance combat skills, particularly through adopting innovative defense solutions. A strong partnership with NATO will enable Ukraine to maintain control of its maritime borders in the Black Sea. It will also provide additional security guarantees against major attacks on newly built strategic infrastructure and disruptions to trade routes, boosting Chornomorsk's attractiveness as the main gateway.

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