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## Constantza: key hub

As Romania's largest port and with grains as its most important cargo, Constantza is a key hub linking Central and Eastern Europe with the Caspian region, Central Asia and the Far East. The port is also in the spotlight as it offers an alternative export route for Ukrainian grains and oilseeds

*Serena Lim*

The Port of Constantza is Romania's most important port and is located on the country's western coast on the Black Sea.

Romania's geopolitical position in international grain and oilseed/oils trade

– as an EU member and with its location on the Black Sea – has risen significantly with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year. Russia's subsequent blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports led to the development of new export routes for Ukraine, including via the Danube River to the Port of Constantza.

The port recorded a 69.7% increase in oilseed traffic for 2022, compared with 2021, according to a Constantza press release on 30 January. In total, it handled 1.8M tonnes of oilseeds from Ukraine last year, the port's press office told *OFI*.

This river route is even more important since Russia withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) on 17 July, the deal brokered by the United Nations and Turkey to allow the safe passage of agricultural exports from Ukraine's Black Sea ports.

However, the shipping of grain and oilseeds via the Danube is now under threat with Russia attacking Ukraine's Danube river ports of Reni and Izmil

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Grains	19,616,118	20,393,803	17,891,285	17,963,535	21,329,156	21,893,550	25,174,619
Crude oil	6,593,434	7,487,357	7,352,164	7,475,408	8,027,409	6,638,429	6,715,111
Oil products	5,165,550	5,653,512	5,473,279	5,897,915	6,296,060	5,042,322	5,438,743
Natural and chemical fertilizers	1,842,646	2,927,072	3,094,332	3,007,574	4,024,682	4,420,218	4,103,372
Iron ore, scrap	2,750,024	2,594,201	3,924,125	4,521,893	5,189,807	3,868,790	4,766,262
Solid mineral fuels	3,207,635	2,226,771	2,830,470	3,770,447	3,834,946	2,850,701	3,438,621
Non-ferrous ores	3,109,993	3,158,060	3,111,182	3,976,068	3,861,530	2,276,486	3,150,187



Table 1: Main cargo types handled at Port of Constantza, 2015-2021

Source: Port of Constantza presentation

since it left the BSGI. Reni and Izmail are just across the border from Romania and the attacks have destroyed grain as well as storage infrastructure.

## Favourable location

Constantza Port is both a maritime and river port and is located on Romania's west coast on the Black Sea.

The port is 179 nM (nautical miles) from Turkey's Bosphorus Strait and 85 nM from the Danube River's Sulina Branch, which flows east from Tulcea in Romania to reach the Black Sea at the port of Sulina, located north of Constantza.

With a Free Zone status to facilitate foreign trade, Constantza is favourably located at the intersection of trade routes that connect landlocked countries in Central and Eastern Europe with the Transcaucasus and Caspian Sea regions, as well as Central Asia and the Far East.

Constantza Port offers an alternative to the oceanic route from Chinese ports through the Suez Canal to Central and Eastern Europe, connecting the industrial regions of northern China to Europe, through the emergent markets of the Caspian region.

The port also has a major role in European intermodal transport. It is a key node in the nine corridors which form the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), a network of roads, railways, airports and water infrastructure adopted by the EU in 1996. TEN-T aims to improve primary roads, railways, inland waterways, airports, seaports, inland ports and traffic management systems to provide

integrated and intermodal long-distance, high-speed transport routes.

Constantza is part of the Pan-European Rhine-Danube TEN-T corridor, which provides the main east-west link across continental Europe.

## Cargo types

Constantza port handles a variety of cargoes, with grains leading by volume (31%), followed by crude oil, oil products, natural and chemical fertilisers, iron ore/scrap, solid mineral fuels and non-ferrous ores (see Table 1, previous page). Oilseeds account for around 4% of this volumes (see Table 2, following page).

Last year, Romania's maritime ports registered a total traffic of goods of 75.55M tonnes, a 12% increase compared to 67.5M tonnes in 2021 and the highest recorded level ever, according to the port's 30 January press release.

"Grains have the largest share in total cargo traffic this year as well and Constantza port has become the most important in Europe from this point of view, especially in the current context [of the war in Ukraine], with an annual traffic of 24.1M tonnes", said Florin Vizan, general manager of NC MPA SA Constanta.

"Since the beginning of the war, the cargo traffic in relation to Ukraine was 11.85M tonnes, of which 5.4M tonnes was via river traffic and 6.4M tonnes via maritime traffic. The largest quantities of cargo were for the grains, followed by equipment, phosphate, laminate, iron ore and containers.

"Significant traffic increases were registered for oilseeds (+69.7%); iron ores and scrap (+47%); crude oil (+41.7%); chemicals products from coal and tar (+37.7%); raw or processed minerals (+36.8%); oil products (+33.4%); metal products (+28.2%); equipment and machines (+12.4%); and fertilisers (+9.5%)," Vizan added.

Constantza handled a record 68.24M tonnes of freight traffic in 2022, an increase of 11.5% compared with 67.9M tonnes in 2021 (see Table 3, following page). In 2021, the port handled 2.2M tonnes of oilseeds and fats (see Table 3, following page).

"An updated figure for oilseeds traffic from Ukraine is 1.8M tonnes for 2022," the port press office told OFI, adding that the port has the capacity to handle more grains and oilseeds from Ukraine.

"There are no limitations regarding the capacities of the port. The main bottlenecks were the logistics needed to reach Constantza, such as differences in railway gauges, border congestion and the low transit speed to reach us."

"Once grain and oilseeds transport was moved to the inland waterway – the way to transport dry and liquid bulk cargoes is on the Danube river – the quantities handled in the port started to rise."

## Facilities

Constantza has a planned total handling capacity of around 100M tonnes/year, with 38 port operators and 100 forwarding companies located at the port.

It has 156 berths, 140 of which are





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operational, with a total quay length of 32km and depths ranging from 7-19m, which can accommodate the largest vessels passing through the Suez Canal.

The port has direct connections to road, railway, river and pipeline networks and Ro-Ro terminals that ensure a fast connection with the ports of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

Constantza also has land availability for future expansion and there are several projects in progress to build new facilities for cargo handling and to improve the transport connections between the port and its hinterland, mainly located in the southern part of the port.

"The southern part of the port is dedicated to containers," the port press office told *OFI*. "Grains and other agri-bulk cargoes reach Constantza mainly on the inland waterway as river transportation is the best way to transit dry and liquid bulk cargoes.

"There are also other projects to improve road access in the northern part of the port, which will improve conditions for all the operators in this part of the port. The rail infrastructure in the port

is also under modernisation but this project is carried out by the Romanian Railway National Company, which owns and manages the rail infrastructure in Constantza Port."

## River links

Constantza is connected to the Danube river via the Danube-Black Sea Canal. The Danube river in Romania runs for 1,050km and the canal is 64.4km long and 90m wide, with a water depth of 7m.

Due to low costs and important cargo volumes that can be carried, the Danube is one of the most advantageous modes of transport and an efficient alternative to congested European rail and road networks. Important cargo quantities are carried by river between Constantza and Central and Eastern European countries such as Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Moldova, Serbia and Slovakia.

In order to handle future growth of river traffic, the Maritime Ports Administration of Constantza has completed a barge terminal to improve sailing conditions and develop facilities to accommodate river vessels in the southern part of the port.

## Specialised terminals

The Port of Constantza has a specialised terminal for the import of crude oil and other oil products and for the export of refined oil products, oil derivatives and other liquid chemical products.

Two specialised terminals handle dry bulk (iron and non-ferrous ore, grain, coal and coke); another specialised terminal handles chemical products and fertilisers; and a further two operate bulk cement and construction materials.

Other terminals also offer facilities for container, Ro-Ro, ferry boat, cruise and LPG operations.

## Agribulk

Facilities for grain and oilseeds are provided by specialised berths which can accommodate both river and Panamax-type vessels.

Silos and warehouses supply a total storage capacity of over 1.8M tonnes and all terminals can trans-ship from barge to vessels with floating cranes.

There are agri-bulk operators located at the port, with five grain terminals owned by leading grain/oilseed traders ADM, Ameropa, Cargill, CHS and COFCO.

The most important stevedoring companies that handle agribulk are TTS Operator, North Star Shipping, United Shipping Agency, Silotrans, Chimpex and Socep.

"Last year there were 10 companies operating in oilseeds and vegetable oils," the Constantza press office told *OFI*. "The largest ones are Canopus Star SRL, Comvex SA, Frial SA, North Star Shipping SRL and United Shipping Agency SRL."

As the traditional partner Eastern and Central European agricultural producers that export their cargoes worldwide and acts a grain hub for Romanian, Serbian and Hungarian crops, Constantza port now also plays a key role in handling Ukrainian grains and oilseeds.

"Ukraine needs maritime ports to export and import goods," the port's press office told *OFI*. "As long as is needed, we will provide services for the cargoes from Ukraine until these flows can be handled again in Ukrainian ports."

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Cargo type	Quantity
Grains	20,418,564
Live animals, sugar beet	78,762
Wood and cork	332,356
Food products, animal feed	254,077
Oilseeds, oleaginous fruits, fats	2,844,551
Solid mineral fuels	2,836,434
Crude oil	7,973,999
Oil products	5,794,011
Iron ore, iron and steel waste, furnace slag	6,162,140
Non-ferrous ores and waste	854,615
Metal products	2,627,922
Cement, quick lime, prefabricated materials for construction	580,728
Raw or processed minerals	1,047,706
Fertilisers (natural and chemical)	3,710,847
Chemical products derived from coal and tar	93,623
Other chemical products	585,112
Cellulose and paper waste	21,236
Equipment, machines	415,033
Metal articles	7,605
Miscellaneous	6,601,585
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63,240,906</b>

Source: D Jarnea, Port of Constantza presentation, IGC webinar, 2022

Table 2: Cargo types handled Port of Constantza, first 10 months of 2022

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cereals	15,261,789	17,420,547	19,616,118	20,393,803	17,891,285	17,963,535	21,329,156	21,893,550	25,174,619
Oilseeds, oleaginous fruits, fats	1,932,875	2,478,251	1,951,341	2,918,535	3,215,811	3,262,034	2,141,252	1,826,407	2,204,820
<b>Total</b>	<b>55,138,057</b>	<b>55,641,910</b>	<b>56,336,772</b>	<b>59,424,831</b>	<b>58,379,154</b>	<b>58,379,154</b>	<b>66,603,292</b>	<b>60,375,799</b>	<b>67,483,435</b>

Table 3: Port of Constantza - handling of cereals and oilseeds, 2013-2021 (tonnes)

Source: Port of Constantza website