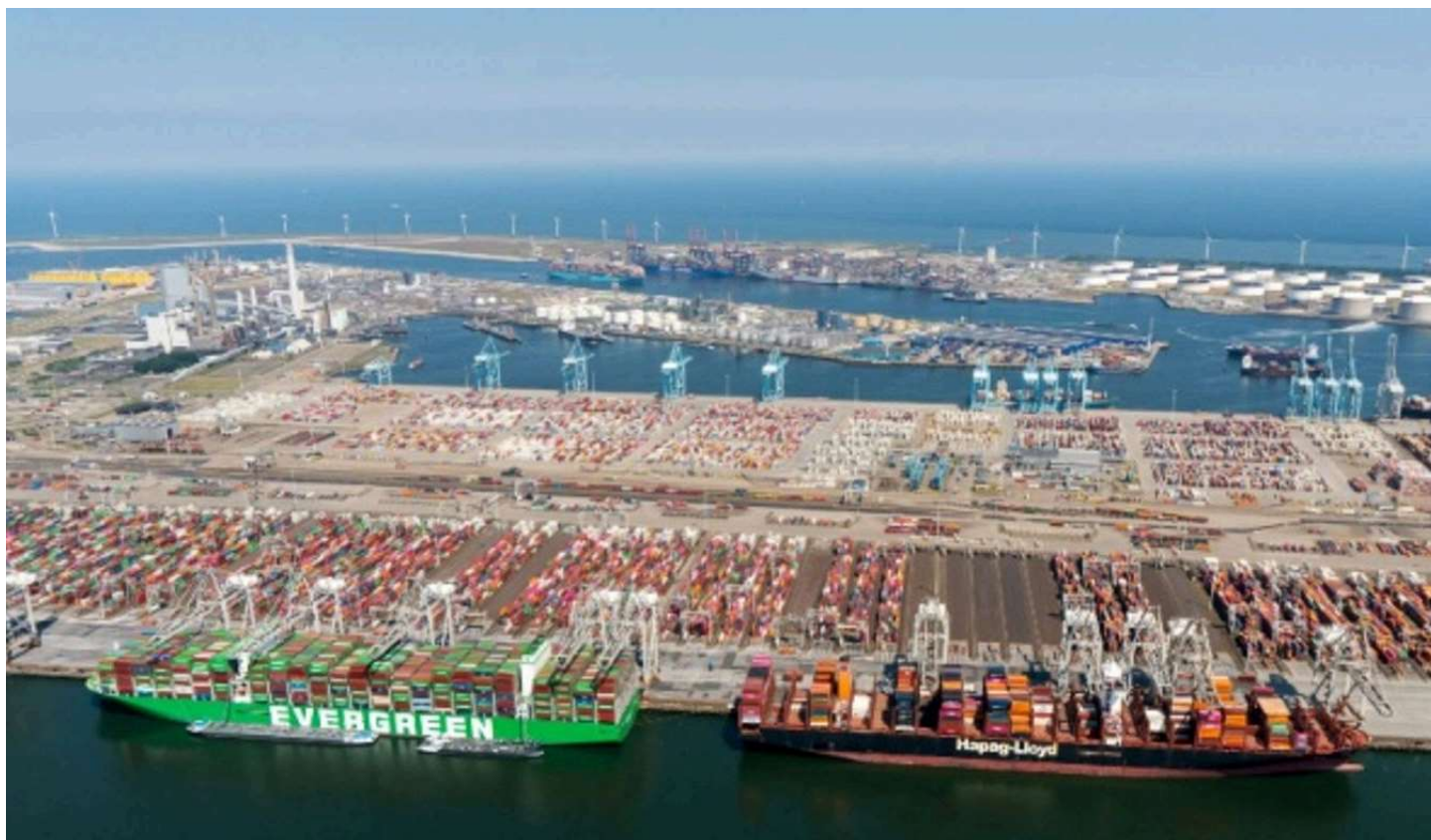


'Solidarity strike' call by Dutch port union gets industry attention



Hutchison Ports' Delta II terminal has been facing a series of work stoppages this month. Photo credit: Aerovista Luchtfotografie / Shutterstock.com.

Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe | Feb 21, 2025, 10:38 AM EST

Correction: The dispute is affecting Hutchison Ports' Delta II terminal and not Hutchison Ports' ECT Delta as first stated.

A call by Dutch union FNV Havens for ports in Europe to refuse to handle ships diverted from Rotterdam's Hutchison Ports-owned Delta II terminal has raised the specter of cross-border "solidarity strikes" that the shipping industry is watching closely. Intermittent strike action has taken place this month at the Rotterdam terminal.

No reports have yet been received of dockworkers elsewhere refusing to handle ships diverted from the terminal, but Tim Seifert, a spokesman for Delta II customer Hapag-

Lloyd, said the carrier was monitoring the situation.

“It is a bit early to evaluate the precise impact of the strike [activity],” Seifert told the *Journal of Commerce* this week. “We are analyzing the situation and looking at a case-by-case basis to see whether it creates sense to deviate vessels or adjust rotations and hope that the parties involved will quickly reach an agreement in their negotiations.”

A spokesperson for Hutchison Ports said labor action was ongoing, but “in the meantime ships are being handled.”

The FNV dispute over severance pay compensation has resulted in a series of walkouts by dockworkers at the Delta II terminal in the Maasvlakte area over the past month, severely disrupting the handling of deep-sea vessels, regional feeder ship calls and inland-bound cargo.

“This compensation is a crucial part of the collective labor agreement that we made on Jan. 30,” Asmae Hajjari, union leader of FNV Havens, said in a statement this week. “The fact that the shareholder of Hutchison Ports now suddenly refuses to provide this guarantee is unacceptable to us.”

Frustrated by the response from the terminal owner, the union is attempting to mobilize support in the region against Hutchison Ports via the European Transport Federation (ETF).

“The union has called on its European colleagues to show solidarity with the dock workers in the port of Rotterdam,” FNV said in the statement. “If ships destined for Hutchison {Delta II} divert to other ports, these ports have been called upon not to handle these ships because of contaminated work.”

Last-minute port omissions

Peter Sand, chief analyst at rate benchmarking platform Xeneta, said carriers were making “last-minute omissions” of Rotterdam but he had not seen proof of solidarity strikes in Europe based on the FNV call, adding that “it will be pretty disastrous” if such strikes were held.

“At a point where record cargo volumes from Asia are reaching the terminals of Europe, the timing of rolling strikes in container terminals across France and now also at the Rotterdam terminal is really bad,” Sand said.

Bart Kuipers, port economist at the Erasmus Centre for Urban, Port and Transport Economics in Rotterdam, said a coordinated approach by European unions was rare

and usually related to a European policy measure, a global problem or a problem with a particular company, such as the Hutchison Ports terminal.

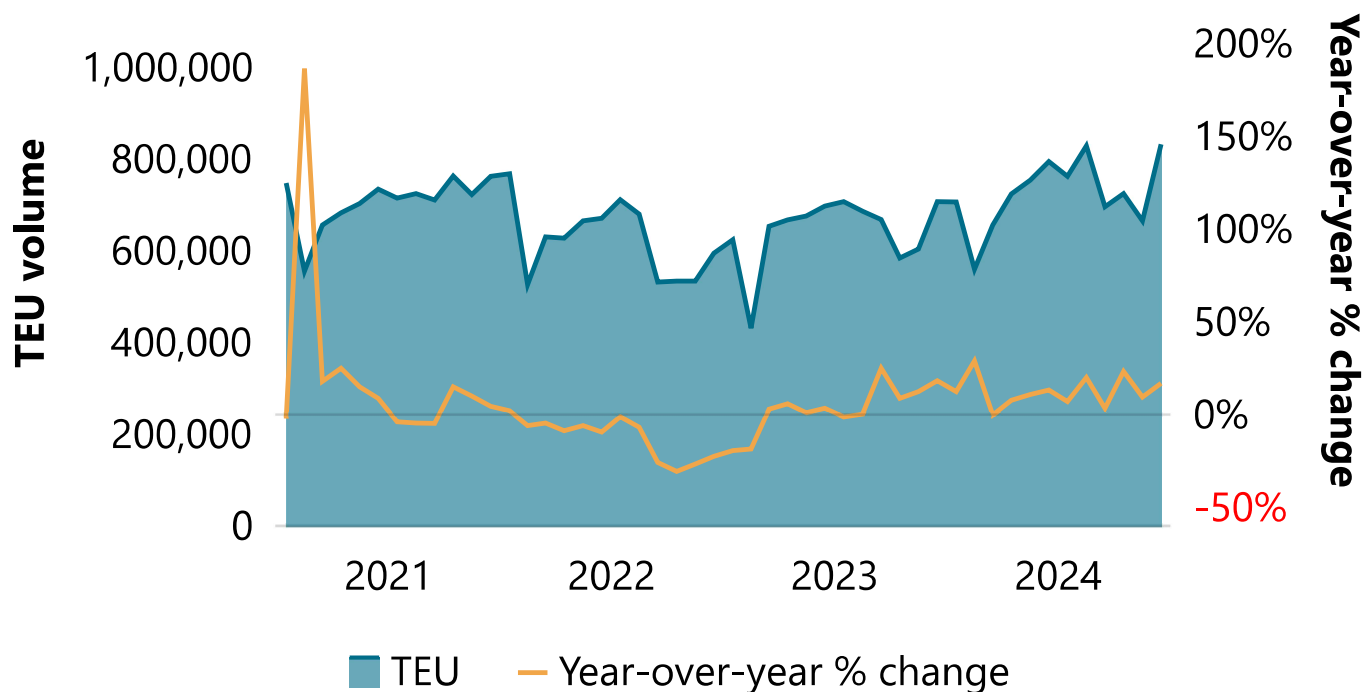
“What is quite normal is that port unions in other ports show their solidarity, so delegations from all over the world can show up at meetings in a certain port,” Kuipers told the *Journal of Commerce* Friday, adding that port unions were organized in a global network and that Hajjari, the leader of the Rotterdam union, was well known in the US.

Data from Container Trades Statistics (CTS) shows China-to-North Europe volumes in December increased 17.6% year over year to a one-month record of 835,000 TEUs. Those containers are currently arriving at Northern European ports, and combined with the bad weather and dockworker strikes, are contributing to congestion.

China to North Europe exports spike to record level in December

Monthly containerized imports to North Europe from China, with year-over-year change

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Source: Container Trades Statistics

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Hanna Stelzel, director of containers at the Port of Rotterdam, said the end of December and the beginning of January were congested due to holiday closures and adverse weather conditions, including a prolonged period of heavy fog.

“Provided that weather conditions remain stable, we anticipate a gradual improvement in the weather-related situation,” she said, although acknowledging the ratio of waiting ships to the number of ships in the port remained high.

The average waiting time at Rotterdam was about 1.2 days on Feb. 15, with eight vessels waiting at anchorage to enter the port, down from 16 on Jan. 18, according to data from S&P Global Commodity Insights. S&P Global is the parent of *Journal of Commerce*.

Kuehne + Nagel said on its SeaExplorer visibility platform that yard congestion in Rotterdam was high at 90% and berths were “fully occupied for the next months.” Rotterdam World Gateway has stopped accepting empty containers into its yard as a precautionary measure, SeaExplorer noted.

Rotterdam handled a total of 13.8 million TEUs in 2024, a 2.8% increase year over year, as rising wages and falling inflation led to increased demand for consumer goods and food, the port said in a statement Friday.

Emergency measures at Antwerp

The bottlenecks in Rotterdam and rolling strikes in French ports through February are adding to the volume being diverted to Antwerp-Bruges, contributing to rising congestion at Europe’s second-largest hub.

Overflowing container yards after persistently high import volume from Asia have forced at least one terminal – Antwerp Gateway – to implement emergency measures to clear the backlogs of boxes.

“Due to extreme yard congestion at Antwerp Gateway Terminal, the terminal has implemented immediate measures to prevent a full operational standstill,” Cosco Shipping told customers in an advisory Thursday.

“Antwerp Gateway will not accept contingency discharge/transshipment for nearby ports, and import deliveries will be prioritized over export shipments,” the carrier added.

Kuehne + Nagel said stacking capacity in the Antwerp terminal was fully utilized and export delivery truck slots were being cut to 30% to prioritize the swift removal of import containers.

Intermodal operator Contargo warned customers this week that the average waiting times for the handling of its barges were 76 hours in Rotterdam and 84 hours in Antwerp, while carriers are reporting feeders experiencing delays of 72 hours.

Port workers in France this month are holding four-hour stoppages on 10 separate days ending Feb. 24 at container ports across the country, severely disrupting handling operations. A 48-hour countrywide strike is planned for Feb. 26–28.

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