

## Labor action, congestion cost Antwerp-Bruges cargo volumes, market share in 2025



*US tariffs on China caused a 3.8% increase in container imports from China to Antwerp in 2025, the European port's CEO said. Photo credit: ZHMURCHAK / Shutterstock.com.*

[Keith Wallis, Asia Special Correspondent](#) | Jan 27, 2026, 2:57 PM EST

Labor woes and congestion in 2025 cost the Port of Antwerp-Bruges both cargo volumes and market share, the head of the Belgian port complex said Tuesday.

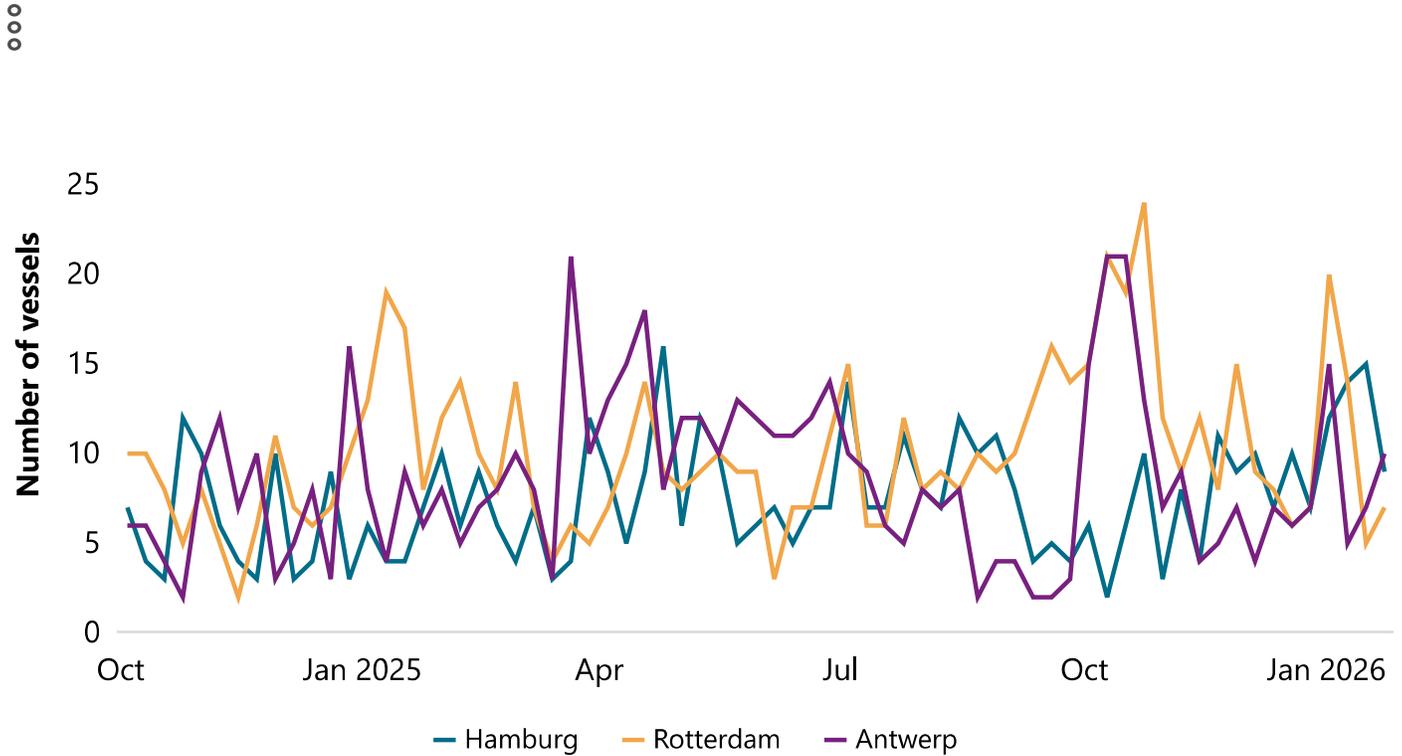
Port CEO Jacques Vandermeiren said Antwerp experienced about 25 days of industrial action last year that resulted in the loss of 2.4 million metric tons of cargo, equivalent to 1% of its annual throughput, as carriers switched to alternative ports.

That left container throughput for the year virtually flat, growing just 0.7% to 13.6 million TEUs.

Vandermeiren pointed out that delays on the inland transport network, especially rail, were even longer, without giving a figure.

“Carriers prefer to go to other ports instead of waiting,” Vandermeiren said during an online results briefing, adding he was unsure if the loss of services and port calls is permanent or temporary. “Twenty-five days is a lot. In my opinion, [a] once in a lifetime [event]. But not a second time.”

### Europe ports vessels waiting to berth (Portcast)



Source: Portcast

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6M	1Y	YTD	MAX
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Container traffic remained the biggest contributor in tonnage terms, accounting for 150 million metric tons of the 267 million metric tons Antwerp-Bruges handled last year. But overall cargo volumes, including dry and liquid cargoes, were down 4% year over year.

The switch in services due to labor unrest and congestion led Antwerp-Bruges to lose market share to other north European ports in the Hamburg-Le Havre region,

Vandermeiren added. He said the port's market share slipped 1.2 percentage points to 29.3%.

Cargo disruption caused by vessel diversions around southern Africa, unpredictable US tariff policies and shifts in carrier alliance memberships, especially the launch of the Maersk/Hapag-Lloyd Gemini Cooperation, also added extra pressure to the logistics chain.

The total number of vessels waiting to berth in Antwerp during the fourth quarter was about 35% higher than the fourth quarter of 2024, according to data from Portcast.

## **China business picks up amid US tariffs**

Vandermeiren pointed out that US tariffs on China caused a 3.8% increase in container imports from China to Antwerp, although containerized exports to China fell 3.3%.

He was hopeful though that stability within the alliances, coupled with the more efficient handling of goods in the port, meant congestion would not be an issue this year.

Vandermeiren was also optimistic that labor relations would improve, especially among the marine pilots who are discussing a new organization.

"The discussions are evolving well in a constructive atmosphere," he said. "So hopefully we will not have those 25 days [of disruption] again."

Vandermeiren said last year's congestion problems increased the urgency for \$6 billion worth of projects on the board, including Antwerp's extra container capacity initiative that aims to add an extra 7.1 million TEUs of capacity. This will be achieved through the construction of additional dock space, including the expansion of the North Sea terminal.

The regional Flemish government has already approved part of the work. Vandermeiren expects construction will start on all the projects this year and in 2027, with completion by 2032–33.

"Without additional capacity, there is a risk that a large part of container traffic will shift to foreign ports," a port spokesperson said.

*Contact Keith Wallis at [keithwallis@hotmail.com](mailto:keithwallis@hotmail.com).*

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