

BLACK SEA: A MERCHANT SHIP SUNK OFF A NATO COAST

On the morning of 23 October 2026 the cargo ship Khoryv, with a mostly Ukrainian crew, was struck by a drone about 13 nautical miles off the Romanian port of Constanța, capsized and sank. One Ukrainian sailor was killed; others were rescued by a passing merchant ship; up to three were reported missing. Romania's President said the ship was "struck by a drone" and blamed Russia's escalation. A day earlier Russia's Ministry of Defence had listed "sea vessels used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" among its targets.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026

1

Ukrainian sailor killed B
Embassy of Ukraine in Romania via Ukraine's foreign ministry; Romanian authorities, 23 Oct 2026

3

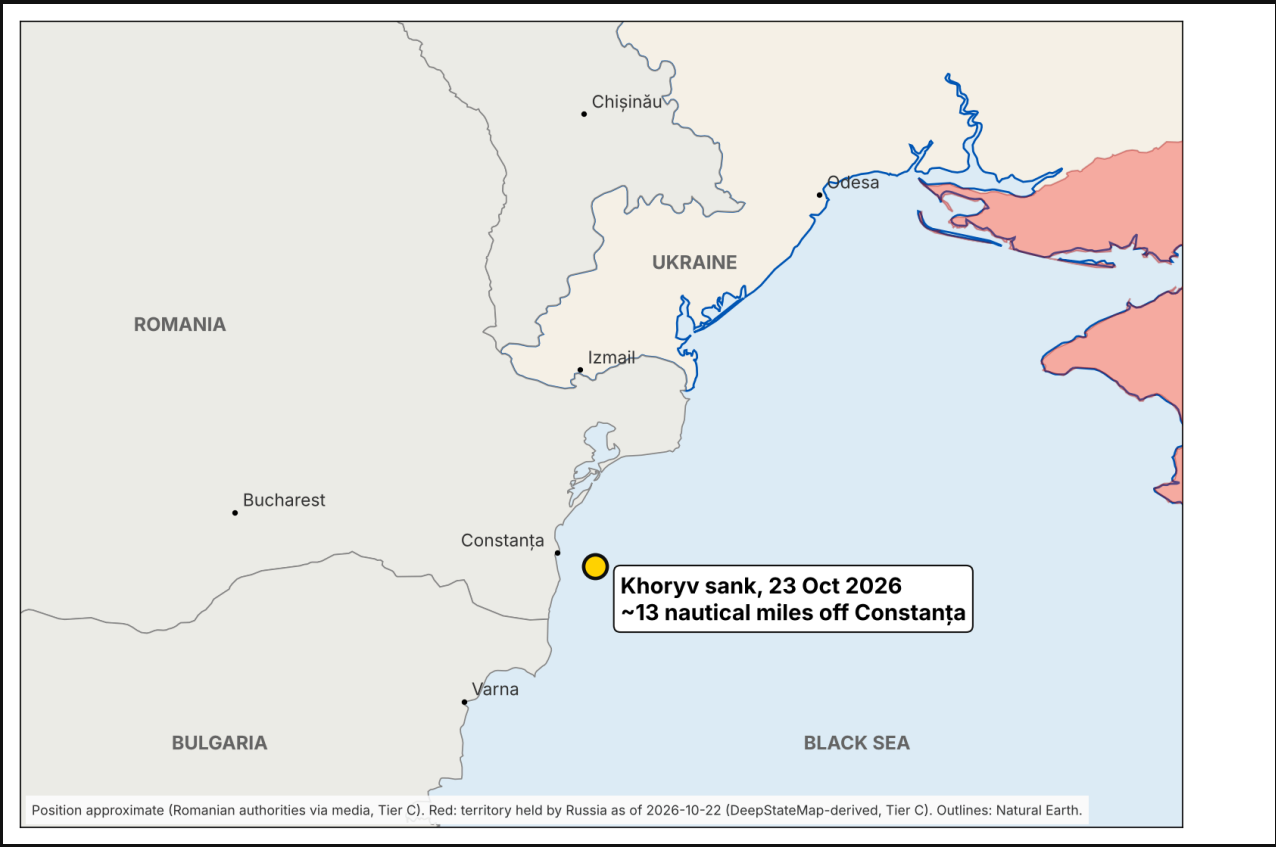
crew missing and searched for — Romania's President, 23 Oct; Ukraine's foreign ministry's first account named none C
President of Romania N. Dan, X, 23 Oct 2026 (foreign government · C); Ukraine's foreign ministry via Interfax-Ukraine

13 · 14

people on board — Romanian Interior Ministry (10 Ukrainians, 3 Azerbaijanis) · Ukraine's foreign ministry C
Romanian Interior Ministry via The Moscow Times; Ukrinform, 23 Oct 2026 · conflicting

~13 nm

from Constanța — near Romanian territorial waters (12 nm) C
Romanian authorities via The Moscow Times, 23 Oct 2026



BOTTOM LINE

A civilian ship sunk next to a NATO member's waters. The Khoryv sent a distress call at about 10:00 local time, capsized and sank near Romanian territorial waters. One Ukrainian sailor was killed (Ukraine's foreign ministry; Romanian authorities, 23 Oct 2026).

Romania names Russia. President Nicușor Dan said the ship was "struck by a drone" and that the attack was "clearly part of the escalation that Russia is carrying out in the context of the war in Ukraine"; the Prime Minister called it "a flagrant violation of international law".

Russia had announced ships as targets. The day before, the Russian Ministry of Defence said it struck "port infrastructure and sea vessels used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" in Odesa region. It has made no statement on the Khoryv.

LEGAL QUALIFICATION IN THREE LAYERS

SINKING OF A CIVILIAN MERCHANT SHIP WITH LOSS OF LIFE — ESTABLISHED (ROMANIAN AND UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES)

DRONE STRIKES ON MERCHANT SHIPPING IN THE WESTERN BLACK SEA, INCL. OFF ROMANIA AND BULGARIA — PATTERN

RUSSIAN ATTACK AND VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW — POSITION (ROMANIA; UKRAINE)

Established. The Khoryv sank off Constanța on 23 October 2026 after an explosion the Romanian President attributes to a drone; one Ukrainian sailor was killed. No body with an international mandate has yet made a finding. **Pattern.** Drone strikes on merchant ships in the western Black Sea, close to NATO coasts, in October 2026; Russia lists "sea vessels" among its targets. **Position.** Romania's President and Prime Minister blame Russia and call the attack a flagrant violation of international law; Ukraine's foreign ministry follows the case through its embassy.

WHAT WE ASK

At the Security Council open debate on maritime security (29 Oct) and the IMO Council (from 2 Nov), name drone strikes on merchant ships in the Black Sea as a threat to freedom of navigation; ask the flag State and Romania to investigate and publish the findings.

Sources: A — Security Council programme (open debate on maritime security, 29 Oct 2026); IMO Council 138th session (from 2 Nov 2026); HRMMU, 16 Oct 2026. B — Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Embassy of Ukraine in Romania (23 Oct 2026, via Ukrinform and UNN). C — President of Romania N. Dan and Prime Minister L. Niculescu (23 Oct 2026); Romanian Interior Ministry (via The Moscow Times, 23 Oct 2026); The Moscow Times, Kyiv Post, Meduza, Bloomberg, Militarnyi, Euromaidan Press (23 Oct 2026); FDD (8 Oct 2026). RU — Interfax (Russia), Russian MoD account (22 Oct 2026); Russian Mission to the UN (9 Oct 2026).



A DISTRESS CALL OFF CONSTANȚA

The Khoryv was a commercial cargo ship under a flag of convenience, crewed mainly by Ukrainians. It went down in daylight within sight of a NATO coastline.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB

VERIFIED RECORD

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Oct 2026	Drone strikes on merchant shipping off the coasts of Romania and Bulgaria raise concern in NATO (independent analysis). C — FDD analysis, 8 Oct 2026
22 Oct 2026	Russian MoD: "port infrastructure and sea vessels used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" in Odesa region hit. RUSSIA SAYS — Interfax (Russia), 22 Oct 2026
23 Oct 2026, ~10:00	The Khoryv sends a distress signal about 13 nautical miles off Constanța; it capsizes and sinks. A passing merchant ship picks up survivors. C — Romanian Interior Ministry via The Moscow Times
23 Oct 2026	President Nicușor Dan: the ship was "struck by a drone and sank near Romanian territorial waters"; Prime Minister: "a flagrant violation of international law". C — Romanian Presidency and Government via The Moscow Times, Kyiv Post
23 Oct 2026	Ukraine's foreign ministry: one Ukrainian sailor killed, four hospitalised incl. the captain, two unhurt; later, three Ukrainian crew missing and searched for. B — Ukrinform; UNN, 23 Oct 2026
29 Oct 2026	Security Council high-level open debate on maritime security and freedom of navigation. A — Hub calendar
2 Nov 2026	IMO Council, 138th session. A — Hub calendar

WHAT IS ON THE RECORD SO FAR

Romanian authorities report a distress signal at about 10:00 local time on 23 October, about 13 nautical miles from Constanța; the Interior Ministry said the ship "sustained major damage and capsized".

Romania's President said the ship was "struck by a drone". No technical report on the weapon has been published.

Ukraine's foreign ministry said the ship was sailing from a Turkish port; the destination and cargo have not been published.

PHOTO SLOT · DRAFT

The rescue operation off Constanța — Romanian Naval Forces or Romanian emergency services with an open licence, with credit and link

Photo slot · no openly licensed image found as of 24 Oct · no images of the dead

WHO WAS ON BOARD

One Ukrainian sailor was killed. Ukraine's foreign ministry reported four Ukrainians in hospital, among them the captain, and two unhurt; later the same day it reported three Ukrainian crew missing and the search continuing.

Romanian figures, as reported by The Moscow Times: 13 on board (10 Ukrainians, 3 Azerbaijanis), 10 picked up by another merchant ship, one of them dead, three missing. Ukrinform reported 14 on board.

All figures are preliminary and conflict; every variant is shown on page 3. The Hub does not name the crew.

Sources: A — Security Council programme (open debate on maritime security, 29 Oct 2026); IMO Council 138th session (from 2 Nov 2026); HRMMU, 16 Oct 2026. B — Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Embassy of Ukraine in Romania (23 Oct 2026, via Ukrinform and UNN). C — President of Romania N. Dan and Prime Minister L. Niculescu (23 Oct 2026); Romanian Interior Ministry (via The Moscow Times, 23 Oct 2026); The Moscow Times, Kyiv Post, Meduza, Bloomberg, Militarnyi, Euromaidan Press (23 Oct 2026); FDD (8 Oct 2026). RU — Interfax (Russia), Russian MoD account (22 Oct 2026); Russian Mission to the UN (9 Oct 2026).



TWO GOVERNMENTS ON THE RECORD; THE UN NOT YET

One day after the sinking the record rests on Romanian and Ukrainian official statements reported by the media. No UN body has yet reported on it. The figures conflict and are all shown.

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ESTABLISHED BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

No IMO, Secretary-General's spokesperson or Security Council statement specific to the Khoryv found as of 24 Oct 2026. A

Security Council high-level open debate on maritime security and freedom of navigation scheduled for 29 Oct 2026. A

IMO Council, 138th session, from 2 Nov 2026. A

HRMMU, 16 Oct 2026: 2,433 civilian casualties in Ukraine in September 2026 — for context on the scale of attacks. A

UKRAINIAN INVESTIGATION

Ukraine's foreign ministry and Embassy in Romania, 23 Oct 2026: one Ukrainian killed; four hospitalised incl. the captain; two unhurt. B

Ukraine's foreign ministry, later 23 Oct 2026: three Ukrainian crew missing; search and rescue under way; a consular officer in contact with Romanian authorities. B

No statement by Ukraine's Navy or prosecutor on the weapon found as of 24 Oct 2026. B

— B

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS

Romanian President N. Dan and Prime Minister L. Niculescu, 23 Oct 2026 (official statements of a foreign government, reported by The Moscow Times, Kyiv Post, Meduza). C

Romanian Interior Ministry via The Moscow Times: 13 on board, 10 rescued (1 dead), 3 missing; Comoros flag. C

Ukrinform, 23 Oct 2026: 14 on board; Cayman Islands flag. C

Bloomberg, Euromaidan Press, Militarnyi, 23 Oct 2026. C

THE NUMBERS — EVERY SOURCE, AS PUBLISHED		
Figure	What it counts	Source · date · tier
1	killed — a Ukrainian sailor	Ukraine's foreign ministry; Romanian authorities
0 · 3	missing — the foreign ministry's first account · Romania's President and Romanian rescuers later the same day	Interfax-Ukraine; President N. Dan; Romanian maritime rescue via Sofia Globe
13 · 14	on board	Romanian Interior Ministry; Ukrinform
4 · 9	survivors — hospitalised Ukrainians (foreign ministry) · survivors picked up alive (Romanian account)	Ukrinform; The Moscow Times
Comoros	flag State — Romania's President and Ukraine's foreign ministry both name the Comoros; one early report (Ukrinform) gave the Cayman Islands	President of Romania; foreign ministry via Interfax-Ukraine · C/B
~13 nm	distance from Constanța	Romanian authorities

PHOTO SLOT · DRAFT

Romanian rescue services at work, open licence

Photo slot · no openly licensed image yet

The number on board conflicts (13 Romanian, 14 Ukrainian), the flag is now consistent (Comoros), and the number missing differs between early and later Romanian and Ukrainian accounts and media reports; the Hub shows every variant until the flag State or Romania publishes a final account. Statements of the Romanian Government are a foreign government's official position and are marked Tier C here, not A.

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CASE FILE

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ATTRIBUTION BY A NATO GOVERNMENT

No suspect has been named. What is on the record is Romania's attribution, and Russia's own list of targets the day before. The table separates what is case-specific from what is general.

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Who	Role in the case	Proceedings	Sanctions · courts
Drone operator and unit not identified	Struck the Khoryv off Constanța, per the Romanian President	No investigation result published as of 24 Oct	—
Russian Ministry of Defence	Listed "sea vessels used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" among targets on 22 Oct	Interfax (Russia), 22 Oct 2026	RU
Government of Romania	Attributes the attack to Russia's escalation	Romanian Presidency and Government, 23 Oct 2026	C
Flag State to be confirmed	Responsible for the marine casualty investigation under the SOLAS/IMO Casualty Investigation Code	—	—

CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Romanian authorities lead search and rescue in their region.

The flag State is to investigate the marine casualty; Romania as coastal State may take part.

Ukraine's prosecutors may open proceedings over the death of a Ukrainian citizen.

THE RUSSIAN STATE'S OWN ACTS

Russian MoD, 22 Oct 2026: "objects of port infrastructure and sea vessels used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" hit in Odesa region.

No Russian statement on the Khoryv found as of 24 Oct 2026.

Russia has in the past called Romania's drone protests "baseless and contrived" (2025).

Attribution rests on the Romanian President's statement; no technical evidence has been published. Use "Romania blames Russia" until a technical finding is available.

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"VESSELS USED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE AFU" — A MERCHANT CREW IN THE SEA

Russia has said nothing about the Khoryv. Its statement of the day before claims that ships it strikes serve Ukraine's armed forces. The claim is tested here against what is known.

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RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENCE · AS REPORTED BY INTERFAX, 22 OCT 2026

"Sea vessels used in the interests of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were hit."

Interfax (Russia), 22 Oct 2026

VASSILY NEBENZIA · PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF RUSSIA, SECURITY COUNCIL, 9 OCT 2026

"Our targets have been and remain only military facilities and infrastructure."

Russian Mission to the UN, statement of 9 Oct 2026

A BLANKET LABEL FOR CIVILIAN SHIPPING

Merchant ships are civilian objects unless they make an effective contribution to military action; no evidence has been offered for any ship. The Khoryv was a commercial cargo ship with a civilian crew of Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis (Romanian and Ukrainian authorities, 23 Oct 2026).

What the claim concedes: That Russia treats merchant ships trading with Ukraine as targets.

NOT CONSISTENT WITH A SUNKEN MERCHANT SHIP

A merchant ship sank off Constanța after a drone strike, killing a civilian sailor (Romanian President; Ukraine's foreign ministry, 23 Oct 2026).

What the claim concedes: That the law requires attacks to be limited to military objectives.

FAIR TO SAY

Whether the Khoryv was struck by a Russian drone has not been technically established; Romania's attribution is political and preliminary.

The ship's cargo and destination have not been published; the Hub does not know whether it was bound for a Ukrainian port.

Russia's statement of 22 Oct concerns Odesa region; it does not mention waters off Romania.

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MERCHANT SHIPS AND FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION

Merchant vessels are civilian objects. Attacking them, or making the sea unsafe for neutral shipping, engages the law of armed conflict at sea and the law of the sea.

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ESTABLISHED — BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

The Khoryv sank off Constanța on 23 October 2026; one Ukrainian sailor was killed (Ukrainian and Romanian authorities).

No body with an international mandate has yet made a finding (as of 24 Oct 2026).

Security Council and IMO meetings on maritime security fall on 29 October and 2 November 2026.

PATTERN — WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

Drone strikes on merchant ships in the western Black Sea near Romanian and Bulgarian coasts, October 2026.

Russian MoD statements listing "sea vessels" among its targets.

Strikes on Ukraine's Danube and Odesa ports.

POSITION — UKRAINE'S QUALIFICATION

Romania: "clearly part of the escalation that Russia is carrying out" (President); "a flagrant violation of international law" (Prime Minister).

Ukraine follows the case through its embassy in Romania; the attack on a civilian crew is treated as a Russian crime.

THE RULES THAT APPLY

Additional Protocol I arts. 48, 49(3) and 52 and the San Remo Manual (1994) rules 40–41 and 59–60: merchant vessels are civilian objects unless they make an effective contribution to military action.

UNCLOS arts. 87 and 58: freedom of navigation on the high seas and in the exclusive economic zone.

Rome Statute art. 8(2)(b)(i)–(ii): intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects — war crimes.

WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

The weapon type and its launch point.

The final number of dead and missing.

Whether the Comoros, as flag State, opens an investigation.

The ship's cargo and destination.

WHAT WE ASK

Cite the sinking — with attribution. On 23 October 2026 a drone struck the merchant ship Khoryv off Constanța, Romania; it sank and a Ukrainian sailor was killed. Romania's President blamed Russia's escalation.

Raise it on 29 October. At the Security Council open debate on maritime security, name drone strikes on merchant shipping in the Black Sea as a threat to freedom of navigation.

Bring it to the IMO. Ask the IMO Council (from 2 Nov) to record attacks on merchant ships in the Black Sea and to support the flag State's investigation.

Protect the crews. Ask flag and coastal States to publish their findings and to coordinate protection for civilian shipping on the routes to Ukrainian ports.

Sources: A — Security Council programme (open debate on maritime security, 29 Oct 2026); IMO Council 138th session (from 2 Nov 2026); HRMMU, 16 Oct 2026. B — Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Embassy of Ukraine in Romania (23 Oct 2026, via Ukrinform and UNN). C — President of Romania N. Dan and Prime Minister L. Niculescu (23 Oct 2026); Romanian Interior Ministry (via The Moscow Times, 23 Oct 2026); The Moscow Times, Kyiv Post, Meduza, Bloomberg, Militarnyi, Euromaidan Press (23 Oct 2026); FDD (8 Oct 2026). RU — Interfax (Russia), Russian MoD account (22 Oct 2026); Russian Mission to the UN (9 Oct 2026).

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