



Pay attention to bunker declarations before entering Turkish ports

Turkish customs may consider any excess bunkers found onboard compared to the quantities declared as "smuggling". This can result in delays, fines, and even criminal charges against members of a vessel's crew.

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Over the years, our Turkish correspondents have warned vessel operators that customs officers may unexpectedly and randomly show up to inspect vessels in Turkish ports, particularly looking for discrepancies between declared bunker quantities and the measurements taken by the attending officers. Our article "[Turkey - a case of undeclared bunkers](#)" describes a Gard Member's own experience back in 2020.

Unannounced inspections are increasing

In November 2024, our correspondent Kalimbassieris Maritime warned that the trend of random customs inspections is once again on the rise, and that any discovery of more bunkers onboard than the amount declared may be treated as a criminal act under the Turkish Anti-Smuggling Law No. 5607 Article 3.

The correspondent adds that once a bunker discrepancy has been established by customs, the authorities will order the confiscation of the smuggled goods, which in practical terms means that the vessel's surplus bunkers will have to be discharged before departure. Furthermore, the person who smuggled goods into the country, i.e. the Master and/or Chief Officer, may face criminal charges and risk being sentenced to several years in prison plus monetary sanctions.

Please refer to Kalimbassieris' updated circular "[Turkey – enforcement for misdeclaration of bunkers onboard](#)" for more detailed information on the current situation, as well as the potential practical and legal implications, of bunker discrepancies in Turkish ports.

Recommendations

Operators and masters of vessels bound for Turkish ports are reminded to be particularly vigilant and attentive when completing the customs declaration. Specifically, the fuel oil remaining onboard must be carefully calculated and measured before being declared to Turkish customs. It is also important that all relevant crew members are made aware that undeclared bunkers is an issue in Turkish ports and that a discrepancy in the figures can have serious consequences for the crew.

All the required documents should be prepared in advance, before arriving in port, and double-checked that all is in order. It is critical to ensure that all consumables onboard, *including bunkers*, have been correctly listed in the proper declaration form. The accuracy of all numbers is crucial!

In the unfortunate event that a calculation error leads to the vessel's Master and/or Chief Officer being charged with smuggling of petroleum products, the correspondent recommends that they clearly state, both verbally and in writing, that the excess bunkers was not the result of a deliberate act.

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