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Swedish Court Clears Transfer of Detained Cargo Ship to Ukraine

June 05, 2026



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A Swedish court has ruled that a cargo vessel detained in the Baltic Sea earlier this year can be handed over to Ukraine, which suspects the ship was involved in transporting grain from Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories, Reuters reported Friday.

The vessel, Caffa, was detained by Swedish police and coast guard authorities off the country's southern coast in March after it was found to be sailing under a false flag and in violation of maritime safety regulations. Authorities also determined the ship was unseaworthy because of its technical condition.

The case is one of several efforts by European authorities to scrutinize vessels suspected of helping move goods from Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories or circumvent sanctions imposed on Moscow since the invasion.

"The court confirmed that the seizure of the vessel Caffa was lawful and that it may be transferred to Ukraine," public prosecutor Hakan Larsson told Reuters.

The vessel's owner, Caffa Shipping Limited, had challenged the detention. The company now has three weeks to appeal the ruling, Larsson said.

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Ukraine requested the vessel's transfer as part of an investigation into alleged war crimes involving the appropriation and removal of property from territories seized by Russia, according to the court.

The court said such actions could also constitute war crimes under Swedish law, creating a legal basis for transferring the ship and related evidence to Ukrainian authorities.

Kyiv has repeatedly accused Moscow of exporting grain and other agricultural products from occupied Ukrainian territories. Ukrainian officials say Russian-controlled companies subsequently purchased produce from local farmers at heavily discounted prices before exporting it abroad.

Russia has rejected accusations that it has stolen Ukrainian grain.

According to Swedish police, most of the ship's 11 crew members are Russian nationals.

Ship-tracking service MarineTraffic lists the 96-meter (315-foot) cargo vessel as sailing under the flag of Guinea. However, the court's ruling indicated that information about the vessel's registration was inaccurate.

The ship departed Casablanca in February and is currently located in the Swedish port of Trelleborg, according to MarineTraffic data.

The case comes as Nordic countries have stepped up scrutiny of vessels operating in the Baltic Sea. In January, several countries in the region said they were prepared to stop and inspect ships sailing without a valid national registration or using false flags, part of broader efforts to crack down on Russia's so-called "shadow fleet."

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