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Ukrainian attacks on Tuapse: a threat to Russia's fuel sector and the environment

Filip Rudnik, Miłosz Bartosiewicz

Since mid-April 2026, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have attacked Russian energy infrastructure facilities in Tuapse, Krasnodar Krai, on at least four occasions: 16, 20 and 28 April, and 1 May. These drone strikes triggered prolonged fires at an oil refinery and an oil terminal owned by the state-controlled company Rosneft. The attacks have also caused an environmental disaster: black rain mixed with oil particles and soot has fallen across the area, while leaking crude oil and petroleum products have contaminated the Tuapse River and nearby stretches of coastline. Harmful smog, which blanketed large parts of the city, has been observed along the entire Russian Black Sea coast and further inland. As Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian territory pose a domestic political risk for the Kremlin, the government has attempted to conceal the scale of the damage.

The strikes on Tuapse form part of Ukraine's broader campaign aimed at paralysing Russia's energy and fuel sector. Should the frequency and effectiveness of these attacks be sustained, the sector's difficulties could deepen significantly. Further Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian territory – which have affected around one third of Russia's regions since early May – may also contribute to deteriorating public sentiment and further erode support for continuing the war. At the same time, Moscow may seek to exploit the resulting environmental damage for propaganda purposes directed against Ukraine.

Commentary

- **The Russian authorities were slow to respond to the disaster and attempted to conceal its scale.** Vladimir Putin did not address the issue until 28 April, when he downplayed the threat, citing information provided by the Governor of Krasnodar Krai, Veniamin Kondratyev. A state of emergency was declared only at the *okrug* (municipal) level. Emergency Situations Minister Aleksandr Kurenkov, who visited Tuapse, described the measures taken as insufficient, although the regional operational headquarters' Telegram channel later edited his remarks. In an interview published on 29 April on the 'Anapa Region' website, the governor assured the public that the situation was under control and encouraged tourists to visit Krasnodar Krai. The text was quickly removed and the authorities attributed its publication to a hacker attack. Security services reportedly threatened residents documenting the fires, while a female journalist covering the environmental disaster was detained and volunteers assisting with cleanup efforts faced obstruction from the authorities. At the same time, a surge in pro-Kremlin bot activity was

observed online, aimed at downplaying the severity of the threat and emphasising the supposed effectiveness of Russian air defences.

- **Although the exact scale of the damage remains unknown, the attacks have paralysed operations at the facilities, hindering their ability to export fuel.** Satellite imagery indicates that a significant portion of the storage depots has been destroyed, while the repeated nature of Ukrainian strikes has made it impossible to carry out the necessary repairs. The city itself has also sustained damage. Tuapse is an important logistics hub for the transport of Russian petroleum products: in 2025, around 9.6 million tonnes of fuel were exported from the port, accounting for approximately 8.5% of Russia's total fuel exports. Fuel products are supplied there from the local refinery and from other Rosneft facilities, including those in Samara and Saratov. The attacks on the terminal have made it necessary to redirect fuel shipments to other ports, primarily Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, which has itself also been targeted by Ukrainian strikes.
- **Should Ukraine maintain the current pace and scale of its attacks on energy infrastructure, Russia's oil refining output is likely to decline further.** Since early March, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have carried out at least 40 strikes targeting Russian refineries, oil export terminals, pumping stations and related infrastructure. In some cases, these attacks have forced facilities to suspend operations (see: '*Ukrainian attacks on Russia's oil export infrastructure*'). According to Bloomberg, Russian crude oil refining fell to around 4.7 million barrels per day in April this year – 0.5 million fewer than a year earlier and below the 4.9 million barrels recorded in September 2025, when output declined following intensive Ukrainian attacks over the summer. Continued strikes may result in fuel shortages in Russian regions during the summer months. If accompanied by attacks on transport and transmission infrastructure, they could also force Russia to reduce oil production due to difficulties in storing and exporting crude oil.

- **The strikes on Tuapse may have serious environmental consequences, which Russia is likely to exploit for propaganda purposes.** The polluted stretch of coastline currently extends for around 70 km. An oil slick covering 7,000–10,000 square metres has been detected offshore near the port. By 7 May, around 20,500 cubic metres of contaminated soil had been collected. Smog, posing a risk of acid rain, has been observed along virtually the entire Black Sea coast of Russia – excluding occupied Crimea and Sevastopol – from Anapa to Sochi, and has also reached the inland cities of Armavir and Stavropol. According to some experts, the disaster may have more severe consequences than the spill of heavy fuel oil from two Russian tankers at the turn of 2024 and 2025 (see: '*Environmental disaster in the Black Sea: Russia's disregard for regulatory standards*'). Other Ukrainian attacks, such as those targeting oil and fuel infrastructure facilities in Perm on 29 and 30 April, have also caused environmental damage. Russia has sought to instrumentalise these incidents for political purposes: Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova has accused Ukraine of destroying the natural environment, while criticising the European Union and NATO for remaining silent on the issue.