

Situation Report:
January 9, 2026

Port & Inland Disruption from Severe Winter Weather in Europe



Europe: Port & Inland Logistics Disruption From Severe Winter Weather, Storm Impacts, And Localised Non-Weather Shocks

● 1. Executive Summary - What Matters Now

Key judgments (next 72 hours):

- 1. North European gateways are in a “reduced productivity + constrained hinterland evacuation” mode** rather than a uniform “full shutdown.” Carriers and forwarders explicitly flag Hamburg and Rotterdam as the most operationally stressed nodes, with spillover to Antwerp and the North of France.
- 2. The main bottleneck is inland evacuation (rail + trucking), not quay productivity.** Frozen rail switches, rail cancellations, and road delays are increasing yard congestion and extending dwell times, which slows terminals further (a reinforcing loop).
- 3. Storm Goretti adds a second shock-layer** (high winds/snow, power outages, rail suspensions) that raises the probability of stop–start operations and temporary closures in Channel-facing corridors (Normandy/Le Havre; UK).
- 4. In Belgium, tractor blockades in/near Zeebrugge** are causing a traffic standstill risk precisely when shippers may try to reroute away from Hamburg/Rotterdam.
- 5. Secondary disruption in Iberia:** an IT/customs system failure is constraining container unloading and pickup at Leixões and Lisbon, creating localized congestion and reducing Europe’s flexibility for diversion.

Most likely operational pattern: intermittent restrictions, appointment volatility, and vessel/rail schedule slippage.

Recovery pace: determined by inland networks normalisation (not just weather easing).

2. Situation Overview

Northern and Western Europe are under **compounded winter disruption**:

Baseline winter constraints (snow/ice, sub-zero conditions) are reducing terminal productivity and slowing road/rail operations across North Europe. Forwarder and carrier advisories describe broad impacts across trucking, rail, and barge with reduced handling slots and delays at terminals/depots.

Storm Goretti is impacting the UK and northern France with high winds, snow, and power outages. Major electricity loss in France and travel/rail disruption in both France and the UK.

Operational result: ports may remain technically “open,” but **effective throughput falls** because yard operations slow. Containers cannot be evacuated inland at normal rates, driving yard density and gate congestion.

3. Direct Disruption: Port & Logistics Nodes

A) Hamburg (Germany): Primary North Range stress node

Observed/Reported disruptions

- **Hamburg terminal productivity is “significantly reduced”** with truck delays from icy roads and rail disruptions from frozen track switches, creating yard congestion and longer waiting times for import/export cargo.
- **Forwarders report major operational suspensions:** Eurogate suspended waterside and landside (from Jan 3) and HHLA terminals experienced partial resumption with reduced speed. CTT rail/truck movements suspended, waterside moving slowly.
- **Carrier guidance anticipates vessel omissions and discharge shifts to Wilhelmshaven/Bremerhaven.** Cargo for Hamburg may require inland repositioning.

Constraint diagnosis

- **Hard constraint:** frozen rail infrastructure + truck delays.
- **System constraint:** rising yard density increases cycle times (terminal congestion feedback loop).

Immediate implication

- Hamburg is at elevated risk of becoming a network amplifier: once vessel windows slip, schedule reliability degrades across entire North Europe strings.

B) Rotterdam (Netherlands): High-impact gateway with inland “choke sensitivity”

Observed/Reported disruptions

- **Severe winter weather is affecting Rotterdam terminal and inland networks;** carriers note trucking delays, rail disruptions, and yard congestion.
- **Forwarders report ECT Delta halted operations** and advised truck drivers not to approach the terminal (halt “until further notice” in that update window).
- **Hillebrand Gori reports significant backlogs at terminals** including ECT, RWG, and Euromax. Closures vary by terminal, delays expected across North Europe. Inland terminals and barge/rail/trucking also delayed.

Constraint diagnosis

- **Terminal productivity constraint:** weather-driven safety/handling limits.
- **Dominant constraint:** hinterland evacuation (rail + truck), which governs yard density and gate availability.

C) Antwerp (Belgium): Operating but exposed to inland and “access disruption”

Observed/Reported disruptions

- Terminals in Antwerp and Rotterdam are experiencing slower operations and may be suspended. Delays expected for vessels/shipments through these locations.
- Kuehne+Nagel report that trucking has slower processing in Antwerp alongside Rotterdam, inland disruptions are prominent.
- Hillebrand Gori flags Antwerp/Rotterdam delays and backlogs since Jan 6 (with terminal-level variability).

Non-weather compounding constraint (critical)

- Zeebrugge access disruption: Port of Antwerp-Bruges reports tractor blockades causing traffic standstill at/near Zeebrugge access points (A11 area) and advises avoiding the area. This is a major lands-side constraint even if quays remain operational.

D) Le Havre / Normandy (France): Storm-driven closure risk

- Hillebrand Gori reports the Port of Le Havre planned to close around 18:00 due to Storm Gorette and could remain closed the next day. Significant delays expected in container loading and departures.
- Storm Gorette has caused broad disruption in northern France including power outages and rail impacts (Reuters).

Constraint diagnosis

- Wind-driven safety restrictions (pilotage/berthing, crane ops) and power/transport interruptions increase stop-start operations.

E) Iberian nodes (Portugal): Non-weather operational choke

- Hillebrand Gori reports IT/customs system failures preventing normal unloading/pickup at Leixões and Lisbon, reducing container pickup speed, causing congestion, and limiting capacity for export reception.

Why it matters

- In a North Range disruption, shippers can look for alternative routings; Iberian congestion reduces “relief valve” capacity and can shift delays deeper into the network.

4. Inland Logistics Nodes: Where the system is constrained

Rail

- Frozen track switches and cancellations drive disruption around Hamburg and key NL–DE corridors.
- Rail unreliability increases yard dwell, which reduces port crane productivity because stacking/reshuffles increase.

Trucking

- Icy roads and congestion extend turn times and reduce effective trucking capacity (fewer cycles/day). Carriers and forwarders emphasize longer waiting times and delays.
- Zeebrugge blockades create a **hard access stop** (not just slower speeds).

Barge / Inland waterways

- Multiple updates emphasize barge impacts as part of “all modes disrupted” conditions (even when not giving waterway specifics).

5. Country & Corridor Impacts

Netherlands

- Rotterdam disruption affects maritime flow and inland distribution, with rail links (e.g., Rotterdam–Venlo / Rotterdam–Duisburg referenced in carrier advisories) under stress.
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Germany

- Hamburg is the most acute node: terminal productivity reduction and inland constraints. Diversions to Wilhelmshaven/Bremerhaven may create congestion migration.
 - **“Winter storm ‘Elli’ is creating a second-layer disruption in Germany.** Deutsche Bahn halted long-distance services in northern Germany (including the Hanover hub) warning of cancellations/delays into Saturday, tightening inland evacuation for North Range ports. Road capacity is impaired: closure of Hamburg’s Köhlbrandbrücke due to snow/ice and truck-related blockages on major motorways. Eurogate reports North Sea terminal operations are currently running but may face restrictions from heavy snow clearance and wind limits on cranes; the impact of Elli remains uncertain and dynamic.”
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Belgium

- Antwerp may serve as partial alternative routing, but Zeebrugge access disruption sharply limits flexibility and can impede coastal/inland movements.
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France / UK (Channel arc)

- Storm Goretti materially increases the likelihood of closures/delays (Le Havre; rail disruptions; power outages; UK transport disruption).
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Iberia

- Portugal’s IT/customs issue creates a localized bottleneck that may become more visible if shippers attempt southbound diversion strategies.

6. Industry Exposure: Who is hit first, how it cascades

Most exposed in the next 7–14 days (highest sensitivity to delay and variability):

- **Automotive/industrial manufacturing (Germany/Benelux):** risk of delay and variability (missed cutoffs, out-of-sequence parts). Hamburg disruptions/constraints problematic.
- **Chemicals and process industries** often rely on steady inbound feedstocks and outbound export cadence. Yard congestion and appointment volatility increase demurrage/detention and disrupt tank/container positioning.
- **Perishables/temperature-controlled cargo:** high spoilage risk if containers sit in yards or miss feeder connections. Road constraints (Zeebrugge) raise last-mile uncertainty.
- **Retail / consumer goods:** impact manifests as DC variability and store-level availability issues if delays persist beyond a few days.

Companies / operators explicitly referenced in current reporting

- **Maersk:** advisory highlights ongoing disruptions, recommends alternative ports, and expects potential vessel omissions/discharge shifts.
- **Hapag-Lloyd:** warns of slowdowns and potential temporary suspensions across North Europe terminals.
- **Terminal operators referenced via forwarder updates:** Eurogate, HHLA; plus Rotterdam terminals such as ECT and others noted by forwarders.

7. Bottlenecks & Constraints: the “Physics” of Disruption

1. **Inland evacuation capacity (rail and trucking)** is the binding constraint. Without evacuation, yards densify and quay productivity drops.
2. **Frozen rail switches** reduce reliability and throughput on key corridors, pushing volume onto roads also constrained by ice/snow.
3. **Terminal operating restrictions** (slowdowns, temporary suspensions) create vessel bunching and missed berth windows.
4. **Access disruption as a hard stop (Zeebrugge blockades)** turns a “delay problem” into a “no-flow problem” at a critical time.
5. **Non-weather IT failure (Portugal)** demonstrates that congestion can also be “administrative/systemic,” not just physical, reducing reroute options.

8. Cascading Risks and Second-Order Effects

Near-term (days):

- **Vessel omissions, discharge swaps, and schedule reshuffling:** cargo for Hamburg discharged at Wilhelmshaven/Bremerhaven adds lead time and inland complexity.
- **Gate/appointment whiplash:** shippers miss pickup windows, pushing dwell higher and tightening capacity further.

Medium-term (1–3 weeks):

- **Equipment imbalance** (containers/chassis/reefers) as inland evacuation slows and empties don't reposition fast enough. Exporters face "available box" constraints.
- **Cost cascade:** detention/demurrage, storage, re-handling, premium trucking, and "recovery-mode" surcharges as terminals/rail try to clear backlogs.
- **Congestion migration:** diversion from Hamburg/Rotterdam into alternates can saturate those nodes, especially if inland connections are also weather-affected.

Systemic (tail risk):

- A multi-node event (Hamburg + Rotterdam + Channel storm closures + Zeebrugge access blocks) can create **regional synchronization of delays**, where there is no "clean" relief port, only different constraint profiles.

9. What to Monitor: Leading Indicators (Next 72 Hours)

Operational indicators

- **Hamburg:** terminal productivity statements, rail service restoration pace, and whether vessel omissions expand.
- **Rotterdam:** resumption stability at terminals and consistency of rail corridors (NL–DE).
- **Antwerp/Zeebrugge:** if access disruptions persist or recur (blockade announcements).
- **Le Havre:** storm-related closures and reopening timing.
- **Portugal:** customs/IT recovery signals; yard space constraints easing.

10. Recommended Actions: Practical Mitigation

Immediate (0–72h)

- **Segment cargo by criticality** (production-stopping, customer-penalty, temperature-sensitive, standard) and allocate scarce inland capacity accordingly.
- **Assume Hamburg variability:** pre-authorise discharge-at-alternate scenarios and confirm whether direct pickup at Wilhelmshaven/Bremerhaven is feasible for Hamburg-bound cargo (avoid double-handling/returns).
- **Pre-book trucking/rail redundancies** if possible; treat “confirmed slot” as perishable.
- **Avoid Zeebrugge access choke** if feasible; consider alternate dray routing and time windows until blockade risk clears.

Next 1–2 weeks

- **Re-forecast ETA reliability**, not just ETA: pad downstream plans for “arrival bunching” (multiple late vessels compressing into a short window).
- **Prepare for capacity squeeze:** prioritize empty repositioning, extend receiving hours at DCs, and pre-stage labor for surge unloading when the backlog releases.
- **For Iberia routings:** verify customs/terminal fluidity at Leixões/Lisbon before committing diversion volume.

11. Scenario Analysis

Scenario 1: Contained disruption

Likelihood: Medium (lower than earlier)

Time window: Next 3–7 days

Trigger conditions (what must happen)

- Storm Goretti impacts fade without repeat closures, and snow/ice conditions ease.
- DB restores North Germany services
- Zeebrugge access disruption clears and stays cleared.

Expected network outcome

- **Ports:** Operations resume/normalize unevenly; terminal appointments still volatile for several days (especially Hamburg/Rotterdam).
- **Inland:** Gradual restoration; trucking cycle times improve; rail re-accommodates backlogged cargo over multiple days.

Magnitude

- **Effective throughput impact:** moderate (“noticeable but manageable”)
- **Lead time impact:** typically +1–3 days, with exceptions where rail slots are missed.

Second-order risks

- Equipment imbalance (empties) and demurrage/detention pressure in congested yards.

Scenario 2: Stop–start operations (high likelihood with Storm Gorette + weekend deterioration)

Likelihood: High (most likely scenario)

Time window: ~1–2 weeks

Trigger conditions (what must happen)

- Storm Elli constrains rail capacity in North Germany, corridors are disrupted/suspended.
- Hamburg port access (road) is impaired and terminal slots are reduced; some shipping patterns shift to nearby ports.
- Gorette adds continuing cross-border disruption risk (rail + power + weather).

Expected network outcome

- **Ports (Hamburg/Rotterdam):** operations fluctuate; yard density remains high because inland evacuation can't "catch up."
- **Diversions and knock-on congestion:** cargo shifts to Bremerhaven/Wilhelmshaven (and possibly Antwerp), migrating congestion rather than eliminating it.
- **Access shocks:** even if Antwerp is operational, Zeebrugge blockades can create hard delays for drayage flows.

Magnitude

- **Effective throughput impact:** material (think "20–35% class disruption" at the most affected nodes, varying day-to-day)
- **Lead time impact:** +3–7 days becomes common for affected inland moves; high variability.

Second-order risks

- **Production disruption risk increases.** VW halted production in Emden due to hazardous conditions and supply chain disruption, an indicator of industrial sensitivity.
- **Equipment imbalance risk increases** as empties reposition during stop–start windows.

Scenario 3: Severe multi-node disruption

Likelihood: Moderate-to-low, but high consequence (tail risk)

Time window: 2+ weeks

Trigger conditions

- DB restrictions persist or widen and north Germany rail restoration remains unstable.
- Storm Goretti impacts persist/return (power outages, rail suspensions, limited travel) in Channel-facing corridors.
- Zeebrugge blockades recur or broaden, creating repeated access shutdowns.
- Portugal customs IT failure persists, limiting unloading/pickup and constraining diversion capacity.

Expected network outcome

- **Regional synchronization:** multiple “relief valves” fail, rerouting just moves queues.
- **Ports:** intermittent suspensions/slowdowns + vessel schedule breakage (bunching, omitted calls, re-strings).
- **Inland:** severe rail unreliability forces modal shift to trucking, but roads are also impaired, causing effective capacity collapse.

Magnitude

- **Effective throughput impact:** severe (“35–50% class disruption” in affected corridors)
- **Lead time impact:** +7–14 days for impacted flows is plausible; extreme outliers.

Second-order cascades

- **Widespread equipment imbalance, inventory stockouts, broad industrial downtime.**

Scenario 4: Weather eases, inland recovery drags (“hidden” scenario)

Likelihood: Medium-high (often follows Scenario 2)

Time window: 3–5+ weeks

Trigger conditions

- Weather normalizes and ports “reopen,” but rail and trucking remain structurally constrained by backlog, equipment displacement, and re-accommodation queues, especially after DB-wide disruptions.

Expected network outcome

- “Looks fine” at the quay (ships arrive, terminals operate), but inland delivery performance remains weak:
 - appointment volatility
 - missed slots → rework
 - elevated dwell
- Costs compound (storage/detention/extra moves), and reliability remains poor.

Magnitude

- **Effective throughput impact:** mild-to-moderate but persistent (think “10–15% below normal efficiency” for weeks)
- **Lead time impact:** +2–6 days lingering, especially inland legs.

Bottom line

- Treat this as a network + inland evacuation disruption, not a single-port closure.
- The highest-value decision is how you allocate scarce inland capacity and rerouting authority (including acceptance of discharge-at-alternate outcomes).
- Use PortWatch Daily_Trade_Data for baseline exposure sizing (portcalls + import/export fields).
- Rely on carrier/port crisis updates and PortWatch Port Monitor for near-real-time “delta” tracking given the data-lag visible in the trade layer metadata.

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