

Industrial cargo demand challenged by regional variation, economic uncertainty



The movement of industrial project cargoes has stuttered in some European markets. Photo credit: Del Corona & Scardigli Spain (DCS Group).

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From stalled steel mills in Sweden to booming infrastructure in India and an unexpected surge in defense logistics across Europe, project cargo specialists are adapting to a new industrial demand world order.

Regional variations and emerging trends are shaping the movement of vital industrial components. While some markets grapple with the lingering effects of trade disputes and fluctuating demand, others are experiencing unprecedented growth driven by green initiatives, robust domestic infrastructure development and the necessities of defense.

In Sweden, a comparatively small but heavily industrialized market, the impact of international trade policies resonates deeply. Speaking to the *Journal of Commerce*, Jonas Landhage, global project manager/team leader at freight forwarder Begoma, said that his home country “follows the bigger markets,” leaving it susceptible to global shifts, particularly US tariffs.

“Since the tariffs from the US, everything is more or less on hold, both incoming and outgoing cargo,” he said.

That uncertainty has stalled significant domestic projects, including large industrial steel mills that are waiting for a clearer trade outlook.

“It’s a confusing time for everyone, and it makes everyone be a little bit afraid to do project cargo moves,” Landhage said.

Finland, Sweden’s neighbor, presents a dual market scenario, according to Marianne Blechingberg, managing director of project cargo at forwarder Hacklin Oy. Blechingberg highlighted the green transition as a significant driver of project cargo in Finland.

“Green transition companies are growing and growing, and they have a lot of cargo to ship,” she said.

Conversely, traditional heavy industries in Finland face a different reality. After a 10-year boom, those traditional industries have reached saturation, which has led to significant adjustments.

“Now all of a sudden, this market is full, and orders have diminished drastically,” Blechingberg said.

Concerns for current projects

In Spain, Franco Ribechini, project director at Barcelona-based forwarder Del Corona & Scardigli Spain (DCS Group), acknowledged that project moves are still happening, yet expressed concern for future projects amid geopolitical tensions.

“Companies that are already performing projects have seen their budgets increase a lot,” he told the *Journal of Commerce*, adding those shippers are moving project cargo “as soon as possible” under the shadow of strained international relations.

If existing tensions between Spain and the US, mainly over foreign policy disagreements, do not ease, shippers already committed to projects will have no option but to accept a large increase in their budget, Ribechini warned.

More positively, energy production is identified by Ribechini as a resilient sector.

“Energy production — whether related to green energy or not — is still needed, especially in West and South African countries, and South America,” he said. “Here, shippers are bidding for projects, and those projects are developing very quickly.”

India, meanwhile, has not taken its foot off the gas with industrial projects. Nilesh Sinha, director at New Delhi-based project cargo forwarder Procam, described the country’s project outlook as “very, very positive.”

Sinha broke down the Indian market into two key drivers: internal infrastructure requirements and meeting global project demand. He sees current global challenges as an opportunity for India to fill gaps, highlighting the country’s focus on energy efficiency and carbon emissions.

“India and China are the two countries who contribute the maximum to carbon emissions, so there is an opportunity there,” Sinha said.

Meanwhile, an unexpected but growing project cargo segment has also emerged in Europe: the defense industry. Blechingberg highlighted its critical importance for Europe, especially due to the war in Ukraine.

“This is creating opportunity for freight forwarders,” she said.