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Ukraine grain deal: ship inspections have resumed, says minister

Українська зернова угода: судові перевірки поновилися, заявив міністр

Віцепрем'єр-міністр з відновлення України - міністр розвитку громад, територій та інфраструктури - О. Кубраков заявив, що незважаючи на спроби РФ зірвати угоду, за посередництвом ООН відновлено перевірки суден, що перевозять українське зерно. Хоча угода щодо експорту зерна за посередництва ООН дозволила частково відновити експорт через чорноморські порти, експорт, як і раніше, не відповідає довоєнному рівню, навіть незважаючи на те, що частина української сільськогосподарської продукції була відправлена через кордони сусідніх країн. Європейська комісія пропонує 100 млн євро як компенсацію фермерам з ЄС, які постраждали від нещодавнього припливу українського зерна, а також обмежень на продаж пшениці та кукурудзи в постраждалих країнах, щоб знизити напруженість у відносинах із Центральною та Східною Європою. Брюссель прагне покласти край скандалу, який загрожує підірвати загалом єдину позицію ЄС щодо України. Він також хоче, щоб держави-члени погодилися продовжити торговельні поступки Україні, надані після російського вторгнення, до закінчення терміну дії заходів 5 червня.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/19/ukraine-grain-deal-ship-inspections-have-resumed-says-minister>

Deputy PM says inspections have restarted, during visit to Turkey to discuss Black Sea Grain Initiative

Inspections of ships transporting Ukrainian grain have resumed under a UN-brokered agreement, the country's deputy prime minister Oleksandr Kubrakov has said.

Writing on Facebook on Wednesday, Kubrakov said: "Ship inspections are being resumed, despite the Russian Federation's attempts to disrupt the agreement."

As part of the UN deal, inspection teams from Russia, Ukraine, the UN and Turkey ensure ships carry only food and other agricultural products and no weapons. However, Russia has been accused by Ukraine of delaying inspections, leading to a halt in grain shipments.

A spokesperson for the Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) in Istanbul – which facilitates the shipment of grain – also confirmed that inspections were resuming. "Inspections teams are already at work," Ismini Palla, of the JCC, said.

Kubrakov is in Turkey to discuss the status of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which was agreed by Russia and Ukraine last July to help alleviate a global food crisis. Moscow says it agreed to extend the deal only until 18 May.

Kyiv and the UN say the deal has another 60 days to run after then, and are seeking an agreement to ensure it continues.

Kyiv had accused Russian inspectors of preventing vessels from shipping grain from Ukraine.

The agriculture minister, Mykola Solsky, said on Wednesday that Moscow was increasing difficulties for Ukraine at a time when three eastern European countries have banned imports of Ukrainian grain and food products.

“Obviously, the Russians could not fail to take advantage of these nuances on the western border,” Solsky told reporters.

Ukraine is one of the world’s biggest exporters of wheat and other grains, including to the Middle East and Asia. Russia’s invasion last year, however, disrupted the main Black Sea export route, pushing up prices of grain-based foods globally.

While the UN-brokered grain export deal has allowed a partial resumption of exports via the Black Sea ports, exports are still falling short of prewar levels, even as some of Ukraine’s agricultural produce has been shipped over the borders of neighbouring countries.

In May 2022, the EU allowed Kyiv to export its grain stocks through the bloc after the closure of the Black Sea shipping lanes following Russia’s invasion fuelled a global food crisis. Member states agreed to import certain products from Ukraine without quantitative restrictions, and without customs and official inspection.

The scheme has had a knock-on effect as farmers in those countries have complained about the dumping of agricultural produce in their economies at cheap prices, undercutting local farmers.

The European Commission is proposing €100m (£88m) in compensation for EU farmers affected by the recent influx of Ukrainian grain as well as restrictions on selling wheat and maize in affected countries, in a bid to calm tensions with central and eastern Europe.

Ursula von der Leyen, the head of the commission, has written to the leaders of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, setting out support measures after four of those countries banned the import or sale of grain and other food products inside their borders earlier this week.

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The commission wants member states to approve a further €100m in compensation payments for farmers in affected countries, on top of €56.3m that has already been shared between Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. It is also considering banning the sale of grain in the five affected countries until the end of June, with wheat, maize, rapeseed and sunflower seeds only able to enter affected countries en route to another country.

Officials rejected suggestions that limiting the sale of Ukrainian grain in five EU countries was tantamount to accepting import bans, arguing that the Polish decree, for example, had a far broader scope than the EU emergency plan. A commission vice-president, Valdis Dombrovskis, on Wednesday held talks with the five affected countries and Ukraine. Kyiv would need to give its consent to the idea to avoid a legal challenge.

Brussels is anxious to end the row, which threatens to spoil the EU’s largely unified stance on Ukraine. It also wants member states to agree to roll over trade concessions to Ukraine granted after the Russian invasion, before the measures expire on 5 June.

“Unilateral measures can only play into the hands of the adversaries of Ukraine and should not erode our unwavering support for Ukraine,” Von der Leyen wrote in the letter seen by the Guardian.

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the EU dropped all tariffs on Ukrainian grain and introduced “solidarity lanes” in an effort to improve the flow of goods between the bloc and its war-torn neighbour.

But logistical bottlenecks have meant much Ukrainian grain has remained inside the EU, a glut that has hit farmers’ incomes and heaped pressure on governments – in particular Poland’s ruling nationalist Law and Justice party, which relies on rural votes and faces a critical election in the autumn.

Poland, which has been one of Ukraine’s staunchest supporters in the EU, struck a deal with Kyiv on Tuesday to allow Ukrainian grain to transit through Poland.

Hungary’s government, which has been critical of Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, and EU sanctions against Russia, has seized on the issue. “Yet again, it was Europeans who paid the ‘price of solidarity,’” the Hungarian government’s chief spokesperson, Zoltán Kovács, wrote in a blogpost on Wednesday.