



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on April 5, 2023

Cheap Ukraine Grain in EU Fuels Anger, Erodes Support for Kyiv Regime

SINGAPORE — Eastern member-states of the European Union (EU) are starting to call into question their stances with regard to backing Ukraine, as they struggle with an influx of grain that has been stoking fury among their communities.

Originally targeted at developing countries in Africa, [Ukraine's cheap grain](#) supplies were meant to pass through EU member states before arriving at their ultimate destinations. The EU had waived customs duties and import quotas to ensure the transport of the grain, via Romania and Bulgaria, to intended markets outside the EU.



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However, the glut of duty-free imports has remained in Europe, affecting local farmers in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

Ukraine is also allegedly using various routes for crop export apart from the Black Sea, by rail, road, and river.

Based on media reports citing Razvan Filipescu, vice president of the Association of Farmer Producers in the Dobrogea region, grain imports in Romania increased to 570,000 tons last year, having previously been close to zero. This situation was notwithstanding the fact that Romania has been one of the EU's largest corn and wheat producers, and one of the countries initially keen to ensure the transportation of over half of Ukraine's grain exports by land. Romania's farmers recently staged a protest in Brussels, in front of the European Commission building, demanding compensation for their losses.

In Bulgaria, almost 80 percent of the country's sunflower crop for last year still remains unsold, together with over three million tons of 2022 wheat. Furious Bulgarian farmers barricaded border crossings with neighboring Romania for several days as a result.

"It's not working, the grain is staying right here," Emil Macho, chairman of the Slovak Agriculture and Food Chamber, was quoted as saying when referring to the Istanbul Grain Deal.

Reports have indicated that Slovakia has been asking the EU to work with the United Nations (UN) World Food Program to ensure that Ukrainian grain travels through the bloc and reaches other destinations.

Nonetheless, the somber reality remains. With falling prices, storage facilities bursting at the seams, and outraged farmers suffering financial losses due to Ukraine's cheap grain, authorities could face political consequences in their respective countries. For instance, as Poland and Slovakia face upcoming elections, political leaders are trying to assess the impact of their decisions on votes.

In Slovakia, former Prime Minister Robert Fico's Smer-SD (Direction-Social Democracy) party, which



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has petitioned for a stop of military aid to Ukraine, has been leading opinion polls regarding the country's September elections.

Poland, a [country eagerly channeling aid to the Kyiv regime in an effort to emerge as NATO's key ally in Central Europe](#), has to deal with the stark reality that Ukraine's grain imports have been undermining local livelihoods.

"We must help Ukraine in the transport and sale of grain to countries outside the EU. But this cannot be done at the expense of Polish farmers and local markets," Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was cited as saying in a social media post. He asserted that the European Commission should restrict the amount of Ukrainian grain entering the EU.

Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia recently presented a letter to Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, asking the EU to consider limiting Ukrainian imports.

On March 29, Poland's agriculture minister, Henryk Kowalczyk, pledged financial support from the government and the EU as well as looser rules for setting up grain storage as he met with farmers furious at plummeting grain prices. These farmers complained that the EU did not fulfill its pledges that the grains would not remain within the bloc. Instead, grain imports remain, inundating domestic markets and pushing prices downward at the farmers' expense, despite soaring energy and fertilizer prices.

Amid early campaigning leading up to parliamentary elections in the fall, some leading farmers such as Michal Kolodziejczak, head of the AGROUnia group, are demanding that Kowalczyk resign. AGROUnia has been organizing protests, including pouring grain at Kowalczyk's ministry door.

At the beginning of talks with farmers and grain exporters, Kowalczyk assigned the blame for falling grain prices to global trends. He added that although Poland could expect more compensation funds from Brussels, the country's main aim was to boost grain exports and free up space before the harvest in summer.

Kowalczyk acknowledged that the initial plan to transit grain through Poland did not go exactly as expected. "We should remember that we need to be helping Ukraine, everyone agrees with that, because Ukraine is fighting for our freedom," Kowalczyk said, admitting that the war generates "all kinds of effects."

Following discussions with farmer groups, Kowalczyk said they decided to offer over 1.2 billion zlotys (\$277 million) in compensation to farmers and traders who incurred financial losses, as well as subsidies for companies transporting the grain to be shipped out of Poland. He added that EU customs fees should be reapplied to Ukrainian grain supplies. Although the ministry also decided to waive permission requirements for constructing small-size grain storage facilities, Polish farmers are anticipating more talks and more support.

In an attempt to retain support, the Polish premier remarked that grain from Ukraine was "destabilizing our market" and suggested that steps be enforced to urgently export it out of the country. He said the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, had regulations to address the situation, which also has had negative effects in other regional countries.

"We do not agree for this grain to come to Poland's and Romania's markets in huge amounts and destabilize our markets," Morawiecki said at a news conference, although "transit is most welcome." Similarly, in nearby Bulgaria, hundreds of disgruntled farmers staged a three-day blockade of main



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checkpoints on the border with Romania to oppose tariff-free imports of Ukrainian grain. These farmers asserted that around 40 percent of their crop from last year remained unsold due to the huge supply. To make matters worse, farmers do not have enough storage space despite being only a few months ahead of the impending harvest. Protesters showcased banners reading slogans such as “Stop the genocide of agriculture” and “We want to be competitive farmers.”

Daniela Dimitrova, regional leader of Bulgaria’s grain producers union, said Ukrainian imports make Bulgarian farmers noncompetitive. “We stand in solidarity with Europe and its support for Ukraine, but the European Commission should look at each individual member state and make farmers competitive,” she declared.

In March this year, Brussels had offered a total of 56.3 million euros (\$61 million) in compensation to affected farmers, of which Bulgaria would receive 16.7 million and Poland almost 30 million euros. Protesters and some governments regarded the amount as inadequate.



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