

EU Takes Russia to WTO Over Ban on Pork Imports

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The European Union is taking Russia to the World Trade Organization to try to overturn a ban on pork exports from the bloc, escalating a dispute that has been aggravated by the crisis in Ukraine.

The trade row is the fifth between Brussels and Moscow in the two years that Russia has been a member of the WTO. It centers around a swine fever outbreak in Poland and Lithuania that the Kremlin says poses a risk to Russian consumers.

Since the outbreak was confirmed on Jan. 24, all EU trucks carrying pork have been halted at Russia's borders. The EU says the ban is unfair because many areas of Europe are unaffected by the African Swine Fever.

Although Moscow has not formally announced a full ban, the restrictions have so far cost European pork exporters 580 million euros (\$790 million), the European Commission says. Russia normally buys a quarter of the EU's annual pork exports.

"Russia's import restrictions on European pork are clearly disproportionate, discriminatory and not based on science," EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht said in a statement. "As this goes against international trade rules, Europe has no choice but to request the establishment of a panel at the WTO."

The WTO panel, which must be assembled within 45 days, usually takes a year to deliver its verdict and seeks to find an amicable settlement. But it can order a country to remove any trade restrictions found to be in breach of WTO rules, or to pay compensation. If the offending country does not comply, the WTO can grant permission for the other side to retaliate and impose its own trade ban.

Efforts to lift the pork ban have been complicated by tensions over Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, which prompted the EU to impose travel bans and asset freezes on selected Russian officials.

Russia insists the entire EU territory should be quarantined until it can be deemed free from the disease. Its envoy to the EU has said it would be "utterly irresponsible" to lift the ban.

EU officials say the measure is Russian retaliation for their push to encourage Ukraine to sign a free-trade deal with the European Union, rather than for Kiev to join a Russian-led Eurasian customs union.

EU leaders signed the trade and cooperation deal with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova on Friday at a summit in Brussels.

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