

Russia Bans Fruit and Veg Imports From Poland, May Extend to EU

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia announced a ban on most fruit and vegetable imports from Poland on Wednesday and said it may extend the restrictions to the rest of the European Union in its first apparent retaliation to new Western sanctions imposed over Ukraine a day earlier.

Moscow, which buys more than 2 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) worth of EU fruit and vegetables a year, making it by far the biggest export market for the products, said the ban was for sanitary reasons.

Polish fruit growers said the ban was political, although Russia denied this. Moscow has frequently been accused in the past of using sanitary inspections to restrict trade from countries with which it has political disputes.

The ban came a day after the European Union and United States imposed their first sanctions

aimed at hitting broad sectors of the Russian economy, restricting sales of equipment for the oil and defense industries and limiting access by state-controlled banks to Western capital markets.

Moscow denies Western accusations that it has armed and supported rebels who are fighting Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine. Russian officials have condemned Tuesday's sanctions.

Pressure for sanctions in the West increased dramatically after July 17, when a Malaysian airliner was shot down over rebel held territory with what Washington and Brussels believe was a surface-to-air missile acquired from Russia.

According to European Commission figures, the EU sold Russia 1.2 billion euros (\$1.6 billion) worth of fruit and 886 million euros (\$1.2 billion) worth of vegetables in 2011, accounting for 28 percent of the bloc's exports of fruit and 21.5 percent of its vegetables. For some EU countries, including Poland, the percentages are even higher.

By first targeting Poland, which was part of the Soviet bloc until just over two decades ago, Moscow is striking at one of the EU's most strident supporters of increased sanctions against Russia for its backing of rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection Service will restrict most fruit and vegetable imports from Poland starting from Aug. 1, due to "the violation of certification and the identification of quarantine products", spokesman Alexei Alekseyenko said.

"Our restrictions are not linked with EU sanctions, because this situation [with Polish imports] has been developing for a long time," Alekseyenko said. "We impose these limits not to try to get something from the Polish side, but to have our rights observed as a WTO (World Trade Organization) member."

Tomasz Solis, deputy head of the Polish Fruitgrowers Association, told Reuters the decision was "politically motivated".

"The political situation in Ukraine would sooner or later have affected our relations with Russia," he said. "Russia is one of our prime target markets, with 60 or perhaps even 70 percent of our exports going there."

Alekseyenko said the move was part of the food safety watchdog's plan to consider restricting all or some fruit imports from the European Union, which was announced with little fanfare on July 28 while European countries were debating the latest sanctions. Moscow should decide the fate of overall EU imports in a week or two, the agency said at the time.

A spokesman for the EU's executive European Commission said it was studying the new restrictions.

"Let me be very clear that they came unannounced by the Russian authorities - they were not announced beforehand - so what the commission will do now is to analyse the measures and the grounds they have been taken, and we will take action in due course," the Commission spokesman said in Brussels.

See also:

[Russia Considering Ban on EU Fruit Imports](#)

[Russia Bans Dairy Imports from Ukraine](#)

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