

EU Calls Emergency Meeting on Russia's Food Import Ban

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Dacian Ciolos

BRUSSELS – Senior agricultural experts from all 28 European Union countries will hold an emergency meeting next Thursday to analyze the impact of a Russian ban on EU food imports, the European Commission said on Friday.

Moscow banned most food imports from the EU and the United States on Thursday in retaliation against Western sanctions imposed over Russia's actions in Ukraine.

The Commission, the EU executive, has already said that it reserves the right to respond and will set up a task force on Monday to assess the situation.

"In the current context, the most important is to react in a proportionate and rapid way should the situation arise," European Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos said in an emailed statement.

"I am confident that our resilient farm sector will reorient rapidly towards new markets and opportunities," he said.

Roughly 10 percent of EU agricultural exports go to Russia annually with a total value of around 11 billion euros (14.73 billion US dollar), Commission figures show.

To ensure a smooth transition to other markets, the Commission says the bloc's Common Agricultural Policy will provide options for financial support, including a crisis reserve to compensate farmers if necessary.

Ciolos said he had already spoken to farm ministers from across Europe, including Italy's. Rome will hold the rotating EU presidency until the end of the year.

A spokesman for the Italian presidency said there were no plans for now to summon an emergency meeting of agricultural ministers. Next Thursday's emergency meeting will be attended by national experts as well as Commission officials, he said.

Poland said on Friday that it would file a complaint with the World Trade Organization over the Russian embargo, and the Commission has also gone to the WTO over a ban by Moscow on EU pork.

However, when asked about wider WTO action, the Commission said only that it was assessing the situation.

EU lawyers in Brussels said the EU executive was likely to act cautiously because its concern now is to de-escalate the crisis. Further WTO action could have the opposite effect.

Russia is a major buyer of European fruit and vegetables but ranks 23rd among buyers of food from the United States, accounting for less than 1 percent of the U.S.'s farm exports.

The White House said the ban would backfire, hurting Russian citizens by pushing up inflation.

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