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Kazakhstan Stays Away From Russia's Food Import Ban

By The Moscow Times

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Kazakhstan, a member of a Russian-led Customs Union that also includes Belarus, currently has no plans to back Russia's retaliatory embargo on food imports from Western countries that have sanctioned it over its actions in Ukraine, a senior Kazakh official said.

Kazakhstan's abstention would allow banned goods to be reimported to Russia through the Central Asian country — de facto voiding the embargo — and calls into question a trade union portrayed by the Kremlin as a potential rival for the European Union.

"No talks on the matter are ongoing," the Inform.kz news site quoted Deputy Agriculture Minister Gulmira Isayeva as saying on Friday.

Neither Russia's Agriculture Ministry nor its Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection Service, which polices food imports, requested their Kazakh colleagues to back Russia's food

sanctions, she added.

At present, Kazakhstan only imposes food embargoes against countries affected by animal diseases that pose danger for the the nation's population or livestock, she said.

Last week, Moscow blacklisted food imports including dairy, meat, fruit and vegetables from the U.S., the European Union, Norway, Canada and Australia, all of which have imposed sanctions on Russia over its alleged support of the pro-Russian insurgency in eastern Ukraine. The ban has affected some $10 billion worth of food exports from the EU alone.

Russia has no customs border with Kazakhstan or Belarus, both of which are in a position to reimport banned goods to Russia in circumvention of the ban.

After years of lobbying by Moscow, the leaders of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan agreed in May to create a Eurasian Economic Union from 2015 that Russia hopes can become a counterweight to the EU. But Russia's snap food embargo was not reported to have been coordinated with either Minsk or Astana.

According to the Kremlin, Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the embargo on Thursday — the day of its announcement — with his Belarussian and Kazakh counterparts.

But the meeting produced no visible result.

Belarus said earlier that it was ready to replace certain EU imports to Russia, especially meat and dairy. But certain embargoed food products, such as shellfish, are not produced by Russia's landlocked Customs Union partners.

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