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Russian Food Watchdog Stops Imports of Banned EU Fruit Via Belarus

By The Moscow Times

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A vendor sells vegetables and fruits at the city market in St.Petersburg, Russia.

Russia' food sanitation watchdog has found evidence that exporters are attempting to ship imports of banned European fruit and tomatoes to Russia through Belarus, the agency's chief said, threatening to restrict imports from Belarus if it does not block the back-door channel.

Watchdog officials, whom Moscow dispatched to Belarus last week in a bid to prevent banned imports crossing the border, detected shipments of peaches, apples, plums and tomatoes bound for Russia from EU countries, agency head Sergei Dankvert said, ITAR-Tass reported Monday.

Dankvert said Belarus was responsible for ensuring shipments heading over its border to Russia did not include any imports that Moscow had banned, the report said.

"If we discover quarantined objects, we will introduce restrictions on supplies from Belarus,"

he was quoted as saying.

Inspectors identified several shipments of fruit in Belarus that listed their country of origin as outside the EU, such as Turkey, Serbia, Macedonia or a number of African nations, but on closer inspection they established the imports came from Poland, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Lithuania and some other EU countries, the report said.

Other shipments were not accompanied by any supporting documentation at all, Dankvert said, ITAR-Tass reported.

"Some European Union countries have started sending produce to Belarus without specifying the real country of origin," he was quoted as saying.

"We are actively monitoring the situation, and we will promptly check the origins of dubious shipments to block deliveries through countries that serve as a 'front,'" he was quoted as saying.

Russia imposed a ban on all dairy products, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables from the 28 EU countries, the U.S., Australia, Canada and Norway earlier this month in response to Western sanctions against Moscow for its annexation of Crimea and perceived support of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

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