The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Dutch Exports to Russia Down by 40 Percent Post-MH17, Data Shows

By The Moscow Times

July 24, 2015

An aerial view of flower fields is seen near the Keukenhof park, also known as the Garden of Europe, in Lisse, The Netherlands, in this April 15, 2015 file photo.

AMSTERDAM — Dutch exports to Russia have fallen nearly 40 percent since last year, data showed on Friday, as relations between the two countries deteriorate following the downing over Ukraine in July 2014 of an airliner with many Dutch nationals on board.

The official Statistics Netherlands said Dutch exports to Russia were worth 1.26 billion euros ($1.38 billion) in the first four months of 2015, a precipitous decline from 2.07 billion euros during the same period a year before.

The decline largely reflects trade sanctions imposed by Russia in retaliation for Western financial sanctions that followed the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 above territory in eastern Ukraine held by Moscow-backed rebels.

The Netherlands and Russia had previously had a booming trade relationship.

Exports of agricultural machinery rose, to 11 million euros in April this year, from 6.5 million euros a year before, suggesting Russia's policy of import substitution is boosting demand for the technology in which the Dutch are leaders.

Dutch manufacturers have reported increasing demand from Russia for equipment allowing it to grow more agricultural produce locally.

Sales to Russia of natural and food products fell, however, from 497 million to 313 million euros, while exports of machines and transport machinery declined to 473 million euros in the first four months of 2015 from 890 million euros a year before.

The Netherlands and Malaysia are leading a push for a United Nations-backed international tribunal to investigate and try those responsible for the crash, two-thirds of whose 298 victims were Dutch. Moscow opposes the Western-backed proposal.

Europe and the United States imposed financial sanctions against senior Russian political and business figures after the plane crash, prompting Russia to respond with trade sanctions. These have hit the Netherlands, a major center for re-export because of its large ports, particularly hard.

Recently, Russian agricultural watchdog Rosselkhoznadzor considered banning flower imports from the Netherlands due to the presence of quarantined organisms in shipments, alongside other curbs on Western goods, Interfax reported.

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