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Russia Targets Turkish Food Imports Amid Backlash Over Downed Bomber

By The Moscow Times

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Turkey had been a beneficiary of Russian efforts to diversify imports away from Europe following sanctions over the Ukraine crisis.

Russia has restricted some food imports from Turkey and warned of widespread sanitary violations by Turkish suppliers after the country's military shot down a Russian warplane over Syria on Tuesday.

Amid widespread anger in Russia at the downing, authorities have responded with economic measures, placing embargoes on a number of Turkish poultry producers and curtailing Russian tourist travel to the country.

On Wednesday the Agriculture Ministry upped the ante, announcing that it had analyzed Turkish produce following complaints from consumers and industry groups. “Unfortunately, on average 15 percent of Turkish agricultural produce doesn't meet Russian [quality] standards,” Agriculture Minister Alexander Tkatchev was quoted as saying Thursday on the

ministry's official online portal.

The statement said increased controls would be imposed that would include extra checks at production sites inside Turkey and at the border, where customs agents have already begun inspecting all freight, the Interfax news agency reported Thursday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov characterized the actions as increased safety measures, and said Thursday that “no embargo is being imposed,” according to the RBC news agency.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday instructed the government to draft a list of economic measures against Turkey.

Turkey had been a beneficiary of Russian efforts to diversify imports away from Europe following sanctions over the Ukraine crisis. According to Interfax, 20 percent of vegetables imported to Russia come from Turkey.

But fury over the downing is fraying those bonds, and sanitary violations in Russia have a history of coinciding with political spats. Gennady Onishchenko, a popular former health official now advising the government, was quoted on Wednesday as saying: “Every Turkish tomato you buy ... is your contribution to a rocket to shoot down our boys.”

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