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Russia Restricts Turkish Imports to 'Protect National Security'

By The Moscow Times

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree restricting imports from Turkey and banning tour operators from selling travel packages to the country, among a series of sanctions imposed over the NATO member country's downing of a Russian bomber jet.

The decree, dated Saturday and published on the Kremlin website, also imposes restrictions on Turkish companies operating in Russia, bans most Russian employers — with a few yet unspecified exceptions — from hiring Turkish citizens after the end of this year, and orders the Cabinet to suspend charter flights between the two countries.

The measures are imposed “with the goal of protecting national security and national interests of the Russian Federation, and protecting the citizens of the Russian Federation from criminal and other illegal activity,” the decree said.

The decree did not name the types of Turkish goods to be banned from import into Russia, but said they were to be determined by the Cabinet.

Russia already bans food imports from Western countries in response to sanctions imposed against Moscow for its annexation of Crimea and meddling in eastern Ukraine. The embargo has contributed to price hikes in grocery stores and has left Russians without many favorite foods, such as Italian and French cheeses or Spanish ham.

Expectations last week of a ban on vegetable imports from Turkey — which account for 20 percent of Russia's total vegetable imports, according to Agriculture Minister Alexander Tkachyov — stoked fears of further price increases and produce shortages.

But Tkachyov insisted Sunday that banning imports from Turkey would not cause Russians any trouble, the TASS news agency reported.

“Russians will not feel the fact that Turkey is not present today on the country's market,” Tkachyov told state-run Rossia 1 television network, TASS reported. “This is quite obvious, trust me.”

Russia could replace Turkish imports with produce from Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Morocco or Israel, Tkachyov said, conceding, however, that “if we don't manage to substitute the products that are being imported [from Turkey] quickly, then there is also a possibility of a food price increase, although a minimal one,” TASS reported.

Turkey shot down a Russian Su-24 bomber near the Turkish-Syrian border last Tuesday, accusing it of violating Turkish airspace.

Putin called the downing a “stab in the back,” and warned of serious consequences for Turkish-Russian relations.

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