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Russia Tightens Trade Controls Amid Rising Tensions With Belarus

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Maxim Stulov / Vedomosti

Russia is to start tracking all Belarusian food imports in a bid to crackdown on sanctioned European foodstuff sneaking across the border.

Russian food watchdog Rosselkhoznadzor claims that the plans will boost food quality and safety.

The Belarusian border has become an increasingly attractive target for smugglers, who import sanctioned European goods with fake documents declaring them as Belarusian.

The phenomenon has led to several "miracle harvests," with Belarus exporting five times more apples in 2015 than the country officially harvested.

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Minsk has repeatedly denied allegations of widespread smuggling and sub-standard produce. Officials instead claim that below-par products are being loaded onto Belarusian import trucks within Russia itself. They hope that the new tracking system will prove that violations are not taking place on Belarusian territory.

Escalating tensions have placed the Russian-Belarusian border under increasing scrutiny in recent weeks.

Russian security services reintroduced customs and migrations checks along the border in the Bryansk, Smolensk and Pskov regions on Feb. 7.

Minsk accused Moscow of not informing them of the changes, with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko that the move will damage bilateral ties. The Kremlin insists that the checks are only intended for non-Belarusian nationals.

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