

First Ukrainian Grain Shipment Sails Through Istanbul

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A center to oversee the Ukrainian grain export was opened in Istanbul on 27 July following a deal between Russia and Ukraine to export Ukrainian grain from besieged ports through the Black Sea. **EPA/SERGEY KOZLOV/TASS**

The first shipment of grain from Ukraine since the Kremlin's invasion five months ago sailed through Istanbul on Wednesday under a landmark deal designed to help alleviate a global food crisis sparked by the war.

The Sierra Leone-flagged Razoni's voyage from the Black Sea port of Odessa to Lebanon is being watched closely for signs of how the first agreement signed by Moscow and Kyiv since Russia invaded its pro-Western neighbor holds.

A deal brokered by Turkey and the United Nations last month lifted a Russian naval blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea cities and set terms for millions of tons of wheat and other grain to start flowing from Ukraine's filled silos and ports.

Ukraine exports roughly half of the sunflower oil used on the world market and is one of the world's main supplies of grain.

An almost complete halt to its exports helped push up global food prices and make imports prohibitively expensive in some of the poorest countries in the world.

The Razoni took 26,000 tons of maize through a specially designated corridor in the mine-infested waters of the Black Sea before reaching the northern edge of the Bosphorus Strait on Tuesday.

A team of 20 inspectors from the two warring parties and the UN and Turkey strapped on orange helmets and boarded the ship early Wednesday for a mandated inspection that officials said lasted less than 90 minutes.

More ships

The ship's passage is being overseen by an international team that includes Russian and Ukrainian officials in Istanbul.

"This marks the conclusion of an initial 'proof of concept' operation to execute the agreement between the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Nations," the center said after the ship was cleared for passage.

The 186-meter (610-foot) long vessel will move on to the Marmara and Aegean seas before reaching the coast of Lebanon in the coming days.

Kyiv says at least 16 more grain ships are waiting to depart.

But it also accuses Russia of stealing Ukrainian grain in territories seized by Kremlin forces and then shipping it to allied countries such as Syria.

Turkish hopes that the grain deal could help build trust and lead to ceasefire talks have so far been disappointed.

Russia has continued to pound southern Ukrainian cities near the Black Sea with missiles and pressed on with its grinding ground assault across the east.

Officials in Mykolaiv said no one was killed Wednesday in shelling on one of the southern city's supermarkets that came just days after the region's grain mogul and his wife died in a targeted strike on their house.

Moscow said on Wednesday that it had destroyed another foreign arms depot in western Ukraine — a region the furthest removed from the fighting.

Counter-offensive

Kyiv has launched mandatory evacuations from the eastern Donetsk region — now bearing the brunt of Russia's offensive — because the government does not expect to be able to provide it with heat in the cold winter months.

Kyiv's forces have been pressing a counter-offensive to drive out the Russians from the southern Kherson region that they seized in the first days of war near the Kremlin-annexed peninsula of Crimea.

The Ukrainian presidency said it had "liberated" seven more villages in the southern region while 53 remained under Russian control.

Ukraine has been bolstered by more supplies of Western weapons — particularly long-range rockets — ahead of the planned push to retake Kherson city.

The United States announced a new tranche of weapons worth \$550 million for Ukraine's forces.

These include longer-range ammunition for increasingly important HIMARS rocket launchers and artillery pieces.

Ukraine is using the HIMARS and similar Western systems to smash Russian arms depots and break down its lines of ground communication across the war zone.

Energy wars

The Russians have been unable to seize any major village or city since gaining full control of the Donbas war zone's smaller Luhansk region in early July.

Zelensky told U.S. President Joe Biden in a message that "the word 'HIMARS' has become almost synonymous with the word 'justice' for our country."

Russia has responded by sharply reducing natural gas supplies to Europe and stepping up its propaganda battle against the West and Kyiv.

The latest Russian reduction along the Nord Stream pipeline to Germany has forced Berlin to reassess its plans to wean itself off nuclear energy in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Wednesday said extending the lifetime of Germany's three remaining nuclear power plants "can make sense."

The Russian propaganda campaign has included a decision to label Ukraine's Azov regiment a "terrorist" organization.

Azov fighters were among 2,500 Ukrainian soldiers who surrendered in May after weeks of fierce resistance at the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol.

Its members were among 50 Ukrainian servicemen killed last week in an attack on a jail holding prisoners of war in Russian-occupied territory.

Ukraine accuses Moscow of deliberately executing the detainees.

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