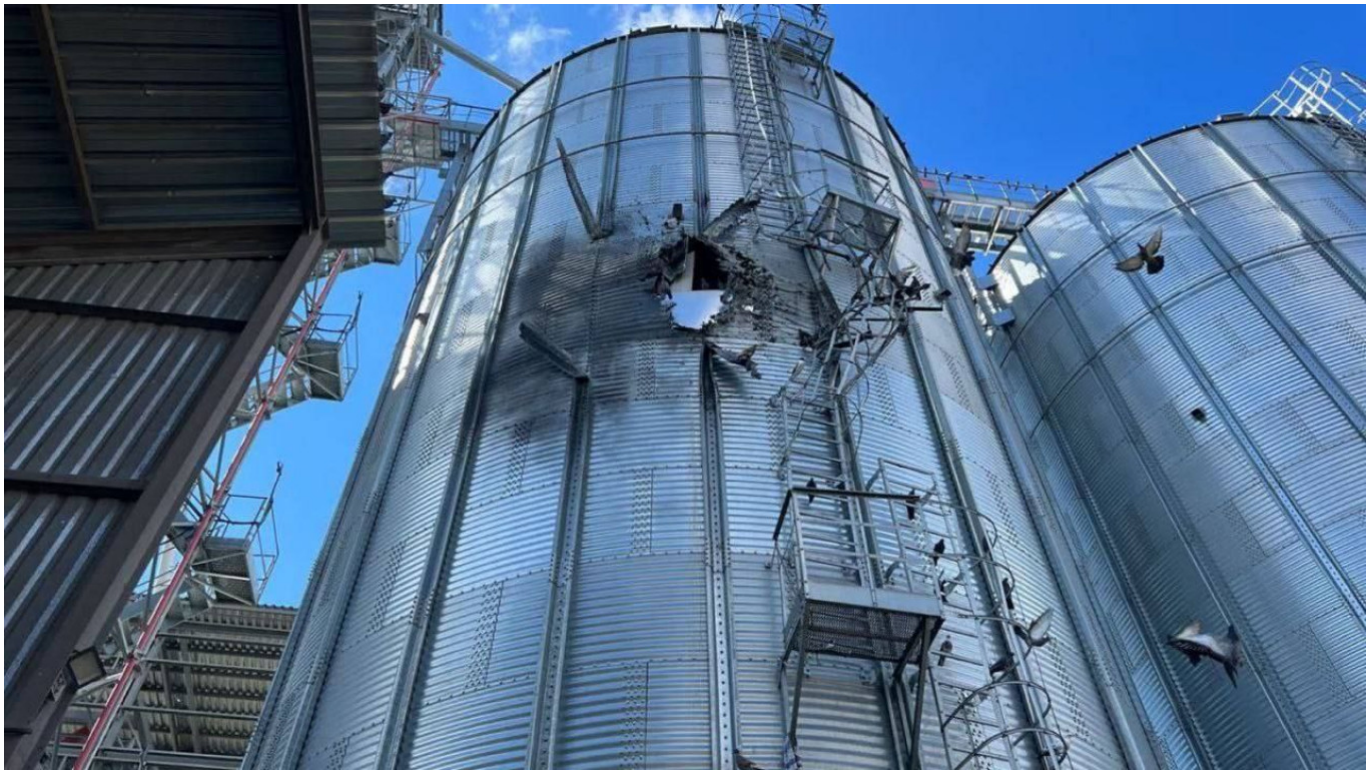
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Hits Ukraine Grain Export Route Near Romania

By Anna Malpas for AFP

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Telegram

Russian drones on Wednesday damaged infrastructure at a Ukrainian port on the Danube, as Moscow targeted facilities vital for grain shipments from Ukraine following the collapse of a key export arrangement.

Turkey, which along with the United Nations-brokered the deal to allow Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea, urged Russia after the port strike not to take steps that would escalate tensions.

Russia struck a grain elevator in the port of Izmail which sits just across the Danube River from Romania, damaging silos, warehouses and administrative buildings, Kyiv said.

Izmail is now the main export route for Ukrainian agricultural products via Romania, following Russia's withdrawal last month from the Black Sea grain agreement.

Related article: 6 Killed in Central Ukraine as Moscow Says Intensified Strikes

The deal had allowed around 33 million tons of grain to leave Ukrainian ports, easing fears of global food shortages after the start of the conflict.

Russia has been pounding the seaports in the Odesa region that were key for the grain exports granted safe passage under the deal.

"No steps should be taken that will escalate tensions in the Russia-Ukraine war," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told Russian leader Vladimir Putin in a phone call.

Erdogan emphasized to Putin the significance of a grain deal that he called a "bridge for peace," the Turkish leader's office said.

'Unacceptable'

Failure to re-establish the grain deal "will not benefit anyone" and nations in need will suffer the most, Erdogan said.

In the same call, Putin asked Erdogan to aid Russia export its grain to African countries vulnerable to food shortages.

"The mood for cooperation with Turkey and other interested states on this issue was expressed," the Kremlin said in a statement.

But Paris accused Moscow of "pursuing its own interest at the expense of the most vulnerable," putting global food security at risk with the strikes on grain infrastructure.

With the Black Sea route effectively blocked, the formerly obscure ports of Izmail and Reni on the Danube have become crucial to global food supplies.

But the transit hubs are struggling to process all the arriving grain, causing massive bottlenecks, and have been targeted by Russia.

The overnight strike damaged nearly 40,000 tons of grain destined for Africa, China, and Israel, Ukraine's Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said.

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis said that Russia's repeated attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure along the river were "unacceptable."

Ukraine needed "more air defense" to repel Russian attacks, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, Andriy Yermak, said Wednesday on Telegram.

In Kyiv, more than 10 Russian drones were downed during an overnight strike that left several floors of a glass high-rise damaged, the city's military administration said.

"Groups of drones entered Kyiv simultaneously from several directions," said Serhiy Popko, head of the administration.

Popko said Russia had used a barrage of Iranian-made drones, with debris hitting several

areas.

Naval drills

In the Golosiivsky district, "parts of a drone fell on a playground" and a fire broke out in a non-residential building, he said, adding that emergency services were on the scene.

Kyiv's Mayor Vitali Klitschko had said earlier that the attack on the capital had damaged several areas, including the busy Solomyansky district.

The attacks came a day after Russia said it downed a wave of Ukrainian drones targeting Moscow and vessels in the Black Sea.

A skyscraper in Moscow's business district housing government offices was struck for the second time in a few days.

Russia also said Wednesday it had launched naval drills on the Baltic Sea, involving 30 warships and boats, amid rising tensions with European countries over the Ukraine conflict.

During the drills, the navy will practice how to protect sea lanes, transport troops and military cargo, and defend the coastline, the Defense Ministry said.

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