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Russia Ramps Up Pressure on Armenia With Produce Import Ban

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Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency

Russia will suspend imports of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs from Armenia, the country's agricultural safety watchdog said Thursday, marking a sharp escalation in trade restrictions that have come as Yerevan pursues ties with Western countries.

"Rosselkhoznadzor is introducing temporary restrictions starting May 30, 2026, on the import of fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, fresh herbs and strawberries originating in or shipped from Armenia," the agency said in a statement.

While Rosselkhoznadzor cited safety concerns — claiming it documented 181 cases of contaminated Armenian produce so far this year — the move is likely political in nature, as Russian authorities recently suspended the import of flowers and sale of some Armenian alcoholic products in Russian stores.

At the same time, Russia this week threatened to rip up a 2013 bilateral agreement guaranteeing Armenia duty-free natural gas and oil if it continues to pursue closer relations

with the European Union, including membership in the bloc.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan shrugged off the energy threats. He argued that EU membership would eventually bring in far more money than Armenia would lose from an increase in Russian natural gas prices.

Related article: Russia Threatens to Rip Up Natural Gas Deal With Armenia Over Its EU Ambitions

Friction between the traditional allies has grown since Azerbaijan regained control of the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. Armenia accused Russia and its peacekeeping forces of failing to deter Baku's military offensive.

While Armenia still hosts a Russian military base, Yerevan has pushed to join the EU and rapidly expanded its domestic defense industry, booking $460 million in military orders over the last three years, according to Pashinyan.

President Vladimir Putin has warned Armenia that closer European integration carries the same risks faced by Ukraine, which Russia invaded in February 2022. Putin is expected to address Armenia's EU bid during the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union summit in Kazakhstan on Friday.

The diplomatic spat comes just ahead of parliamentary elections in Armenia next month, where Pashinyan's Civil Contract party faces a challenge from an array of pro-Russian opposition groups.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday weighed in on the election, praising Pashinyan as "a great friend and leader" following a diplomatic visit to Yerevan by Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

"Nikol has my COMPLETE and TOTAL Endorsement for Re-Election on June 7, 2026," Trump wrote on Truth Social, boasting that Rubio had advanced several "important deals" for both nations.

Pashinyan thanked the U.S. President for his "high appreciation and friendly words."

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