

Turkey, Russia agree separate grain deal as Black Sea corridor talks stall

Bar?? Demir
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Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko said on Wednesday that Russia and Turkey had reached an agreement on the supply of 1 million tons of grain. “All agreements in principle have been reached. We expect that in the near future we will enter into working contacts with all parties to work out all the technical aspects of the scheme for such deliveries,” he announced.

The announcement came shortly after the failure of talks on the safe transport of Ukrainian grain from the Black Sea through the Turkish Straits amid Washington demands more bloodbaths in Ukraine.

Since the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine erupted in February 2022, parts of the Black Sea were mined by both Russian and Ukrainian forces. The northern parts of the sea are controlled by the Russian navy.

An agreement was reached last year to provide a safe route for Ukrainian grain. The deal between Moscow and Kiev had been brokered by the United Nations and Turkey to ensure grain shipments from Ukraine through the Black Sea to the global market.

Shortly after an attack on the Kerch Bridge in July, however, the Kremlin announced its withdrawal from the deal, on the grounds that the commitments to Russia had not been met. The Kremlin stated that Russia would consider rejoining the deal if these commitments were fulfilled, and financial sanctions on the Russian Agricultural Bank were lifted.

Russia and Ukraine are among the world’s largest agricultural producers, mainly supplying countries in Africa and Asia. Russia places special emphasis on grain exports to these countries as part of its influence in Africa and as a means of breaking its US-led isolation.

Russia announced that it had achieved the largest

grain exports in the last seven years after withdrawing from the agreement in July. The Russian Agriculture Ministry said that most of the 7.7 million tons of grain exported in August went to African countries. The grain corridor agreement was one of the main items on the agenda of the Second Summit of the Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum at the end of July, and African countries had expressed their intention to mediate on the issue.

Turkey is already the main mediator in talks on the resumption of the Black Sea grain corridor. On September 4, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held talks in Sochi, with grain shipments being the main topic of discussion.

After the talks, Putin said that Russia was ready to extend the agreement, but that the NATO powers had not kept their commitments: “The deal was approaching expiration, but not a single obligation to Russia was fulfilled. We were asked to extend our participation in it with the promise of immediate compliance with all previous commitments. We extended it, but nothing happened.”

He linked the issue of the corridor to Ukraine’s growing naval attacks in the Black Sea: “We have always agreed that these corridors intended for food exports should not be used for military purposes. ... Just as attempts are being made to attack TurkStream and Blue Stream through which gas is supplied to the Republic of Turkey from Russia. Our ships are guarding these streams, these pipeline systems, and they are constantly being attacked, including with the help of drones sent from Ukrainian Black Sea ports.”

During a joint press conference, Erdoğan said: “We have expressed the points raised by our Russian friends on different occasions. We believe that the initiative

should be continued by correcting the shortcomings. I sincerely shared our views on this issue with my dear friend in our bilateral meeting.”

He added: “Russia has two special requests. One is to connect the Russian Agricultural Bank to the SWIFT system. Currently, Russian banks are excluded from the SWIFT system due to sanctions. This country exports 120 or 130 million tons of grain annually ... Ukraine, of course, needs to soften its approach in order to take joint steps with Russia.”

Erdoʻan’s remarks prompted a swift condemnation from the Kiev regime. Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said: “Let’s be realistic after all and stop discussing nonexistent options, much less encouraging Russia to commit further crimes.”

Turkey is a critical member of NATO, but since the outbreak of the war it has sought to mediate between the NATO imperialist powers and the Putin regime. It has also abetted the main NATO powers in aggressively pursuing the war with Russia.

While condemning Russia’s invasion and recognizing Crimea as part of Ukrainian territory, Ankara has armed Ukraine with Bayraktar drones. It also ultimately decided not to veto Finland and Sweden joining the NATO military alliance.

Shortly before the NATO war summit in Vilnius, Lithuania on July 11–12, Erdoʻan declared that Ukraine “deserves” NATO membership and allowed the return to Ukraine of the Azov commanders who were supposed to remain in Turkey under an agreement with Russia.

However, Turkey has not joined US-led NATO powers’ sanctions against Moscow and has significantly increased its trade with Russia.

Fearing potentially devastating consequences for the Turkish ruling class of an escalation of the NATO war against Russia, with which it has strong trade and military ties, Ankara also faces an ongoing cost-of-living crisis at home and growing working class opposition. The Erdoʻan government believes that improved trade with Russia and potential financial aid from Moscow will help contain this domestic crisis.

After the meeting in Sochi, Erdoʻan pointed out the growing trade with Russia and the use of Turkish lira and Russian rubles instead of US dollars and euros, stating: “Our bilateral trade volume reached

approximately \$69 billion last year. We are taking firm steps towards our target of \$100 billion. I believe that the fact that our central bank governors are meeting here today and that they will also meet each other is also important in terms of having domestic currencies enter into the bilateral relations between us.”

Following the meeting, it was reported that Ankara and Moscow were close to finalizing negotiations on the construction of a natural gas distribution centre in Turkey. In addition, Russia submitted a proposal for the construction of a second nuclear power plant in the northern city of Sinop. Russia is currently building Turkey’s first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Mersin. According to the reports, the first unit of the plant will be commissioned in 2024.



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