

RUSSIA BACKS UKRAINE GRAIN EXPORTS PLAN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

New equation: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, on Wednesday. AFP/DEM ALTAN

Russia and Turkey on Wednesday voiced support for the creation of a safe maritime corridor in the Black Sea so Ukraine can export grain to global markets amid an escalating world food crisis. A Turkish Minister said the move should also be accompanied by the easing of Western sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu hosted his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Ankara for discussions focused on a UN proposal to free Ukraine's Black Sea ports and allow some 22 million tons of grain sitting in silos to be shipped out.

Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil, but the war and a Russian blockade of its ports have halted much of that flow, endangering food supplies to many developing countries. Many of those ports are now also heavily mined.

Ukraine's government was not represented at the Ankara meeting but has expressed concerns that removing mines from its ports to facilitate grain exports could allow Russia to attack its southern coast.

Mr. Lavrov promised that Russia would not "abuse" its naval advantage if Ukraine's ports were demined and would "take all necessary steps to ensure that the ships can leave there freely." Both Russia and Turkey would also benefit from the export plan. The same corridor would also allow Russia to export food and fertilizer. Turkey would facilitate and protect the transport of the grain in the Black Sea, Turkish officials say.

"We find this plan reasonable and see it as a feasible one," Mr. Cavusoglu told a joint news conference with Mr. Lavrov. The scheme, however, would require negotiation between Moscow and Kyiv, he added.

The Turkish Minister also backed easing Western sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine if it participates in the UN plan, saying that seemed "quite legitimate".

"If the whole world is in need of the products to be exported by Ukraine and the Russian Federation, then a method needs to be established," he said, adding that he hoped "technical preparations" could be made "as soon as possible".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the creation of a safe sea corridor last week, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday. It also called for security guarantees, such as a supply of weapons to defend against maritime threats and the participation of third-country naval forces.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday the Russian military would need to check commercial ships taking the grain to make sure they don't carry weapons. He added that after they are loaded with grain, Russia would help escort the ships to international waters. Turkish Defence Ministry said on Tuesday that technical details were still being worked out.

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