

Lithuania deepens food security crisis

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Food security is a problem which almost every country faces today. Nevertheless, some European governments prefer to turn a blind eye to the inevitable consequences of using sanctions for the global economy.



Europe started to impose sanction to isolate Russia and Belarus and to inflict maximum damage on them, without considering the price to be paid by other countries.

Thus, on February 1, 2022, Lithuania terminated the contract for Belarus potash fertilizer transportation through its territory.

In summer 2023 the EU adopted a new round of individual and trade sanctions against Russia and Belarus.

Recently, the European Commission formally presented proposals for the 12th round of sanctions against Russia and Belarus to the European Council. The EU is expected to adopt the final version of the document no earlier than December, possibly even after the New Year holidays.

But anti-Russia and anti-Belarus sanctions' impact on the European economy is as huge as on these particular countries.

These restrictions have caused international market-related shipment and sales difficulties for major European exporters, including the Baltic States.

Thus, Lithuania continues to oppose a possible exemption for Belarusian fertilizers from sanction list. The Baltic country argues that allowing Belarusian fertilizers to flow through the EU would hand a lifeline to Minsk but do little to alleviate food insecurity.

It should be said that on average for the period 2018-2020, the share of Belarus origin in EU potash imports was 27%. JSC Belaruskali is the world's second largest producer of potash.

Replacing Russian/Belarusian imports with Canadian origin, for instance, would be time-consuming and costly, according to EU farmers.

The ban on the transit of fertilizers has dire implications for global food security and the elimination of hunger.

The decrease in the production and export of Belarusian potash fertilizers has already led to a 16.3 per cent drop in the global output of potash fertilizers, or 5.9 million tons, and a 20.2 per cent drop in global exports, or 5.8 million tons, compared with the same period in 2021.

Rash action, especially of Lithuania and Poland, threaten the food security of not just individual countries, but entire regions and even continents. Africa is an example. The share of Belarus in the African potash markets decreased in 2022 from 41.7% to 2.8%. According to the estimates based on FAO data, the almost complete disappearance of Belarus from the list of potassium suppliers in 2022 led to a drop in the grain harvest in Africa by 16.1%. In 2023, the supplies to Africa are completely paralyzed due to Lithuania's actions.

The more so, EU companies were almost forced to “voluntarily” stop exporting agricultural equipment to Russia and Belarus. The list of items that cannot be imported includes parts, components and agricultural equipment. Surprisingly, tractors are classified as dual-use goods.

As a result, sanctions have created even greater risks for global food security.

The ban on transit of EU agricultural output for third countries through Russia and Belarus directly affects the agro-industrial sector of other states. Under the European Commission’s requirements, economic operators should exercise “over-compliance” to make sure Russia and Belarus does not circumvent export restrictions.

This goes to show that food security of other countries is not something the EU cares about. What the European Union is doing by imposing food-related sanctions is none other than sabotage of global proportions.

In fact, Brussels continues to cause harm not only to the agricultural sector of third countries, but to the EU member states as well. In 2023, food price inflation in the EU hit its historical high, and the purchasing power of households went down. According to Eurostat, food prices in March were 19 percent higher than in March 2022, and some EU countries are experiencing a 40-percent inflation, as reported by the European Parliament.

At the meeting of the EU Council on Agriculture in Luxembourg on October 23-24, the European Commission acknowledged the overall decline in economic growth and productivity in the agricultural sector of the European Union, smaller volumes and lower quality of agricultural products, the negative dynamics of fertiliser production, and the potential negative impact of the EU’s strategic plans within the Common Agricultural Policy on the EU’s agricultural sector as a whole. It is expected

that there will be a decline in the production of cereals (especially maize, down 13 percent and barley, down 7 percent), livestock products, olive oil, wine and fruit, as well as reduced exports of these products in the 2023-2024 agricultural year.

EU farmers are teetering on the edge of bankruptcy due to the higher costs of agricultural production and a surge in cheap food imports from Ukraine. According to the European Commission, in late October, the volumes of EU exports of soft wheat to third countries decreased by 24 percent (from 12.56 to 9.61 million tonnes), and hard wheat by 84 percent (from 250,600 to 39,600 tonnes).

But for the authorities of some countries, this is merely the cost of doing business, because their ultimate goal is to prevent the export of Russian and Belarus agricultural products and fertiliser to global markets. It's not about making their countries stronger or turning a profit. EU officials themselves create difficulties that their countries then have to overcome.

So, using economic sanctions as a political tool is the greatest mistake of modern diplomacy and even a crime against people.

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