

Russia Rejects Key Moldovan Meat Imports

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia is Moldova's third-largest export market after the European Union and Ukraine. Both meat and wine exports are big currency earners for Moldova.

Russia will limit imports of Moldovan meat beginning Saturday, its veterinary watchdog ruled, a move the European Union said looked like retaliation against Moldova for entering a free-trade deal with the EU.

Moldova, which signed the free trade and political cooperation agreement with the EU last week, will only be able to export pork, beef, lamb and horse meat as carcasses and certain bone cuts, effectively banning the trade in prime cuts and processed meats most valuable for the consumer market.

Imposing the restrictions, Russian veterinary and phytosanitary service Rosselkhoznadzor cited "violations of veterinary-sanitary demands and norms".

The European Union said the timing of what it called a ban indicated its political nature.

"The EU regrets the decision by the Russian authorities to ban a number of Moldovan meat exports on what is coincidentally the same day that the Moldovan Parliament ratified the EU-Moldova agreement," EU trade spokesman John Clancy said in a statement.

"Yesterday's ratification ... is proof of the democratic choice of the Moldovan people to strengthen their ties with the EU," Clancy said.

Rosselkhoznadzor declined to comment.

The restrictions follow Russia's ban on imports of Moldovan wines and spirits last September, which was also seen in Brussels as a reprisal for moving closer to the West.

Trade tensions between Brussels and Moscow have been aggravated by the tug-of-war for the former Soviet republics of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, with both Russia and the EU offering exclusive membership in their respective trade blocs.

After months of upheaval and hundreds of deaths in Ukraine, all three republics chose the EU over Russia, signing the free-trade pacts at a summit in Brussels on Friday and drawing an immediate threat of "grave consequences" from Russia.

On Monday, Brussels said it was taking Russia to the World Trade Organization to overturn a ban on pork exports from the 28-nation EU, although the EU has declined to follow up on its threat of more sanctions on Russia over the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

EU officials say that Russia has threatened to withdraw the duty-free treatment that Ukraine benefits from as a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, or CIS, free-trade pact.

Russia is Moldova's third-largest export market after the European Union and Ukraine. Both meat and wine exports are big currency earners for Moldova, which has a population of 3.5 million and is one of Europe's poorest states.

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