

Russia's Communists Propose Price Controls for Food After Import Ban

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August 28, 2014



Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov.

Communist lawmakers have introduced a bill that would impose price controls on food, following the government's move to keep tabs on hikes spurred by Moscow's ban on Western food imports in response to sanctions against Russia for its policies in Ukraine.

According to the explanatory note accompanying the bill, which was submitted to Russia's lower house of parliament on Wednesday and published on the government's legislation portal, the "instability of the economic situation and the introduction of economic sanctions against Russia" dictates the need to "regulate trade activity" in the country.

"Above all, this concerns state regulation of prices on food products," the document said. "This regards main food products such as bread, baked goods, milk, dairy products, some meat products, as well as baby food."

The government has already ordered retailers earlier this month to report to the government daily about the prices of 40 food categories, according to Russian media reports.

While the government's order stops short of imposing price controls, the required frequency of reporting surpasses even the practices of the Soviet command economy that demanded only weekly reports from stores.

The bill, signed by Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and his faction members, would set caps on trade markups.

Retailers such as grocery stores would be required to keep their prices at no more than 10 percent above their wholesale costs, while producers of unprocessed grains, milk, fruit and vegetables would be allowed to sell their goods at up to 45 percent above production costs.

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