

Ukraine pleads for steps to end Russian blockade of Ukraine ports

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Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has called on the international community to take immediate steps to end a Russian blockade of his country's ports, so that wheat exports can resume, and a global food crisis can be prevented.

The president made his comments in an online post after speaking to European Council President Charles Michel, who was visiting the major Black Sea port of Odesa, which came under fire from Russian missiles during the visit.

Zelenskiy did not specify what measures he would like taken, nor was it immediately apparent how such a liberation could be achieved against Russia's will. NATO countries have ruled out direct armed intervention, and Turkey would not allow any military vessels through the Bosphorus, citing the more than 80-year-old Montreux Convention.

Michel wrote on Twitter that he had seen silos full of grain, wheat and corn in Odesa that was ready for export, but which was blocked.

"This badly needed food is stranded because of the Russian war and blockade of Black Sea ports. Causing dramatic consequences for vulnerable countries. We need a global response," he wrote.

Nearly 25 million tonnes of grains are now stuck in Ukraine, a UN food agency official said last Friday.

Ukrainian agriculture officials have said that there was an exportable surplus of around 12m tonnes.

Ukraine has sown about 7 million hectares of spring crops so far this year, or 25-30% less than in the corresponding period of 2021, Agriculture Minister Mykola Solnskyi said on Monday, adding that Ukraine had exported 1.09m tonnes of grain in April.

The grain is going out via Romania, where it is being taken by rail, but Solskyi said those exports could be complicated soon by exports of the new wheat crop in Romania and Bulgaria.