

Turkey investigates origin of grain aboard Russian ship

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Ukrainian claims at the weekend that Turkey had detained a vessel alleged to have been carrying “stolen” Ukrainian grain appeared to have been confirmed on Monday when it was stated that Turkey had begun an investigation into the origin of grain aboard bulk carrier **Zhibek Zholy** (IMO 9598880), a Russian ship anchored off the small Turkish Black Sea port of Karasu.

Ukraine’s ambassador to Turkey, Vasyl Bodnar said on Friday July 1st that Turkey had been urged to “take necessary actions” over the Zhibek Zholy, which left Russian-occupied Berdyansk with about 7,000 tons of grain on board.

For some time, Ukraine had been accusing Russia of stealing grain from occupied territories, allegations which hitherto Russia had denied. That line from Russia appeared to be subtly transmogrifying into one of disagreements about what territory is occupied and what territory is not really Ukrainian.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov confirmed on Monday July 4th that the Zhibek Zholy was Russian but added that Moscow was working to clarify what had happened. “The ship really is Russian-flagged but I think it belongs to Kazakhstan and the cargo was being carried on a contract between Estonia and Turkey,” Lavrov told reporters.

The vessel was yet to dock or unload and was waiting off the port while Turkey investigated the origin of the shipment and the route taken by the ship, which “went dark” for several days in late June.

Turkey is also currently trying to arrange four-way talks between Turkey, the UN, Russia and Ukraine to establish a Black Sea corridor that might restart Ukrainian food shipments by sea.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last week his country had about 20 ships in the region ready to transport the grain on Ukraine’s behalf once an agreement was reached. “We will try to carry these products and re-export them to third countries,” he said.

2010-built, Russia-flagged, 17,025 gt Matros Pozynich is owned and managed by Crane Marine Contractor LLC of Astrakhan, Russia. As of June 30th, the vessel was underway in the middle of the Black Sea, heading north.