

Progress on Ukrainian grain export talks, claim reports

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Negotiations to release millions of tons of Ukraine's grain exports had made progress, Ukrainian officials reported. The United Nations and Turkey are participating in the talks with Ukraine and Russia.

The parties have agreed on technical principles, including setting up a monitoring unit in Istanbul. They are expected to meet again next week, according to Turkey's Minister of Defence.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy also said, in his daily address to the nation, that the Ukrainian delegation had reported some progress. He said that Ukraine expected to agree on details with the UN over the next few days. Russia was yet to make a statement on the talks.

Ukraine has managed to gear up to some 2.5m tons a month in exports, utilizing road, rail and river links to the maximum degree possible, but this is still only 40% of "normal" levels. And now it has at least 22m tons of grains ready for export, with a new harvest starting in June.

Ukraine has demanded firm security guarantees that Russian troops will not attack its ports once it de-mines passages to them. Russia has already damaged some grain terminals at Ukrainian ports with missiles, making future shipments more difficult.

Russia's foreign ministry had previously talked about demanding that sanctions on Russian trade be relaxed in return for opening the ports.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that since the war started, he has been "underlining the importance of having Ukraine's food products and Russian food and fertilizers fully available in world markets." Global geopolitical pressure was thought to be one part of the leverage being used on Russia – the impact on its reputation amongst "neutral" players in the developing world, which depend on Ukrainian grain exports either directly or indirectly in terms of global food prices.

Ukraine is typically a major agricultural supplier to regions including Africa, Asia and Europe. The UN's food-price index has retreated from an all-time high but costs remain well above normal, adding to accelerating inflation worldwide.

The UN's Guterres told journalists in a briefing after the talks that "today is an important and substantive step, a step on the way to a comprehensive agreement. We still need a lot of goodwill and commitment by all parties. They've shown it and I'm encouraged, I'm optimistic. But it's not yet fully done."