

Turkey remains confident that deal over Ukrainian grain is near

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Despite pessimism being expressed by Ukrainian diplomats and the foreign ministry about the prospects of getting Ukrainian grain out of the country and into the Eastern Mediterranean via the Black Sea and Bosphorus, Turkish officials have said that a deal could be signed soon, with only minor difficulties to be overcome.

Turkey said on Monday July 18th that officials from Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the UN most likely would meet this week to discuss resuming Ukraine's Black Sea grain exports. One Turkish official said that the lingering "small problems" should be overcome.

About 20m tonnes of grain are estimated to be stuck in silos at Odesa, waiting for a boat out.

Last week, Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations would sign a deal this week on the grain exports corridor after talks in Istanbul.

Akar said that "an agreement was reached on a plan, general principles for shipping grain and food products... A meeting on this within the week is probable", adding that technical matters such as forming a monitoring centre in Istanbul, identifying safe routes, and checkpoints at port exits and entries were on the agenda for discussions this week.

UN chief Antonio Guterres spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Monday about the "ongoing negotiations" to resume Black Sea grain exports, a UN spokesperson said.