



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 5, 2024

Polish Farmers Announce Ukrainian Farmer Blockade

Polish farmers will block border crossings with Ukraine during a general strike planned for next week, the Solidarity trade union announced last Thursday.

Besides rendering Ukrainian crossings impassable, the union plans intermittent road blockades across Poland to last through March 10, it announced.

“Our patience has run out. Brussels’ position on the last day of January 2024 is unacceptable for our entire agricultural community,” the union said in a statement, alluding to Thursday’s EU summit, which was loudly objected to by farmers from across the bloc.



AP Images
Polish farmers protesting

“The inaction of the Polish authorities and plans to cooperate with the European Commission and respect all its decisions regarding the import of agricultural products and food from Ukraine leave us no choice but to announce a general strike,” Solidarity added, requesting that Polish citizens respect the union’s struggle for what it positioned as the “common good” of the nation.

Farmers across Germany, France, the Netherlands, and many other EU countries have turned out to protest in recent weeks, opposing the bloc’s “green” climate policies targeting agricultural producers with price hikes on fuel, as well as the cheap Ukrainian imports inundating their domestic markets.

They gathered in Brussels with more than 1,300 tractors during the EU summit this week, throwing eggs, rocks, and fireworks at the EU Parliament building and setting huge piles of manure on fire.

The European Commission enraged farmers with its proposal recently to extend the suspension of customs duties on agricultural goods from Ukraine and Moldova through 2025. Brussels had initially justified dropping the tariff in 2022 as a way of backing Kyiv during its conflict with Russia, and the suspension was previously poised to expire this year.

Polish farmers initially took to the streets last year to protest the cheap Ukrainian imports that have pushed prices down and jeopardized their livelihoods. Furthermore, Polish truckers joined the protests, contending that they, too, were being undermined by their Ukrainian counterparts. Together with Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, Poland moved to block imports of Ukrainian grain in May.

Additionally, a different protest by another group of farmers and truckers forbidding a key border crossing with Ukraine ended earlier this month when Warsaw protesters’ demands, which included reinstating a permit system for Ukrainian truckers, implementing government subsidies for Polish corn, and a moratorium on tax hikes.

After weeks of farmer protests across Europe, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen held a “strategic dialogue” with community and business leaders in Brussels in late January in an attempt to find “common and lasting solutions” for European agriculture. However, critics underscored a lack of farmer representation at the meeting.



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“We all have the same sense of urgency that things have to improve,” von der Leyen said during the meeting. She bemoaned what she described as “an increasing division and polarization when it comes to topics related to agriculture.”

“We must overcome this polarization with dialogue,” she said, stressing the need to find “a new way forward and common and lasting solutions” for European agriculture.

“I hope that you will build the trust to appreciate each other’s perspectives and to find common solutions for the future of agriculture in Europe. This dialogue aims to find a new consensus on issues with which we all struggle,” von der Leyen told the attendees.

Meanwhile, farmers in Germany have been blocking city streets with their tractors since last month, demanding that Chancellor Olaf Scholz undo the proposed cancellation of a diesel fuel subsidy worth as much as €3,000 yearly.

The German government has justified its move on environmental grounds. The farmers, however, maintained that the plan would imperil their livelihoods.

Similar protests have been happening in France, Romania, and Bulgaria, as farmers’ issues are scheduled to feature heavily in European Parliament elections later this year.

The French government canceled plans to reduce subsidies on diesel for farmers after protesters used tractors and other agricultural machines to block a major highway out of Paris and a road linking France to Spain.

In Romania, farmers’ and truckers’ unions who were involved in country-wide protests over the past several weeks opted to stand down in exchange for seats on a new committee tasked with finding long-term solutions to their problems. The public body will launch alongside 25 percent diesel subsidies and €70 million in grants for livestock farmers.

Protesters’ representatives signed the agreement with PM Marcel Ciolacu on Friday. Per an official government [press release](#), the finalized document stipulates that “an inter-ministerial committee will be set up ... to analyze and find the best solutions to the protesters’ claims.”

Said committee will comprise a secretary of state from each “relevant” ministry as well as representatives of the farming and trucking unions. Each specific question will be tackled first by the ministry and a union delegate, then coordinated with the other ministries within the committee.

This agreement comes apart from measures already conceded by the government to address the most urgent needs of the farmers, as well as a considerable diesel subsidy for those carrying out mechanized work in the agricultural sector. Such a scheme works by imposing a cap on the fuel tax rate at €21/1,000 liters throughout 2024. Per the government, this effectively means a 25 percent fuel price reduction for farmers who use diesel-powered machinery.

The measures enforced at the end of last month also mean that animal breeders will be able to request grants to compensate them for lost earnings due to energy and feed cost hikes.

Cattle and buffalo breeders can apply for a one-time aid of €100/animal and up to a maximum of €280,000. The total sum earmarked for this scheme is €16.1 million, with the government estimating the potential number of beneficiaries to be 6,000, owning around 160,000 head of cattle.

Similar schemes were unveiled for poultry and pig farms, totalling €30.7 million and €25.6 million respectively, albeit with a shorter, six-month deadline.



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There's much less done for truckers, who — like those in countries near Ukraine — have not only been objecting to high fuel prices but also unfair competition with Ukrainian truckers, who can leverage the EU's temporary agreements with Kyiv.

Thus far, Bucharest granted truckers only a symbolic concession by amending the legal framework so that they are no longer fined for expired [vignettes](#) (time-based road charges) if there are unusually long waiting times at customs, with other preliminary agreements also possible. "I think this is the right gesture until we come up with another solution in the set of measures agreed with the carriers, that of dedicated lanes at the border and in the Port of Constanta," PM Ciolacu said.



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