

The Real Reason Why Russia Is Destroying Sanctioned EU Food

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Global Research, August 20, 2015

[Oriental Review](#) 19 August 2015

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

President Putin's late-July decree to [destroy all sanctioned EU foodstuffs](#) caught at the Russian border has incited a flurry of backlash, even among some typically Russian-friendly foreign journalists. Russia Insider's Danielle Ryan, for example, [documents](#) not only instances of domestic criticism over the initiative, but also personally laments that it's "wrong" and "not right". It's completely understandable why the publicized destruction of food is appalling to many people worldwide, but the fact is that they're largely missing the deeper reasons why this is happening, and that's partly due to the Russian authorities not properly communicating them.

It's not simply about saving the administrative resources and time that have to be directed to resending the products back to their original destination, nor in depriving a sanctions violator of the opportunity to profitably resell their said contraband back in the EU or elsewhere. There's also more at play than just supporting Russian domestic producers and ending the country's foreign food reliance. What's really happening is that Russia is publicly defending itself from a clever form of psychological-economic warfare being waged against it by the EU, and it's doing so at this specific time in order to limit the ability of this offensive to interfere with the upcoming general elections in September.

Full Transparency

The first thing that needs to be addressed is the reason why the Russian government is engaging in such a highly publicized destruction of the banned EU foodstuffs. The point here is to hold Russian customs officials to full accountability by retaining a retrievable record of their activity and transparently demonstrating to the people that the law is being complied with. Things brings about another point, which is that it's impossible to have carried out such an action "quietly" since the whole point of the matter is to enforce a law that was publicly signed by the Russian President. As such, there's obviously an accessible record of Putin having agreed to the decree, and correspondingly, investigative journalists (both Russian and foreign) that would naturally conduct follow-up reporting on it and monitor its implementation. Under such conditions, it would be scandalous for the government to 'hide' the very same activity that it had just recently committed to in public. Even more so, it would have been a conspiracy of epic proportions if the original decree had been 'secret' and pictures and/or footage of the Russian government burning and burying food were leaked to the international media. All things considered, this is why Moscow decided to publicly and proudly demonstrate to the world that the President's law is actively being followed.

Prevent Dependence On Illegal 'Humanitarian Aid'

The most common criticism surrounding Russia's controversial measure is that the government should donate the smuggled food to those in need, perhaps even to the refugees in Donbass, instead of just destroying it. This well-intentioned and altruistic perspective forgets that there are concrete health concerns behind the government giving its citizens or other recipients food products of unverified quality, but that's not all. The main issue is that doing so would only be a short-term solution to whatever problem it was meant to address (be it poverty in Russia or helping war refugees in Donbass), albeit one with major external strings attached that are unacceptable for any self-respecting and patriotic authorities to fully agree to. To begin with, if Russia gave the food to anyone else, it would merely be acting as a conduit for de-facto 'humanitarian aid' from the EU to its population, and as with all examples of this type of international assistance, the donor's image would be enhanced at the government's expense and could easily be exploited by Brussels for soft power gains. It would also undermine Russia's message that its domestic issues (even poverty) don't need foreign interference to solve.



Moving along, another primary reason behind Moscow's refusal to give the confiscated food away is that it establishes a dependency relationship between the recipients and the EU donor that could be broken at any time. Should the EU and its related companies decide to stop breaking the law and trying to smuggle their products into Russia, the civil beneficiaries would suddenly be left without the resources that they had previously come to expect, possibly even leading to unrest and discontent with the government intermediaries that had previously facilitated the 'donations'.

Russia in that case would be forced to 'pick up the slack' for a commitment that it didn't agree to nor budget for (amid a time of decreased revenue, it must be pointed out), and worse, the period of EU 'humanitarian aid' would have set unrealistic standards for the recipients. They would have come to expect that Moscow would continue giving them the same type of camembert cheese and other high-quality luxury foodstuffs that the EU was providing via the seized products, which in any instance is unfeasible for any government to indefinitely pay for and provide to its impoverished citizens. The EU is calculating that the comparatively lower quality of Russian-provided assistance to its poor could then achieve the same destabilizing consequences that Moscow had initially sought to avoid by continuing the unsolicited 'aid' in the first place.

Ensure A Smooth Election Process

The final issue that Moscow seeks to remedy by destroying the EU contraband is to ensure smooth [regional elections](#) on 13 September. Had there not been any visible decree such as the one that prompted the controversy, then citizens may have questioned their government's commitment to its own counter-sanction policy, as banned EU food has still been slipping through the borders regardless. This will likely still remain the case to some extent (it's impossible to stop everything from getting through, after all), but by publicly demonstrating its resolve in dealing with the issue, it's thought that this will decrease any potential voter apathy in the upcoming polls or possible dissatisfaction with the ruling United Russia party.

On the other hand, there are certainly consequences to this patriotic measure, as

the [Western media onslaught](#) attests. The US and its EU allies have once more been caught unaware by the fortitude of the Russian government, hence why they're reacting in such a hysterical manner (much as they did to Crimea's seemingly unexpected reunification). The objective here is to intensify the information war against Russia by promoting the false idea that Moscow is depriving an unspecified amount of starving citizens from being fed by seized EU foodstuffs. The preconditioned foreign audience is expected to use their imagination in envisioning thousands of disgruntled people queuing up for food that they won't ever receive (a hybrid mix of the [late-Soviet-era bread lines](#) and the recent [untrue](#) stories about a 'food scarcity' ever since the counter-sanctions). There's also a domestic component at work here too, since external actors hope that Russian voters will be so upset by the decree and its coverage in the international (Western) media that they'll vote against United Russia next month.

Concluding Thoughts

Russia's decision to destroy seized EU foodstuffs has provoked a loud reaction from many forces, not least of which is the West, which is gleeful to use the highly publicized opportunity to denigrate the Russian authorities. It's surprising then that [some](#) of those very [same outlets](#) are giving space to voices that suggest the food be given to those in need, but this just confirms that the West does in fact have a stake in Russian citizens establishing an indirect 'humanitarian aid' dependency on the EU. Moreover, there's definitely a [sizeable proportion](#) of the population that is unhappy with the decree, but it's now becoming clearer that the US and its allies aim to steer them towards expressing their dissatisfaction politically through the upcoming regional elections next month. The government isn't likely to enact a policy reversal on the matter so soon, no matter what domestic opinion indicates at this point, since that could be manipulated into being presented as a capitulation to international pressure (which wouldn't be the case at all, but would definitely be how the West would market it as).

The general motif still remains the same, however, and it's that the EU has taken to using its sanctioned foodstuffs as an asymmetrical weapon against the Russian government and its people, attempting to push through tons of illegal product with the very intent that some of it will be seized and consequently end up furthering the psychological-economic war that's Washington and Brussels have unleashed.

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