



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



SPEAKING POINTS PRESS CONFERENCE EU-UKRAINE Solidarity Lanes

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Ladies and gentlemen of the press,

I am here today to present our action plan for export and import flows to and from Ukraine, which we adopted yesterday. Our EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes communication is a very concrete list of actions covering our emergency response, but also medium-term and long-term solutions.

Solidarity is here to stay. That is clear. These Lanes are just the first step in a long strategy for extending our essential transport infrastructure network into Ukraine and Moldova.

Ukraine is currently storing around 40 million tonnes of grain, and half of that must be exported by the end of July. Apart from economic and food security reasons, pressure is mounting to free storage capacity for the coming harvest. So 20 million tonnes of grains must leave Ukraine in less than 3 months.

Last week, a big ship left Romania's Constanța port loaded with 70,000 tonnes of Ukrainian cereals. To fill it to capacity, a combination of 49 barges and trains was used. One 600 metre train can carry around 1,900 tonnes of grain. A convoy of 6 barges, which is how the grain travelled from Ukraine's Danube ports, can carry a maximum of 18,000 tonnes.

If you do the maths, you will see that an astonishing 10,000 barges and almost 300 large ships are needed to carry 20 million tonnes of grains.

The task before us is gigantesque. Thousands of wagons packed with grain are still waiting at Ukraine's borders with Poland and Romania. The **average waiting time for border crossings is 16 days**; at some border crossings, it can be 30 days.

The backlog is certainly not due to a lack of goodwill; it is because we **need to rethink logistics and supply chains, create additional capacity, adapt infrastructure, and get the right machinery to the right place.**

The European Commission cannot substitute EU operators or Ukrainian grain-sellers, but what we can do is to help put the two in touch and design new links between Ukraine's borders and EU ports. In short, **this is the concept behind the Solidarity Lanes.**

In yesterday's Communication, we set out **20 actions to get Ukrainian grain moving** in the short term, and to strengthen EU-Ukrainian connectivity in the longer term.

To mention just some of the emergency measures in our action plan: we will set up a matchmaking logistics platform to help industry associations, traders, the Commission's services, the member states, and Ukrainian authorities find each other easier and solve the pressing issues without delays.

We are calling on market players to **make available loading equipment, train wagons, barges, lorries, and vessels as a matter of urgency.** We are also asking the Member States to **increase inspection capacity at border posts** to deal with arrivals 24/7.

We ask all infrastructure managers to **prioritise Ukrainian agricultural exports along our busy freight corridors.**

This includes granting **rail slots** for these shipments. And because we understand the risks involved in sending EU equipment over the border and into Ukraine, we are also looking into **granting top-up guarantees**, together with international financial institutions, to remove the risk of financial loss for EU companies.

But, as I mentioned, we are also looking further into the future.

And I'm pleased to announce that today, the Commission adopted a decision with a view to signing a high-level agreement with Ukraine updating the indicative maps for the Trans-European Transport Network – or TEN-T – in Ukraine.

The revised map will help us strengthen transport connectivity between Ukraine and the EU.

We are also in the process of identifying common infrastructure priorities, and increasing interoperability between the Union TEN-T and Ukrainian infrastructure, for example, by laying EU standard-gauge rail lines in the border regions of Ukraine and Moldova – both currently use a wider gauge than their neighbours. We would support projects under our **Connecting Europe Facility**, which has a budget of €25.81 billion for 2021-2027.

Ukraine's exports are the driver of these Solidarity Lanes. But strengthening our transport links will also make it easier for Ukraine to import essential goods, such as humanitarian aid, food, animal feed, fertilisers, and fuel.

So, to conclude: the problem we are trying to solve is in no way regional or European, but global - Ukraine produces 12 percent of the world's wheat, 15 percent of its corn and 50 percent of its sunflower oil. It is the main exporter of agricultural goods for countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

Work started even before we adopted this Communication, and I trust that the action plan see us all moving in the same direction, together, towards the most efficient solutions. I want to use this opportunity to thank the Member States, transport operators, and associations for their positive reaction to our calls and their own excellent initiatives throughout this crisis.

Thank you, I would be happy to answer your questions.

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