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Brussels defends rollback of Ukraine trade benefits amid backlash

“Our commitment to Ukraine is as firm as ever,” Commission says.

by [Bartosz Brzeziński](#) • JUN 6 • 2 MINUTES READ

BRUSSELS — The European Commission on Friday defended its decision to let wartime trade perks for Ukraine’s agricultural exports expire, despite warnings from Kyiv that the move could cost its economy €1.1 billion by the end of 2025.

While the EU has [extended duty-free access](#) for Ukrainian steel and industrial products, emergency measures for agri-food goods, including grains, dairy, sugar and meat, expired at midnight. New transitional rules [reintroduce tariff-rate quotas](#) for several key exports, [prompting concern from Ukrainian producers](#).

“Our commitment to Ukraine is as firm as ever,” said Commission trade spokesperson Olof Gill, adding that Brussels is now negotiating an [updated free trade deal](#) to replace the wartime measures and ensure “stability, predictability and good conditions for traders.”

Asked whether pressure from [farm lobbies and governments like Poland’s](#) shaped the decision, Gill demurred: “You’re talking about political speculation.” Still, the move follows a year of farmer protests across Europe and comes just days after Poland’s presidential election, during which Donald Tusk — the country’s prime minister and a close ally of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen — publicly [urged the EU to limit Ukrainian imports](#).

Critics say the Commission’s decision sends the wrong signal. “I really wonder — are European farmers more afraid of competition from Ukraine than Putin winning the war?” Swedish liberal MEP Karin Karlsbro [told POLITICO’s EU Confidential podcast](#) this week, stressing the [importance of agricultural exports](#) in sustaining Ukraine’s wartime economy. “The Commission has not been brave enough in this very tough situation.”

Chief spokesperson Paula Pinho insisted the ATMs were “always intended to be temporary,” and argued that Ukraine’s reopening of its Black Sea ports gives it “good prospects” to rebuild export flows.

Talks to upgrade the EU-Ukraine trade agreement continued this week, with both sides pledging to strike a deal swiftly.

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