

**Turkish Diplomacy  
in Action:**  
The Black Sea  
Grain Initiative

*Burak Elmali*

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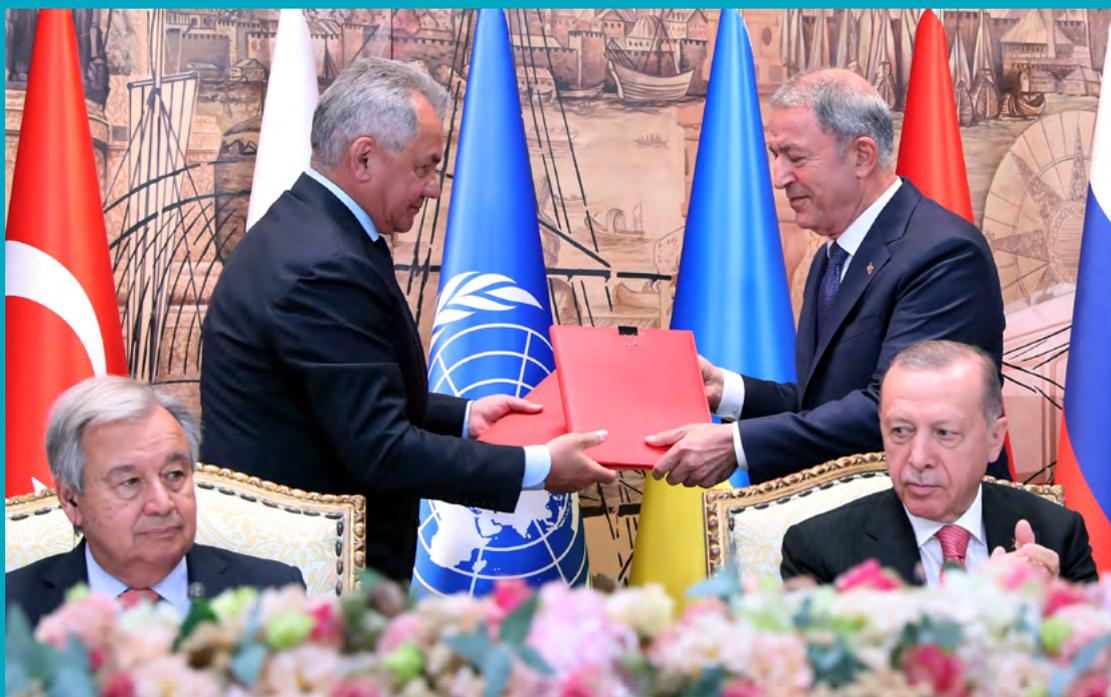
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# Introduction

**T**he Russo-Ukrainian War has entered its sixth month. During this period, a perfect storm has led the world to the precipice of a global food crisis, in large part because of the inability of Ukraine, one of the largest grain exporters in the world, to get its product to market. While the impacts of pandemic on supply chains have not eased yet, an emergent food crisis has deeply affected all countries, particular those considered 'vulnerable'. So far, more than 20 million tonnes of grain could not be exported because of the inability of ships to both access and leave key Ukrainian Black Sea ports. Supply problems in developing countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, have brought high prices and difficulty in accessing vital food sources. Moreover, economic sanctions have complicated the ability of Russian potash fertilizer exports to reach their destination countries. Mediation initiatives led by Türkiye built a diplomatic communication link

between Moscow and Kyiv. As a result of several rounds of bilateral and multilateral talks, the grain corridor agreement was signed on July 22 in Istanbul between Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye and the United Nations (UN). The deal is expected to substantially alleviate the pending global food crisis so long as each actor duly adheres to their responsibilities. On Monday 1 August 2022, a Sierra Leone-registered ship set sail from Ukraine's Odessa port. This was the first time since Russia's invasion in February 2022 that any vessel loaded with Ukrainian grain was allowed to depart from the Ukrainian-controlled ports on the Black Sea. This event represents a major triumph for Turkish diplomacy. This Info Pack examines the recent grain corridor agreement by focusing on four main aspects: (I) Background: Food Crisis, (II) Türkiye's Mediating Role, (III) The Black Sea Grain Initiative and (IV) Responses from the international community.



*Türkiye, UN, Russia, Ukraine sign deal to resume grain exports. (Türkiye Presidency / Murat Çetinmühürdar - Anadolu Agency)*

# Background to the Global Food Crisis: A Matter of Life or Death

Russia and Ukraine are two of the most important exporters of world agricultural products. Since the beginning of the war, there have been serious disruptions to the economic activities of both countries, both of which are in the top five grain and fertilizer exporters in the world. On the one hand, Russia has been isolated from the international trade system as a result of heavy economic sanctions imposed by Western countries. On the other hand, according to Ukrainian officials, Ukrainian grain exports through the ports of Chornomorsk, Mykolayiv, Pivdennyi, Odesa, and Olvia have come to a standstill because of Russian naval blockades. Russia [claims](#) that Ukrainian mining around its ports and its refusal to utilize sea-based humanitarian corridors proposed by Russia has exacerbated the situation. In short, both sides have [blamed](#) each other for the crisis.

**Table 1: Global wheat and sunflower seed oil shares of Ukraine and Russia, 2021**

Country	% of global export volume	
	Wheat	Sunflower seed oil
Russia	13.1	52.2
Ukraine	8.5	20.2

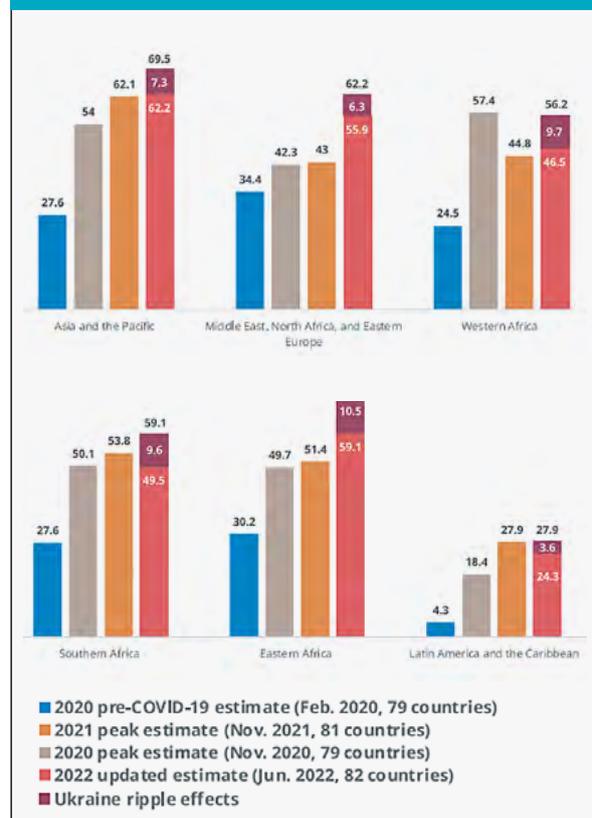
Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC).

In addition to agricultural products, Russia is also responsible for 11% of the world's urea, and 48% of the ammonium nitrate exports, both of which are key ingredients in fertilizer. Russia and Ukraine together export 28% of fertilizers made from nitrogen and phosphorous, as well as potassium, according to a [report](#) by Morgan Stanley. The war has also brought fertilizer exports to a halt, thereby negatively affecting agricultural activities around the world.

The Russia-Ukraine War has significantly contributed to high food prices indirectly as well as a result of the problems it has created in global supply chains. While the magnitude of the crisis has been felt more in low-income countries, food price inflation has been observed in almost all countries. A [report](#) by World Bank indicates that the Agricultural Price Index is 19% higher compared to January 2021. Wheat and maize prices are also 24% and 15% higher, respectively. With the high prices, the purchasing power of fixed income groups has decreased significantly.

**Graph 1: Ukraine ripple effects drive record food insecurity**

Number of people acutely insecure or at high risk (millions)



Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

An important point to be underlined here is the fact that negative impacts of the war have primarily affected Least Developed Country (LDC) and Low-Income Food-Deficit Country (LIFDC) groups largely because of their high level of import dependence on both Russia and Ukraine. For instance, [according](#) to the International Committee of the Red Cross, some of the countries worst affected by the current food security crisis are the most reliant on wheat from Russia and Ukraine. This includes Somalia (over 90 per cent dependent), the Democratic Republic of Congo (over 80 per cent dependent) and Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Sudan (all between 20-45 per cent dependent). As seen in the Graph 2 below, most of the import-dependent countries on Russian and Ukrainian



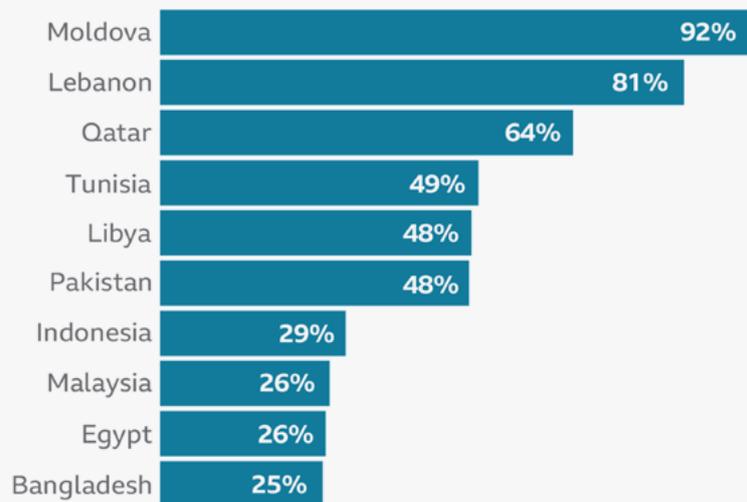
Food crisis in Yemen. (Abdulnasser Alseddik - Anadolu Agency)

wheat are from LIFDC and LDC countries. Acute problems such as famine and drought that already exist in these countries also act as a multiplier effect, making the food crisis even more severe. This reliance has brought several problems in bread production and intensified the extent of hunger, undernourishment, and famine in Africa. Red Cross Director-General Robert Mardini [stated](#) that food prices have risen 187% in Sudan, 86% in Syria and 60% in Yemen, just to name a few countries. "It's an issue of life and death for many human beings. And the question is that Russia has to de-block and allow Ukrainian grain to be exported," [said](#) EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell.

### Graph 2: Wheat import dependency, net importers, 2020

#### Ukraine plays crucial role in the global food supply

% of wheat imports sourced from Ukraine



Source: (BBC).

## Türkiye's Mediating Role

Turkish diplomatic efforts played a significant role in reaching an agreement on the grain corridor in the Black Sea. At the same time, the agreement was a concrete reflection of the fact that Turkish diplomacy under the leadership of President Erdogan has become perhaps the most viable communications bridge between the warring parties. Before the deal, both sides were [blaming](#) each other for exacerbating the food crisis. For Ukraine, Russia was the main culprit for the crisis as it blockaded ports. With the blockade of the Black Sea ports through which approximately 98% of total Ukrainian grain is exported, Russia was accused of weaponizing food and punishing the world for sanctions imposed on it since the beginning of the war. For Russia, however, the main responsible party for food crisis was Ukraine itself, because of the mines it placed in its own ports and the Dnieper River.

In such an atmosphere of mutual accusation, reaching a compromise was seen as all but impossible. Nevertheless, Turkish foreign policy under President Erdogan has followed rather a different diplomatic path from the beginning, working to ensure communication channels with

both Moscow and Kyiv remain open. Moreover, while it has provided Bayraktar TB2 drones to Ukraine, it has not become part of the sanctions regime imposed on Russia. As a result of the positive response of the parties, significant progress was made in a short time. President Erdogan held several diplomatic talks with officials from other countries such as France, Germany, the UK, and Italia, as well as the United Nations before the preparation of a draft including technical details of the Grain Corridor in the Black Sea. The fact that countries put aside their short-term interests and prioritized humanitarian concerns regarding the food crisis, the impact of which is not limited to a specific region, has been one of the greatest achievements of this process. The diplomatic efforts of Türkiye with regards to the grain corridor can be seen as one of the most significant diplomatic successes achieved in the course of the Russia-Ukraine War thus far. Importantly, this also opens the possibility of Türkiye being a key architect of any potential future cease-fire between Russia and Ukraine. Below is the chronological order of key events leading up to the agreement.

### Key Events: Türkiye's Grain Diplomacy

June 8	Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discuss the establishment of the grain corridor at a meeting in Ankara.
June 21	The grain corridor issue continued to be discussed in meetings held on 21 June with the participation of Turkish and Russian military delegates in Moscow. At that time, the hotline between the Defence Ministries of Turkey, Russian and Ukraine on grain export was <a href="#">announced</a> .
June 28-30	After the NATO summit in Madrid on 28-30 June, President Erdogan <a href="#">stated</a> that Türkiye could play a role in a possible grain corridor to be established via the Black Sea.
July 8	At the G20 Ministerial Summit held in Bali on 8 July, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov <a href="#">stated</a> that Moscow is open to negotiations in the presence of Türkiye on the grain corridor issue.
July 13	UN-led plan to establish a coordination centre in Istanbul in order to carry out joint inspections at the entrance and exit of the harbours, and to ensure the safety of the routes.
July 14-22	Several multilateral talks between Türkiye, the UN, Russia, and Ukraine on shipments and coordination were held.
July 22	With the mediation of Türkiye and the UN, Ukraine, and Russia signed an agreement in Istanbul on the grain corridor in the Black Sea.

# The Black Sea Grain Initiative

The grain corridor agreement was signed on July 22 in Istanbul by officials from Türkiye, the UN, Russia, and Ukraine. The deal will be valid for 120 days and will be renewed unless there is a demand otherwise from any of the signatories. The main points of the agreement regulating sea traffic, coordination, and other technical issues are as follows:

- Within the scope of the agreement, vessels will be able to use the safe sea route specified for them in the Black Sea, departing from the ports of Odessa, Chornomorsk and Yuzhny.
- A joint coordination centre (JCC) will be established in İstanbul to monitor the ships going across the Black Sea and through the Turkish Straits to make their grain exports to the world.
- All activity in Ukrainian territorial waters will be carried out under the jurisdiction of Ukraine. Under the deal, it is guaranteed that there should be no attacks on any of the vessels leaving territorial waters into the Black Sea.
- There will be a safe passage that will be monitored by the joint coordination centre in İstanbul.
- In the joint coordination centre, which will be responsible for the inspection of the ships entering the ports, there will be representatives of the four parties -Türkiye, the UN, Russia, and Ukraine.
- All commercial vessels that partake in this Initiative will be subject to inspections carried out by the inspection teams in the harbours determined by Turkey, at the entrance/exit to/from the Turkish strait.
- Ships will be inspected to make sure there are no weapons going into Ukraine.

The deal has been designed in a way that it does not exclude any actor from the decision-making process. Türkiye is at the centre of the deal, the UN has a supervisory role as well. Overall sustainability of the grain export activities within the scope of the agreement depends on the efforts of the parties. The principle of trust between the parties is at the centre of the agreement. All parties are expected to avoid any aggressive action that may violate the sustainability of the agreement. Accordingly, all ports and safe sea routes should be properly protected from military attack in order to resume grain exports effectively. Otherwise, the

potential for the trust that underpins the deal to be undermined will remain significant. For instance, on 23 July, just one day after the agreement was signed, Russia launched a strike against the Ukrainian port city of Odessa. Stating that the attack was on a military base in the region, Russian officials underlined that they did not take any action that was in violation of the terms of the deal. Under the terms of the agreement, the warring countries should give utmost importance to the safety of vessels and sea routes which are clearly expressed under the deal. In addition, monitoring and inspection activities should be carried out carefully by representatives of the authorized organizations. In this context, the UN, which has a representative at the Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) in İstanbul, has a key role to play in ensuring the trust of the international community is maintained and providing necessary information about grain exports. If the loading, transportation, monitoring, and control processes are not carried out in a transparent manner, it increases the likelihood that one or the other involved parties could act in a way that may invalidate the agreement. Moreover, there are issues external to the deal itself that have the potential to undermine its sustainability. The increased cost of transportation under conditions of war is one important issue in this regard.



## Responses from the International Community

Türkiye's mediating role has sparked admiration on an international scale. Since the beginning of the war, both Russia and Ukraine have demonstrated respect for Türkiye's position, a delicate balancing act that has helped keep diplomatic channels open. Other international actors have also shown respect for how Türkiye has maintained its mediating and balancing role, which ultimately allowed for the grain deal to be reached. Below are some of the responses from international community regarding Türkiye's role in facilitating the agreement: "The agreement signed today by Ukraine, the Russian Federation & Türkiye under UN auspices opens a path for commercial food exports from Ukraine in the Black Sea. It will help avoid a food shortage catastrophe for millions worldwide. It is a beacon of hope, possibility & relief." - [Antonio Guterres](#), UN Secretary General.

- "Thank you dear Antonio Guterres for your tireless efforts in securing the agreements with the UN and Turkey on Ukrainian grain exports. Millions of tonnes of desperately-needed grain blocked by Russia's war will finally leave through the Black Sea to help feed people across the world." - [Ursula von der Leyen](#), President of the European Commission.

## Conclusion

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine helped trigger a global food crisis. Underdeveloped countries, which had chronic food security issues before the war have been the most affected by the crisis due to their high level of import dependence on Russia and Ukraine. In an international atmosphere of uncompromising resentment and uncertainty, Türkiye achieved a major diplomatic breakthrough. The grain corridor agreement, signed on July 22 after numerous high-level diplomatic talks, represents a turning point in putting an end to the current food crisis. Reaching a consensus on the grain corridor is a reflection of the determined vision of the Turkish foreign policy for which international actors have expressed their admiration. In this process, the performance of the agreement depends mainly on how parties will act according to the principle of trust and fulfil their responsibilities in technical matters

- "I welcome the 1<sup>st</sup> shipment of Ukrainian grain from Odesa under the UN-brokered deal. I thank our Ally Türkiye for its pivotal role. NATO Allies strongly support the full implementation of the deal to ease the global food crisis caused by Russia's war in Ukraine." - [Jens Stoltenberg](#), NATO Secretary General.
- "The United States welcomes this deal and commends U.N. Secretary General Guterres and Turkish President Erdogan for their dedicated mediation diplomatic efforts." - [Anthony Blinken](#), US Secretary of State. Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. "Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has left millions at risk of hunger. Today's Istanbul agreement is a step in the right direction. We call for its swift implementation. Welcome efforts by the UN and Turkey. The EU is committed to continue helping export Ukraine's grain." - [Josep Borrell Fontelles](#), High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

of grain exports from the ports. The deal also opens the potential of maintaining diplomatic momentum towards a cease fire by building on the trust and communication channels that allowed the grain deal to come to fruition.

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