

Russia introduces an embargo on Moldovan wine

On 12 August the Russian Border Guard admitted that at the beginning of the month at the request of Rospotrebnadzor, the chief sanitary inspectorate of Russia, it had introduced a ban on imports of Moldovan wine. Despite the fact that Rospotrebnadzor the same day denied the information, Moldovan wine has not reached the Russian market. The embargo has a political character and comes as a result of Moscow's dissatisfaction with the policies of the current Moldovan government; they may also be recognised as a means of supporting pro-Russian parties ahead of parliamentary elections planned for this autumn.

Gennadiy Onishchenko, the head of Rospotrebnadzor as early as 17 July warned that Russia could introduce an embargo on Moldovan wines within two weeks due to their alleged harmful ingredients. Wine production is one of the main sectors of the Moldovan economy (accounting for approximately 20% GDP) and half of its production is sold in Russia. In 2006-2007 Russia closed its market to Moldovan wine which led to losses estimated at US\$400m. An embargo is a traditional means used by Russia to achieve its foreign policy goals (in recent years three recipients of this have been: Belarus, Georgia and Poland). The Kremlin is counting on the ban provoking voter dissatisfaction for the policies of the incumbent pro-Western Alliance for European Integration and a strengthening of support for pro-Russian parties (the Communists, the Humanist Party, the Democratic Party of Moldova) which could lead to their victory in the parliamentary elections. Vladimir Voronin, the leader of the Communists and the former president went to Moscow at the beginning of August. He was received by, among others, Sergey Naryshkin, the chief of the Kremlin's administration; the main topic of conversation was most likely the formation of a coalition of pro-Russian parties. <WoyK>