



‘Casus belli’: What Kaliningrad blockade means for Russia

Description

LITHUANIA/RUSSIA: The transit of some goods through Lithuania has been blocked, raising concerns over shortages in Russia’s exclave

Lithuania blocked the rail transit of some Russian goods to the country’s Kaliningrad Region on Saturday. Vilnius explained the move by stating that the goods in question were sanctioned by the EU in connection with the conflict in Ukraine, and therefore can no longer pass through the bloc’s territory even if they travel from one part of Russia to another.

1. **Why is that important?** The Kaliningrad Region is a Russian exclave, sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania along the Baltic Coast. Its position in the heart of Europe enables it to easily deliver Russian goods to any part of the EU. As a territory which belongs to Russia but is geographically separated from the rest of the country, it should be granted full access to and from “mainland” Russia under international law. Therefore, some analysts suggest that Lithuania’s move to block Russia’s access to its own territory could, to some extent, be considered a ‘casus belli’ – a cause for the declaration of war.
2. **Why did Lithuania block transit?** According to Lithuanian officials, the decision was made after getting the approval of the European Commission, the EU’s main governing body. Many countries, including EU member states, imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia in response to its military operation in Ukraine in late February. The bloc, among other things, banned the entry of a number of Russian goods. Vilnius’ move is allegedly meant to enforce these bans.
3. **Is the transit of all goods blocked?** No, only the goods sanctioned by Brussels were denied passage. Among them are crude oil and oil products, coal, metals, construction materials, advanced technology, glassware, some foods and fertilizers, plus alcohol. According to the region’s governor, Anton Alikhanov, the ban means that as much as 50% of all goods destined for Kaliningrad could be blocked.
4. **Can the block result in supply shortages in the region?** Not necessarily, as the passage via the Baltic Sea is still open for Russia to use. According to local officials, as well as the heads of most retail chains, the region is well-stocked with food and supplies and would not suffer from delivery setbacks for three to six months. A significant portion of meat, dairy, and fish is produced locally, and, according to the head of its main port, Elena Zaitseva, Kaliningrad has even

exported some corn, wheat, and rapeseed in recent years.

5. **Is there a threat to tourism/passenger traffic?** No threat for now. While passenger trains from mainland Russia to Kaliningrad through Lithuania were halted back in early April, four major Russian airlines maintain Moscow-Kaliningrad flights. Sea ferries are also available, while reports state that Russian officials are currently working on launching passenger sea routes through the Baltic.

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