

Eyes on Russia

Mapping grain seizure and extraction under Russian occupation authorities



MAY 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Analysis by CIR investigators reveals the Russian government and its Ukrainian collaborators are taking grain from Ukraine's occupied areas without the permission of the Ukrainian government. Commercial entities linked to pro-Russian occupying authorities have played a key role in the process of illegitimate extraction and export of grain.

- Through the analysis of satellite imagery and user generated content, CIR has verified several pieces of data indicating grain extraction from two companies in Russia-controlled areas: 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' (Luhansk oblast) and 'State Grain Operator' (Zaporizhzhia oblast). CIR investigators verified and crosschecked satellite imagery with user-generated content to expose grain extraction by Russia's State Grain Operator in at least three areas across Zaporizhzhia oblast: Branch No. 15 and Branch No. 16 in Melitopol, Branch No. 6 in Kamianka-Dniprovsk, and Branches No. 5, No. 12, and No. 13 in Berdiansk.
- State Unitary Enterprises or Municipal Unitary Enterprises have been established at major regional grain logistics hubs that have been seized and pillaged by Russian troops, including large elevators in the Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions.
- This report names individuals belonging to the so-called military-civilian administrations (occupying entities) that take part in the process of grain extraction in these areas.
- Rail transport has played a key role in grain extractive activity from Luhansk to Russian export hubs in Rostov-on-Don. This likely results in the contamination of legitimate Russian foodstuffs from within Russian territory, with food produce sourced from locations in Luhansk. This report documents widespread rail logistical operations in occupied grain storage facilities across Ukraine.
- CIR investigators have identified Ukrainian citizens linked to extraction activities by companies seized by Russia or their collaborators.
- The elevator in Melitopol was seized by Russian State Unitary Enterprise State Grain Operator. Data analysed by CIR investigators indicates a very high likelihood of export activity from the Melitopol elevator, as well as other branches of the State Grain Operator, to Crimea via both rail and road.
- Analysis indicates that barges with grain have been loaded at Berdiansk Port. CIR worked with maritime experts and assessed that it is very unlikely that the barges are used to carry grain outside of the Azov sea, narrowing their likely destinations to Rostov-on-Don in Russia, or Kerch in occupied Crimea.
- CIR finds sufficient evidence to suggest there are multiple forms of overland logistics connections between State Grain Operator's enterprises and occupied Crimea. For example, video footage analysed by CIR investigators shows several trucks likely filled with grain turning from the E105 highway, from the direction of Zaporizhzhia, onto the E97, towards Kerch.
- Crane Marine Contractors, a subsidiary of Russian state-owned defence contractor United Shipbuilding Corp, has been expanding operations in Sevastopol through the purchase of ships. United Shipbuilding Corp, which has

been under US sanctions since April 2022 for providing weapons to the Russian army, operates in Sevastopol. CMC's handy bulkers are the largest ships likely taking part in grain smuggling operation, at 170-180 metres. They have the capacity to reach any European port and have been present in Turkish ports of Iskenderun, Derince, and Dörtyol.

- The AGRO-FRIGAT (ОБЩЕСТВО С ОГРАНИЧЕННОЙ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТЬЮ "АГРО-ФРЕГАТ"), an agro-transportation LLC based in Rostov-on-Don, is likely to be heavily involved in the movement of grain by rail across occupied areas and Black Sea ports.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) has been continually monitoring the disruption of food production and exports by Russian military activity across the territory of Ukraine.

This report consolidates open-source data collected and verified by CIR relating to this subject since 24 February 2022. Gathered over the course of February and March 2023, it was produced in accordance with the Eyes on Russia (EoR) methodology,¹ which complies with the guidance provided by the Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations² and the reference paper 'Documenting international crimes and human rights violations for accountability purposes: Guidelines for civil society organisations,' from European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation' (Eurojust).³

This investigation examines the alleged theft and appropriation of strategic crops in Ukrainian territory

temporarily occupied by Russian and Russia-controlled forces after the full-scale invasion. The report identifies extractive activities at high-interest locations that have fallen under the complete or partial control of the Russia-controlled occupying authorities in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion.

Open-source data verified by CIR can be categorised as applying to one of the following four themes:

- Seizure of harvested grain;
- Appropriation of agricultural land;
- Transport of illicit grain (overland);
- Transport of illicit grain (maritime).

The report provides an analysis of extractive activity, or work undertaken to withdraw grain or other foodstuffs stored and grown within occupied areas of Ukraine by organisations linked to the Russian Federation or occupation proxies.

1 Strick (3 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.info-res.org/post/eyes-on-russia-documenting-conflict-and-disinformation-in-the-kremlin-s-war-on-ukraine>

2 OHCHR (March 2022). Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/OHCHR_BerkeleyProtocol.pdf

3 Eurojust (21 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/sites/default/files/assets/eurojust-icc-csos-guidelines.pdf>

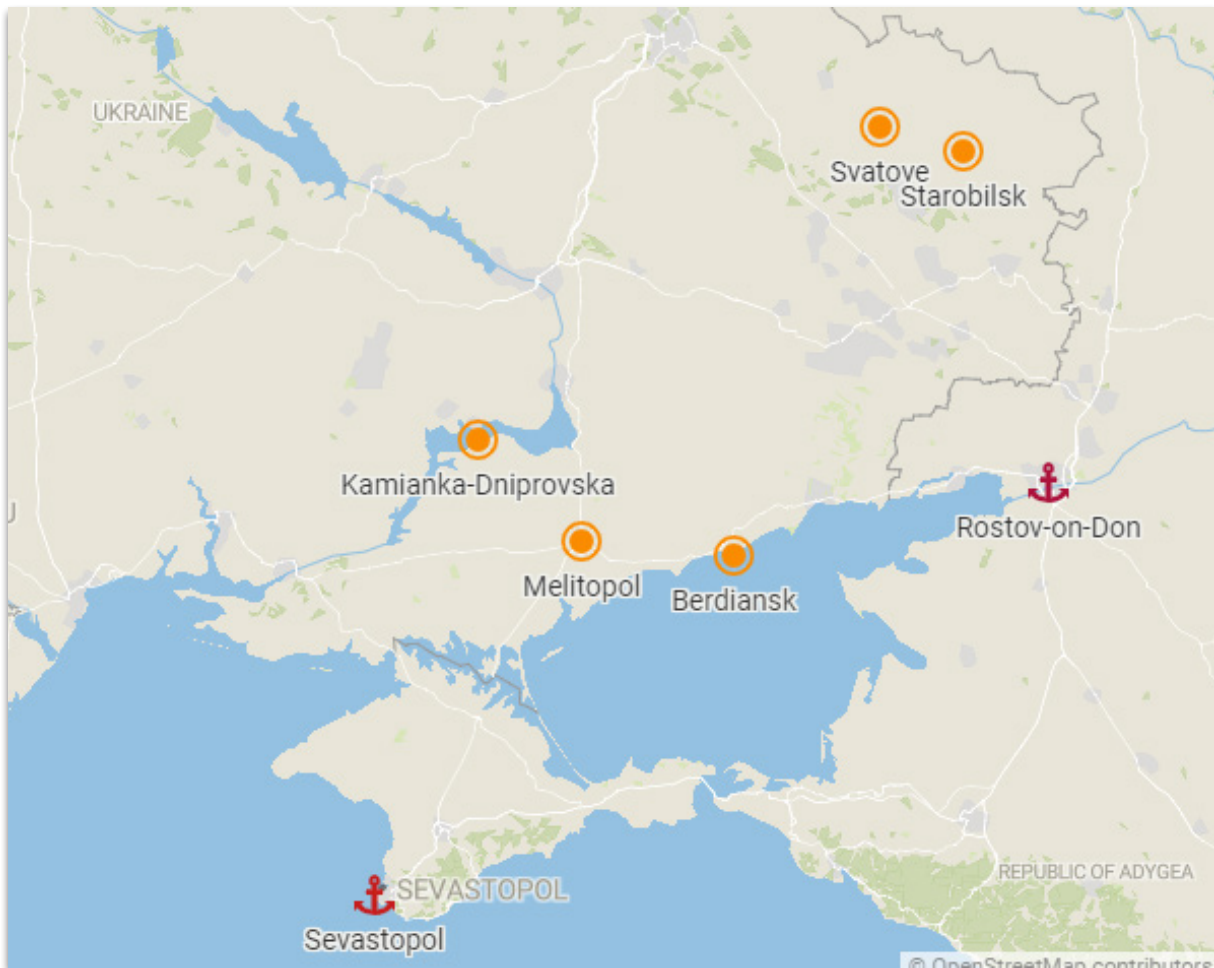


Figure 1: Locations analysed in the report as demonstrating indicators of extractive activities: Starobilsk (Luhansk oblast), Svatove (Luhansk oblast), Berdiansk (Zaporizhzhia oblast), Melitopol (Zaporizhzhia oblast), Kamianka-Dniprovska (Zaporizhzhia oblast).

IDENTIFIED SITES OF EXTRACTIVE ACTIVITY

This first section of the report highlights verified data of known extractive activity, or work undertaken to withdraw grain or other foodstuffs stored and grown within occupied areas of Ukraine by organisations linked to Russia or occupying authorities.

CIR investigators have conducted an in-depth investigation of sites in two oblasts in the east and southeast of Ukraine that have seen significant extractive activity during the occupation of Russian forces: Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia.

Municipal Unitary Enterprise ‘Starobilsky Elevator’ (Муниципальное унитарное предприятие ‘Старобельский элеватор’), Luhansk oblast

The city of Starobilsk was seized by Russian forces within the opening two weeks of Russia’s 24 February offensive.⁴ The town accommodates the largest elevator in Luhansk, with a storage capacity of 157,700 tons.

According to Ukrainian commercial records, Starobilsk’s elevator was established on 11 December 1998 and is owned by Nibulon (Нібулон), a large agricultural company operating across Ukraine.⁵ The facility had been under the legal supervision of Krutko Yevhenii Mykolaiovych (Крутько Євгеній Миколайович) since 26 October 2016 until his position was relinquished, on 19 August 2022.⁶ The

open-source information gathered indicates Krutko remains responsible for running the facility, which, after the occupation of Starobilsk, was registered as a Municipal Unitary Enterprise⁷ under the Russian tax authority of the ‘Interdistrict Inspectorate of the Federal Tax Service of Russia No. 4 for the Luhansk People’s Republic’.⁸ Russian commercial records show the company was registered on 1 August 2022. They list the ‘Administration of the Starobilsk District of the [so-called] Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR)’⁹ (or АСТР ЛНР), headed by former Starobilsk mayor Oleksandr Honcharov (Александр Гончаров), as the founder of the enterprise.¹⁰

4 Videos show Russian Armed Forces entering the town on 2 March 2022. See @mattia_n (2 March 2022). Available at: https://twitter.com/mattia_n/status/1498948877268967426?s=20; Videos associated with the town under occupation were widely published on 7 March 2022. See Серій Гайдай (7 March 2022). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1104491670317108>

5 Directory of Ukrainian enterprises (Last accessed 12 April 2023). Available at: <https://www.ua-region.com.ua/en/00952798>

6 Opendatabot.ua (Last accessed 30 January 2023). Available at: <https://opendatabot.ua/c/00952798>

7 In Russian corporate law, Unitary Enterprises are corporations founded by the Russian government or territorial units of the Russian Federation (e.g., municipalities). These entities have limited legal capacity and hold no ownership rights over the assets that they use in their operations; Heindler (19 April 2022). Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Lz9sDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT110&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

8 Rusprofile (Last accessed on 10 April 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/1229400033444>

9 ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’, or ‘LPR’, is the name given to the unrecognised Russia-occupied areas of the Luhansk oblast.

10 RBC Companies (last accessed 10 April 2023). Available at: <https://companies.rbc.ru/id/1229400033444-munitsipalnoe-unitarnoe-predpriatie-starobelskij-elevator-goroda-starobelska/>.

Open-source commercial information indicates that several other nearby elevators have been seized by the Russia-controlled 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC', including the branches in Belokurakinsky, Novoaidar, and Svativskyi districts.¹¹ The following

pages describe several pieces of data identified by CIR indicating grain extraction from the Russia-controlled 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' and its branches.

Construction of railway

Media outlets associated with the pro-Russian occupying authorities in occupied areas of Luhansk published imagery related to the refurbishment of railways in the territory of 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC'

on 18 May 2022. The construction was reportedly carried out by the so-called 'Lugansk Railway' (LZhD) ["Луганская железная дорога" (ЛЖД)].¹²



Figure 2: Railway conversion taking place at 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC'. [Image taken from 49.285077, 38.923030 facing East]¹³

¹¹ [Rusprofile.ru](https://www.rusprofile.ru/branches/1229400033444) (Last accessed 17 February 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/branches/1229400033444>

¹² LZhD is a company established by the occupying authorities in the Luhansk region. LZhD (Last accessed 9 April 2023). Available at: <https://lug-info.com/tag/%D0%BB%D0%B6%D0%B4>

¹³ LZhD (Last accessed 13 January 2023). Available at: <https://lug-info.com/news/specialisty-l-zh-d-stroyat-zh-d-vetku-dlya-transportirovki-zerna-iz-starobel-skogo-elevatora>



Figure 3: Railway repairs outside 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC'. [Image taken from 49.282288, 38.927680, facing North].¹⁴

The railway construction was attended by Viktor Molotok (Виктор Молоток), director of the Russian agricultural company, Kalmichanka (Калмичанка),

listed under Russian corporate records,¹⁵ as well as Yevhenii Krutko.

Increase in rail traffic

On 10 June 2022, the 'LuhanskInformCenter' Telegram channel shared a video of the head of 'LPR', Leonid Ivanovich Pasechnik (Леонід Іванович Пасічник), attending the departure of a train from the 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' facility.¹⁶ The video

shows customs officers tagging wagons, claimed to be filled with grain, as the train moves towards the exit of the facility. The post is captioned with the claim that the train is carrying 13 wagons of grain, at a weight of 650 tonnes, to Rostov-on-Don (Russia).

¹⁴ Старобільські новини (20 May 2022). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/starobilskinovyny/photos/a.311319062644888/1421079925002124/>

¹⁵ Rusprofile (Last accessed 13 January 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/1229400052200>

¹⁶ @LIC_LPR (10 June 2022). Available at: https://t.me/LIC_LPR/27803. CIR has verified that the video was filmed at the 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' facility.



Figure 4: Still of a video showing grain wagons departing the 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' facility.¹⁷ These grain wagons have the markings affiliated with the 'OZK United Grain Company' logistics fleet, which is headquartered in Rostov-on-Don.¹⁸

In the video of the Rostov-on-Don train, the carriages pulled by the locomotive are marked with a distinct blue and white livery, although other identifying features have been painted over. This livery is associated with the United Grain Company (Объединенная зерновая компания), or OZK, headquartered in Rostov-on-Don.¹⁹ The company provides logistics services, as well as facilitates the export of harvested crops from its own facilities in Novorossiysk, where it owns the Public Joint Stock Company (PJSC) Novorossiysk Grain Plant (ПАО «Новороссийский комбинат хлебопродуктов») storage and shipment facility.²⁰ OZK is partially

owned by the Russian State.²¹

OZK carriages have also been spotted across occupied areas in Ukraine. A video shared to YouTube, uploaded on 6 May 2022, on a trainspotting channel showed 20 OZK grain carriages being pulled towards Simferopol from the direction of Chonhar, in Kherson Oblast.²² On 8 May 2022, a row of 20 newly arrived grain carriages was pictured by satellite imagery next to the grain terminal at Sevastopol.²³ Based on CIR's mapping of the Crimean rail network, this train could have also potentially originated in Yevpatoriya, Crimea.

17 @LIC_LPR (10 June 2022). Available at: https://t.me/LIC_LPR/27803

18 OZK Group (Last accessed 10 February 2023). Available at: <https://ozk-group.ru/en/activities/logistics/>

19 OZK Group (Last accessed 9 April 2023). Available at: <https://www.ozk-group.ru/>

20 OZK Group (Last accessed 30 January 2023). Available at: https://www.ozk-group.ru/about/ozk_group/novorossiysk_grain_plant/ [Accessed 30/01/2023]

21 OZK Group. Last accessed 2 April 2023. Available at: <https://www.ozk-group.ru/about/>

22 Videos taken of the freight train. 'Crazy station (6 May 2022). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G5sUblLj2jE>; Транспорт Симферополя! (7 May 2022). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgH5sMmChmo>

23 Based on a review of satellite imagery provided by Planet SkySat (0.5m). This train is unlikely to be drawing grain from areas of Ukraine occupied since 24 February 2022.



Figure 5: Southern-bound train on the line running between Crimea and Kherson, hauling carriages marked with OZK livery. [Geolocated to 45.013084, 34.041843].

After the restoration of the rail infrastructure within the facility, CIR observed a notable increase in rail traffic within the 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' compound. In satellite imagery from 13 July 2022, CIR identified several lines of carriages across the compound as

grain trucks, which are pictured queuing internally and externally (see figure 6, below). Satellite imagery from December indicates extractive activities were persistent throughout 2022.



Figure 6: PlanetLabs image of 'Starobilsky Elevator LLC' on the 13 July 2022. E-trucks seen queuing to deliver grain on the northern perimeter of the compound, highlighted in white. Rail carriages highlighted in yellow.

Further images were shared to the occupying administration's media outlet²⁴ as well as local Telegram channels.²⁵



Figure 7: PlanetLabs image of 'Starobil'sky Elevator LLC' on 5 December 2022. Rail carriages highlighted in yellow.

Further Branches

Three other facilities were seized and incorporated under 'Starobil'sky Elevator LLC's ownership in 2022 based on Russian open-source commercial records.²⁶ These include Svatove, Belokurakinskiy, and Novoaidar.

In Svatove, a train was filmed departing from a second Nibulon elevator facility,²⁷ under the supervision of occupation authority customs officials.²⁸ As of April 2023, it is unclear where grain collected from the Svatove elevator was taken.

²⁴ LZHD (7 July 2022). Available at: <https://lug-info.com/news/starobel-skij-elevator-ezhesutochno-prinimaet-2-5-3-tys-t-zerna>

²⁵ @tygvfhh (1 August 2022). Available at: <https://t.me/tygvfhh/71898>

²⁶ Rusprofile (Last accessed 15 February 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/branches/1229400033444>

²⁷ Nibulon (Last accessed 15 February 2023). Available at: <https://www.nibulon.com/data/filii/virobnichi-filii-tov-sp-nibulon/filiya-svativska.html>

²⁸ LZHD (20 August 2022). Available at: <https://lug-info.com/news/tamozhenniki-lnr-ofomili-na-eksport-pervye-560-tonn-zerna-iz-svatovskogo-elevatora>



Figure 8: 'LPR' customs official, Volodymyr Honcharuk (Владимир Гончарук, right), pictured alongside wagons at grain elevator facility in Svatove, Luhansk. [Geolocated to 49.404276, 38.178705; facing northwest].

Beyond Nibulon facilities in Luhansk, two facilities owned and operated by PJSC 'Agrotron', the elevators in Bilokurakyne and Novoaidar,²⁹ were also seized by the enterprise.³⁰ Rail activity was detected at Bilokurakyne in October 2022, based on a review of PlanetLabs satellite imagery.

Possibly, Russian military vehicles were observed at the Novoaidar elevator in April 2022, based on PlanetLabs imagery. The area experienced extensive Russian activity over the course of April-May 2022.³¹

²⁹ Agrotron (Last accessed 14 February 2022). Available at: <https://tripoli.land/companies/agrotron>

³⁰ Based on commercial records. See also: Старобільські новини (16 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/starobilskinovyny/posts/pfbid0NeUM1bHwbKGv2hqofLZT5WRnKdxUiUJfd3XBDzs6vcb8nwufr4A88PZnwARkSrg1I>

³¹ @MarQs__ (6 May 2022). Available at: https://twitter.com/MarQs__/status/1522664252720529409 [geolocated to 48.964485, 39.016382]; @200_zoka (19 May 2022). Available at: https://twitter.com/200_zoka/status/1527268991718285312?s=20 [00:18-00:21; geolocated to: 48.942048, 39.03259].



Figure 9: Planet satellite imagery of possible military vehicles within Novoidar compound on 25 April 2022.

State Unitary Enterprise State Grain Operator (Государственный зерновой оператор, ГУП “ГЗО”)

Melitopol, in Zaporizhzhia oblast, has become a significant centre for trafficking grain from areas in the region, partially occupied since Russia’s 2022 offensives into Ukrainian territory.³² This section reviews available indicators of how grain was seized, trafficked, and ultimately exported from Zaporizhzhia oblast, finding that commercial entities with ties to occupation authorities have played a key role in all stages of the extraction and export process.

The grain elevator in Melitopol is listed as a ‘branch’ of the Russian State Unitary Enterprise State Grain Operator. The enterprise, and its director, Busel

Nikita Petrovich (Бусел Микита Петрович), are currently under US sanctions.³³ The organisation claims the State Grain Operator has the capacity to export approximately 12,000 tonnes of grain from the occupied territory every day. In March 2023, the enterprise’s official Telegram channel claimed it engaged in meetings between Dmitry Patrushev, the Russian Minister for Agriculture, and representatives of the occupation authorities for Zaporizhzhia in Moscow, suggesting further links to the Russian State.³⁴ Russian state-owned media shares the use of the elevator by occupying authorities publicly.³⁵

³² Biesecker et al (3 October 2022). Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-business-lebanon-syria-87c3b6fea3f4c-326003123b21aa78099>

³³ US Department of State (Last accessed 5 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-takes-sweeping-actions-on-the-one-year-anniversary-of-russias-war-against-ukraine/>

³⁴ The meetings were also attended by Євген Віталійович Балицький. Available at: <https://t.me/gupgzo/448> [Accessed 27/03/2023].

³⁵ TASS (5 April 2023). Available at: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/17454493>

State Grain Operator lists 16 addresses across occupied areas of Ukraine.

- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 1, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, с. Акимовка, улца Курортная д.1;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 2, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, Пологовский район, г. Токмак, ул. Шава д. 84;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 3, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Васильевка, ул. 8-го Марта дом 75;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 4, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Пологи, ул. Ломоносова дом 36;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 5, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Бердянск, ул. Горького дом 4 ;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 6, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Каменка-Днепровская, ул. Промышленная дом 1;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 7, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Токмак, ул. Шава, дом 88;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 8, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, Бердянский район, с. Верхний Токмак, ул. Привокзальная, дом 8а;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 9, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, Пологовский район, с. Розовка, ул. Вокзальная, дом 72;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 10, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, Бердянский район, с. Троицы, ул. Школьная дом 1;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 11, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, пгт Пришиб, ул. Элеваторная дом 1;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 12, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Бердянск, ул. Туристическая, дом 1;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 13, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Бердянск, ул. Гагарина дом 11;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 14, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, с. Обильное;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 15, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Мелитополь, ул. Гетьмана Сагайдачного, дом 212;
- филиал ГУП «ГЗО» № 16, который расположен по адресу: Запорожская область, г. Мелитополь, ул. Гетьмана Сагайдачного, дом 51.

Figure 10: List of locations of branches of State Grain Operator based on the company's charter.³⁶

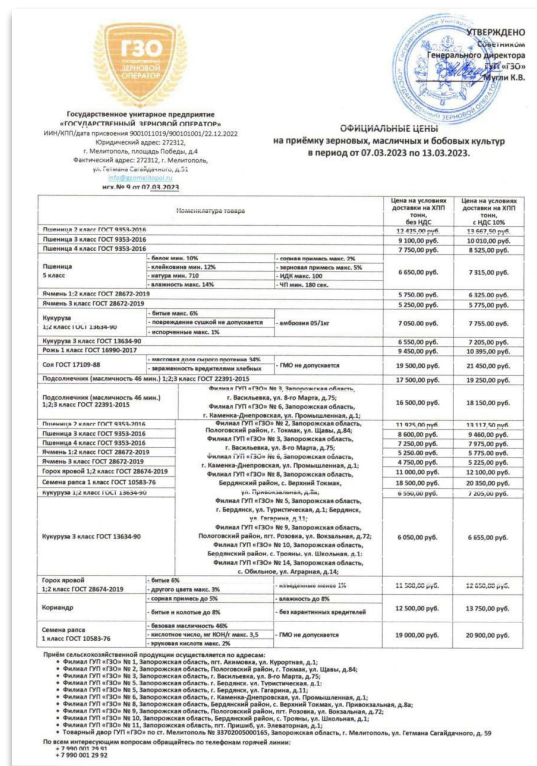


Figure 11: Prices of grain purchases set by the State Grain Operator.³⁷

The enterprise also sets prices for grain purchase from farmers hoping to export grain via the State Grain Operator's export facilities. CIR utilised the State Grain Operator's Telegram chatbot to ascertain information about current prices set by the enterprise per collection location.

CIR conducted analysis of several of the sites listed on the enterprise's website and charter, which lists activities relating to crop production as well as storage and exports, to identify patterns of seizure of grain.

36 [Disk.yandex.ru](https://disk.yandex.ru) (Last accessed 6 March 2023). Available at: <https://disk.yandex.ru/i/EWEFmb9WSDQzhg>

37 Received via the State Grain Operator Telegram chatbot, @gup_gzobot, for prices between 7 and 13 March 2023; Available at: https://t.me/gup_gzobot

State Grain Operator in Melitopol: Branch No. 16, 38 Melitopol Grain Elevator, and nearby Branch No. 15³⁹

Activity at the Melitopol Grain Elevator was identified prior to the establishment of the State Grain Operator. A video shared widely on social media shows a convoy of over 15 Category E trucks, with trailers used to transport grain, heading South-West in proximity to the Melitopol Grain Elevator.⁴⁰

The trucks had no number plates, and the majority of the vehicles were marked with the 'Z' symbol used by the Russian Armed Forces (see figure 12, below). Based on the analysis of shadows in the video, the footage was likely captured in the early morning at some point in late March or April 2022.

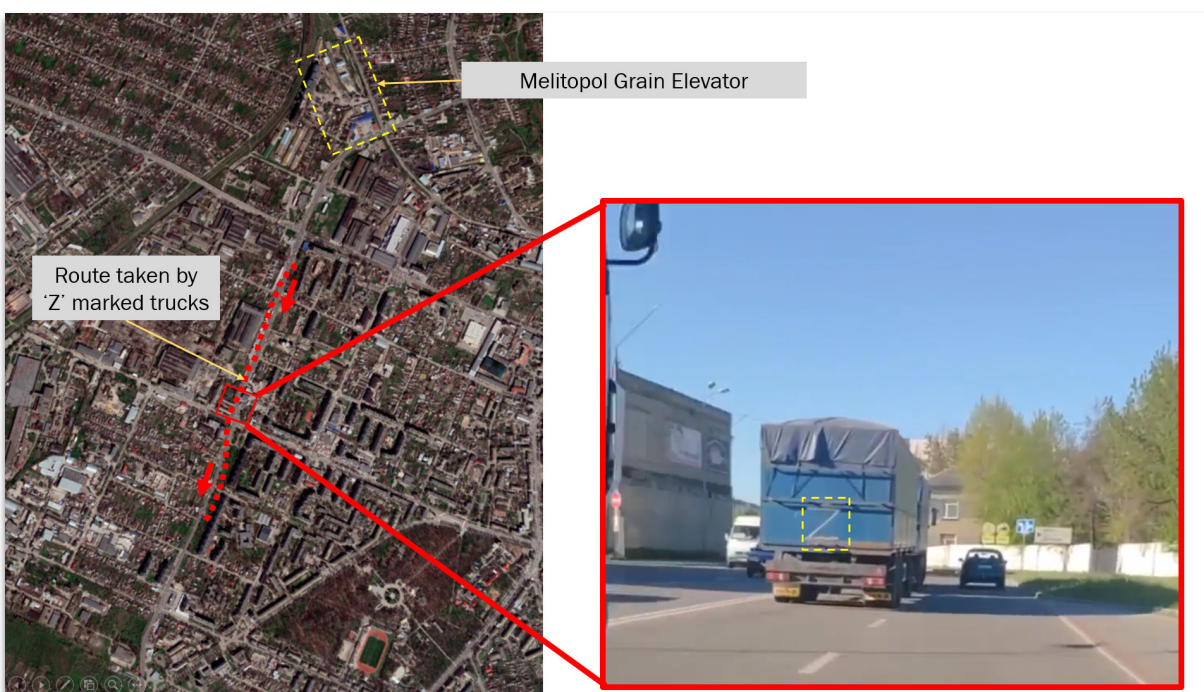


Figure 12: (Left) Annotated Maxar (2023) satellite image showing the route captured on video of 15+ trucks departing Melitopol in a south-west direction. (Right) Frame from the footage, showing a truck marked with the Russian 'Z' symbol.

On 15 July 2022, Andrey Siguta (Андрей Сигута),⁴¹ the Russian-appointed acting head of the so-called military-civilian administration of the Melitopol district, held a press conference stating that grain from the Melitopol grain elevator would be transported to Sevastopol Port and Berdyansk Port.⁴² A day prior to this, Russian troops were photographed in armoured vehicles in the Melitopol

³⁸ Address: Melitopol, Hetmana Sahaidachnoho street, 51 [46.855109, 35.364243]

³⁹ Address: Melitopol, Hetmana Sahaidachnoho street, 212 [46.860784, 35.3619526]

⁴⁰ @nevedimka123 (15 May 2022). Available at: <https://twitter.com/nevedimka123/status/1520787867743698947> [geolocated to: 46.846065, 35.357876].

⁴¹ Siguta is currently under international sanctions; OFAC (Last accessed 10 April 2023): <https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=39199>; War & Sanctions (Last accessed 10 April 2023). Available at: <https://sanctions.nazk.gov.ua/sanction-person/24196/>

⁴² Izvestia (15 July 2022). Available at: <https://iz.ru/1365103/2022-07-15/inostrannym-zhurnalistam-pokazali-polnyi-zerna-elevator-v-melitopole>

Elevator facility.⁴³ Video footage showing trucks leaving with grain was shared on social media on 24 July 2022.⁴⁴ CIR investigators geolocated this video to Branch No. 16 of the State Grain Operator by the Melitopol grain elevator. One of the trucks

was identified as having Russian number plates registered to occupied Crimea (see figure 13, below), suggesting a road transportation route between Melitopol and Crimea.



Figure 13: Trucks identified by the Melitopol grain elevator with plate number L734HE82, registered to occupied Crimea.

At the nearby Branch No. 15, extensive activity has been recorded in reference to the collection and export of grain. In a video produced by the State Grain Operator, the enterprise's director, Nikita Busel, can be seen standing in front of several rail

wagons as they are loaded with grain.⁴⁵ The video claims that the wagons are bound for Berdyansk for shipment. The video is no longer available on the enterprise's website or Telegram channel.

43 Getty Images (Last accessed 13 February 2022). Available at: <https://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/russian-service-man-guards-a-grain-elevator-in-melitopol-news-photo/1241909960>, [geolocated to: 46.854667, 35.361705].

44 @Riamelitopol (24 July 2022). Available at: <https://t.me/riamelitopol/62638>

45 @melitopolnewsru (Last accessed 9 March 2023). Available at: https://vk.com/video/@melitopolnews-ru?z=video-213103258_456240666%2Fpl_-213103258_-2 [Geolocated to 46.86005, 35.36149].



Figure 14: Planet SkySat imagery from 17 October 2022 (left) and 7 November 2022 (right). Branch No. 15 with exposed grain storage annotated in white (left). Grain railway wagons at site highlighted in yellow (right).

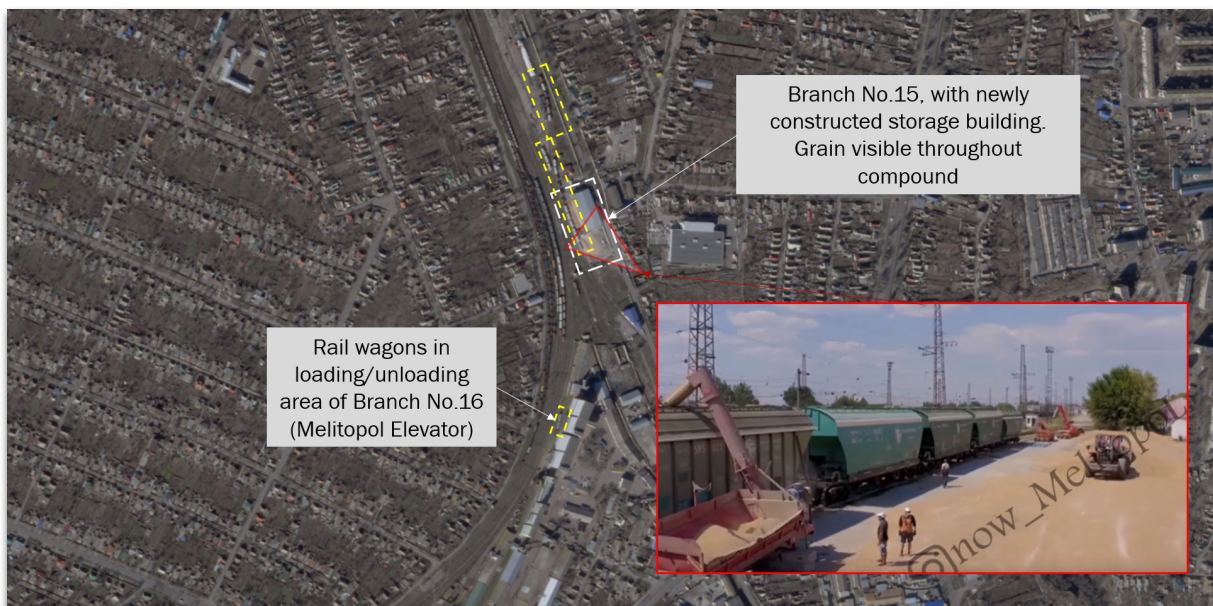


Figure 15: Planet SkySat imagery from 2 March 2023 showing Branch No. 15 with exposed newly constructed storage building in yellow. On the right, social media footage showing rail wagons loading/unloading grain geolocated to the area of Branch No. 16.

Imagery from February 2023 shows the expansion of the operation in Melitopol. Both branches (Branch No. 15 and Branch No. 16) appear to accommodate rail activity, suggesting a high tonnage of grain passing through the facility.

Statements circulated by several media sources suggest that transfers of grain from Melitopol to Crimea began in early June. On 7 June 2022, Yevgeny Balitsky, head of the occupying 'Military-Civilian Administration' of the Zaporizhzhia region, claimed that 11 wagons had departed from Melitopol elevator for Crimea.⁴⁶ Video footage shared by RIA Novosti published on the same day shows a locomotive leaving Melitopol railway station in a southern direction, towing several grain hopper

wagons.⁴⁷ The locomotives are decorated in the liveries and logo of state-owned Russian Railways.⁴⁸

A video shared to Telegram in July 2022 show grain wagons arriving in Melitopol, moving towards the enterprise's two rail loading branches.⁴⁹ The train, comprised of 15+ grain wagons, is arriving from the direction of Melitopol's rail link to the Crimean peninsula.

In conclusion, the analysis provided above implies a very high likelihood of export activity from the Melitopol elevator, as well as other branches of the State Grain Operator, to Crimea via both rail and road.

Branch No. 6: Kamianka-Dniprovska50 [47.500759, 34.386155]

Evidence on social media, as well as investigations by international media, have demonstrated extensive extractive activities at the grain elevator in Kamianka-Dniprovska. The facility, also owned by Nibulon,⁵¹ is now listed as a branch of the enterprise under State Grain Operator's charter.⁵²

Images from 19 May 2022 shared on Facebook show several trucks heading eastwards on the road leading away from the elevator compound, along with a claim that Russian forces were stealing grain from the facility.⁵³

46 Interfax (7 June 2022). Available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/845178>

47 Ria Novosti (7 June 2022). Available at: <https://ria.ru/20220607/zerno-1793854089.html> [Geolocated to approximately 46.86779, 35.35658, looking north].

48 Russian Railways (Last accessed 11 April 2023). Available at: <https://www.russianrailways.com/>

49 @riamelitopol (9 July 2022). Available at: <https://t.me/riamelitopol/60999> [Geolocated to approximately 46.854804, 35.357848, facing north-west]

50 This site has been the subject of an investigation by the Wall Street Journal. WSJ (7 July 2022). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLQilhrutmA>

51 Nibulon (26 January 2017). Available at: <https://nibulon.com/news/news-company/the-first-million-of-kamianka-dniprovs-ka-branch.html>

52 [Disk.yandex.ru](https://disk.yandex.ru) (Last accessed 6 March 2023). Available at: <https://disk.yandex.ru/i/EWeFMb9WSDQzhg>

53 Private facebook post (29 May 2022). Collected and archived by CIR. Last accessed 3 April 2023.



*Figure 16: Queues of trucks, allegedly carrying seized grain, reportedly in Kamianka-Dniprovska.⁵⁴
[Geolocated to: 47.495444, 34.407490, facing East].*

The sighted trucks have no number plates or identifying features. An investigative report from the Wall Street Journal reporting on the facility included CCTV footage, apparently from May 2022, showing trucks with masked number plates arriving at the

grain facility with the 'Z' symbol associated with the Russian invasion painted on the front. The WSJ's reporting did not discuss the facility's ties to the State Grain Operator enterprise.

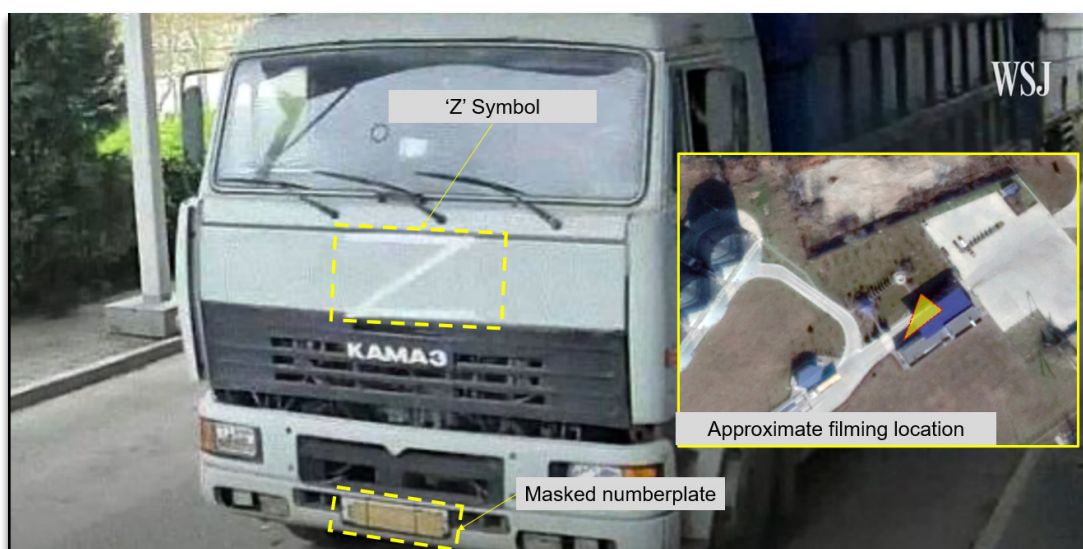


Figure 17: Grain carrying trucks marked with 'Z' symbol of Russian invasion seen entering the grain elevator compound in CCTV footage provided to the Wall Street Journal, annotated by CIR.⁵⁵ [Geolocated to: 47.501669, 34.387838, facing east]. Reported date of filming: 05 May 2022.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ WSJ (7 July 2022). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLQilhrutmA>

Satellite imagery from the facility would further demonstrate activity from the facility, with several trucks seen queuing at the edge of, and within, the grain elevator facility in June 2022.



Figure 18: Trucks used to transport grain in the vicinity of the facility in June 2022.

Branches in Berdiansk

Several branches are listed in and around the town of Berdiansk, in Zaporizhzhia oblast.

Branch No.12 was initially seized by Russian forces in mid-March, with satellite imagery showing a small

military column on the edge of the compound. CCTV footage acquired by international media outlets shows several vehicles, reportedly from the same day, entering the grain storage compound via the main gate.



Figure 19: Annotated PlanetLabs SkySat imagery from 26 March 2022 showing a column of military vehicles (yellow) on the road. CCTV footage acquired by the WSJ geolocated to the front gate of the compound [Geolocated to 46.796015, 36.730520].

Later imagery shows multiple grain loading trucks across the facility, some queuing in the holding area. The first vehicles in the site were detected on 2

August 2022, with extensive activity pictured on 15 August 2022 and later into the year (see figure 20, below).



Figure 20: Frequency of vehicles at the facility visible on Planet imagery from August, 2022.

Images of grain being loaded onto a cargo ship (46.752427, 36.778497) at Berdiansk port were shared on Telegram 26 June 2022.⁵⁶ The *Branch No. 5* of the State Grain Operator is listed as located next to the port on 4, Gork Street [46.755197, 36.778829]. The State Grain Operator is understood to be a separate entity to the Berdyansk Port operator, which is listed as a separate State Unitary Enterprise in Russian commercial records.⁵⁷ A number of ports in newly occupied areas have also been placed under the control of State Unitary Enterprises, including the Kherson River Port⁵⁸ and the Skadovsky Sea Port⁵⁹

User generated-content shared on 24 October 2022 shows multiple carriages at Berdiansk railway station. One of the carriages is clearly labelled 'зерно' ('grain').⁶⁰ Branch No.13 of the State Grain Operator is listed as being on 11 Gagarina Street [46.751234, 36.804954], which is located next to the railway station and where the photograph was taken. Berdiansk Port has been an important, albeit limited, location in the transfer of grain. However, Russian officials have stated that they have plans to

increase grain export from the port through the Sea of Azov.⁶¹



Figure 21: Train carriages labelled 'grain' leaving Berdiansk Train Station [46.750873, 36.804023].

56 @berdiansk_in_occupation (26 Jun 2022). Available at: https://t.me/berdiansk_in_occupation/137874

57 Rusprofile (last accessed 31 Mar 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/1229000019984>

58 Rusprofile (last accessed 31 Mar 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/1229500007417>

59 Rusprofile (last accessed 31 Mar 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/1229500007330>

60 @brdnews (24 October 2022). Available at: <https://t.me/brdnews/9839>

61 Reuters (14 March 2022). Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-zaporizhzhia-grains-idAFS8N3570ME>

Further rail activity was detected between Branch No.13 and Branch No. 5, with grain wagons being hauled between the main train station (Branch No.13) and Berdyansk Port (Branch No. 5). Satellite imagery obtained in 2023 shows increased rail activity in proximity to the grain elevator of the port.⁶²

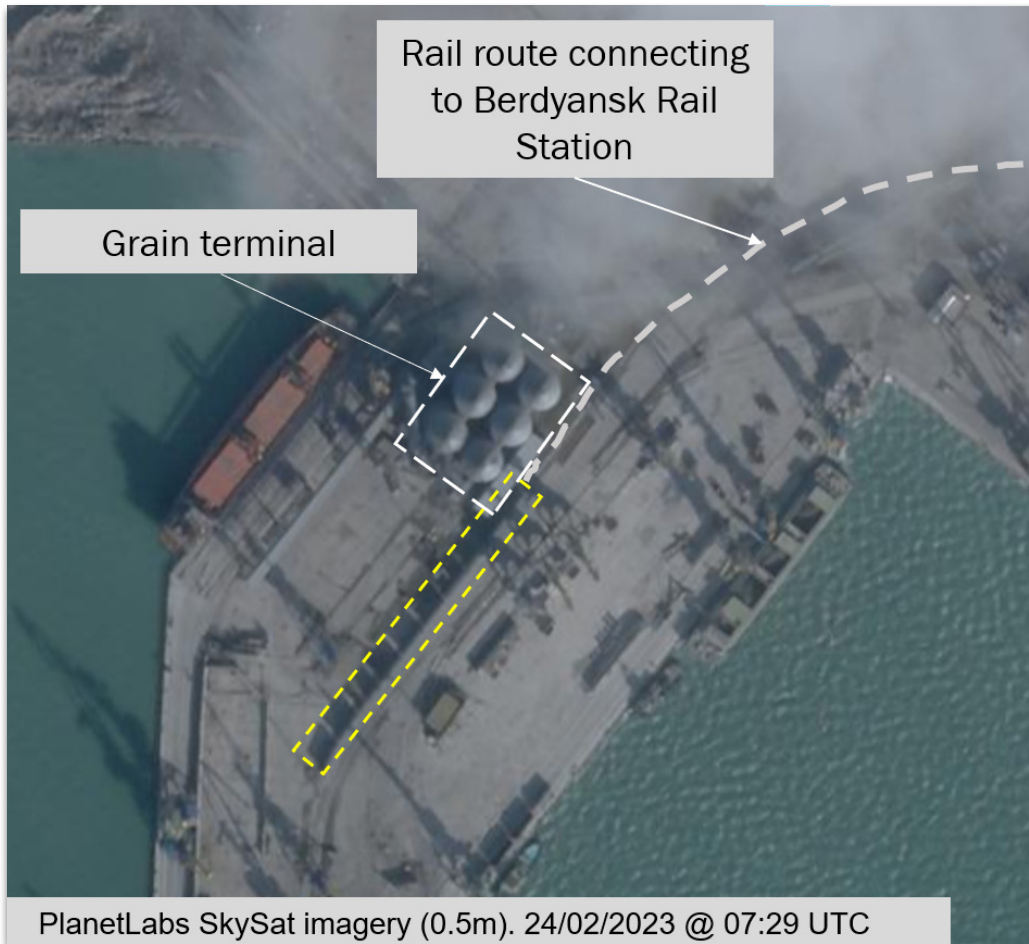


Figure 22: Imagery of Berdiansk port on 24 February 2023 showing a train at the loading/unloading point of the grain elevator.

In late March 2023, CIR acquired satellite imagery of a barge at Berdiansk Port, suspected to have been used previously to carry heavy equipment to and from the port. For example, imagery from 24 February 2023 (see figure 22, above) shows heavy equipment in proximity to the barge as it is moored alongside the pier.

⁶² @brdnews (23 December 2022). Available at: <https://t.me/brdnews/10818>, [geolocated to approximately 46.749515, 36.788227]; @brdnews (11 December 2022). Available at: <https://t.me/brdnews/10692>, [geolocated to approximately 46.749881, 36.787674].

However, in imagery from 21 March 2023 (see figure 23, below), CIR confirmed a similar barge was loaded with grain at the facility. Based on analysis of

the colour of the material in the hold of the barge, it is likely barley or wheat.



Figure 23: Imagery of Berdyansk Port on 21 March 2023 showing a barge moored alongside the pier loaded with grain.

Barges tend to be used for short-haul transportation along coastlines or river systems. CIR worked with maritime experts and assessed that it is unlikely that

the barge is used to carry grain outside of the Azov Sea, narrowing its potential destinations to Rostov-on-Don in Russia or Kerch in occupied Crimea.

OPERATIONS IN CRIMEA

Over-land Transit

Based on evidence collated above in reference to the Melitopol elevator, CIR finds sufficient evidence to suggest there are multiple forms of overland logistics connections between State Grain Operator's enterprises and occupied Crimea.

This section collates available evidence of grain transit activities over the course of several routes throughout Crimea to maritime export hubs in the Black Sea.

Road logistics

Based on available information on Melitopol, multiple convoys of grain vehicles can be seen carrying grain in the direction of the Crimean peninsula. The convoy identified as taking part in grain extraction activities from Melitopol Grain Elevator (see figures 12 and 13, above on previous page) is travelling

along the route listed as the most direct between Melitopol and Crimea, according to YandexMaps.⁶³ Large quantities of transport vehicles, including multi-trailer bulk carriers used to transport grain, have been identified along this route in the direction of Crimea (see figure 24, below).



Figure 24: PlanetLabs SkySat Image of high number of transport vehicles queuing at the approach Crimea near Chonhar on 12 August 2022 [46.00082, 34.54735].

After passing onto the Crimean peninsula, vehicles reach Dzhankoy. A number of different routes can be identified here (see figure 25, below on next page).

⁶³ Based on information from Yandex Maps: <https://yandex.com/maps/?ll=35.520852%2C46.641856&mode=routes&rtxt=46.855902%2C35.361809~45.972762%2C34.574189~45.713335%2C34.392849&rtt=auto&ruri=~~&via=1&z=9.8>.



Figure 25: Agrotransport vehicles turning east towards Kerch at Dzhankoy [geolocated to 45.710901, 34.411970].

For example, in a video⁶⁴ shared by a Russian trucking vlogger, several bulk carrier vehicles can be seen turning from the E105, from the direction of Zaporizhzhia, onto the E97, towards Kerch. One of the vehicles in the video is identifiable as a vehicle belonging to Russian agro-logistics firm 'ITECO'.⁶⁵

It is also possible these vehicles could have departed from the nearby elevator in Dzhankoy itself, which has seen some road transit activity since the beginning of grain export operations into Crimea and sits on the train rail line running from Melitopol to Sevastopol.

Rail Operations

In regards to rail transit, Agro-frigat ("АГРО-ФРЕГАТ"), an agro-transportation LLC based in Rostov-on-Don,⁶⁶ is likely heavily involved in the movement of grain by rail across occupied areas and Black Sea ports. Wagons belonging to the company have been in widespread use across Crimea. The

enterprise's wagons have also been seen at the 'Urozhane' (Krasnogvardeyskoe) railway station, 80 kilometres along the rail line from the border of the Kherson oblast, and in the vicinity of Feodosia,⁶⁷ including at the elevator in Melitopol.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Антон Власов (23 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrTR4E94MqQ&t=35s> [See 01:20 in video].

⁶⁵ ITECO (Last accessed 27 March 2023). Available at: <https://iteco.com/> (Accessed 27/03/2023).

⁶⁶ Rusprofile (Last accessed 27 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.rusprofile.ru/id/11913850> [Accessed 27/03/2023].

⁶⁷ Поезда России (8 August 2022). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzdfiF55tUI> [Geolocated to: 45.038919, 35.382627]

⁶⁸ See section State Grain Operator in Melitopol: Branch No. 16, Melitopol Grain Elevator, and nearby Branch No. 15.

In March 2022, Russian company ‘Petrokhleb-Kuban OOO’⁶⁹ concluded at least three leasing agreements (“1056/K_1-DL”,⁷⁰ “1056/K_2-DL”,⁷¹ “1056/K_3-DL”⁷²), which provided additional wagons (hoppers)

Maritime Transit

Crane Marine Contractors (CMC), operates in Sevastopol. It is a subsidiary of Russian state-owned defence contractor United Shipbuilding Corp.⁷⁴ United Shipbuilding and its senior executives were sanctioned by the United States in April 2022 for providing weapons to the Russian war effort.⁷⁵ CMC now owns and operates four ships. The company bought three grain carriers just before Russia invaded Ukraine, a departure from its core business of providing heavy lift platforms to the oil and gas industry.⁷⁶ All three ships are ‘handy bulkers’ (medium bulk carriers),⁷⁷ which is the maximum length and depth that Sevastopol’s Avlita grain terminal allows. The owned ships are the ‘Matros Pozynich’, ‘Matros Koshka’, and ‘Nikolai Nenashev’.⁷⁸ The enterprise purchased the ‘Matros Shevchenko’ in 2023, suggesting an expanding operation.⁷⁹

for grain, with a total number of 620 units. These wagons were filmed at the exit from the port of Aval, Sevastopol, where vessels have been observed loading grain from large elevators.⁷³

CMC’s handy bulkers are the biggest ships likely taking part in grain smuggling operation, at 170-180 meters. They are also the ships that are in the best shape. They have the capacity to reach any European port, and have been present in Turkish ports of Iskenderun, Derince, and Dörtyol.⁸⁰ These ships can carry up to 30,000 metric tons of wheat.

‘Petrokhleb-Kuban’ also operates several vessels to small Black Sea Turkish ports, with many small ships working as feeder ships to larger vessels in the Kerch anchorage.⁸¹

AnRussTrans, a Russian company whose ships work Turkish ports in the western Black Sea or Sea of Marmara, owns its ship Fedor through a subsidiary.

69 Petrokhleb-Kuban (Last accessed 11 April 2023). Available at: <https://petrokhlebkuban.ru/english/>; OOO or общества с ограниченной ответственностью refer to private companies with limited liability.

70 Fedresurs.ru (Last accessed 19 March 2023). Available at: <https://fedresurs.ru/sfactmessage/02631D97B3904D65AB0AFF1B8F833C4A>

71 Fedresurs.ru (Last accessed 19 March 2023). Available at: <https://fedresurs.ru/sfactmessage/CA64D2CF87A546E2BB706EE5EE318E6>

72 Fedresurs.ru (Last accessed 19 March 2023). Available at: <https://fedresurs.ru/sfactmessage/7114AA92E574485786854D9040A7F15>

73 Zen.Yandex.ru (Last accessed 20 March 2023). Available at: <https://zen.yandex.ru/video/watch/62acc617cbd9197865ab128e?t=11> [Geolocated to: 44.635249, 33.561549].

74 United Shipbuilding Corps (Last accessed 15 March 2023). Available at: https://www.aosk.ru/companies/ooo_kmk/

75 US State Department (Last accessed 16 March 2023). Available at: <https://www.state.gov/additional-state-department-designations-targeting-russian-state-owned-defense-shipbuilding-enterprise/>

76 Lloyd’s List (10 February 2023). Available at: <https://lloydslist.maritimeintelligence.informa.com/LL1143939/Handysize-bulk-carrier-joins-Russias-grain-plundering-operation>

77 Bulk Carrier Guide (Last accessed 9 April 2023). Available at: <https://bulkcarrierguide.com/size-range.html#:~:text=‘Handysize’%20are%20the%20medium%20bulk,and%20quantity%20of%20bulk%20cargoes>

78 Based on commercial maritime information seen by CIR. See Annex 1: Maritime Documentation on page 30.

79 Lloyds List Intelligence (10 Feb 2023). Available at: <https://lloydslist.maritimeintelligence.informa.com/LL1143939/Handysize-bulk-carrier-joins-Russias-grain-plundering-operation>

80 Based on CIR’s tracking of vessels through AIS tracking websites. See, for example, MarineTraffic (n.d.). Available at: https://www.marine-traffic.com/en/ais/details/ships/shipid:407125/mmsi:273292290/imo:9515539/vessel:MIKHAIL_NENASHEV.

81 Wilson (21 July 2022). Available at: <https://www.eupoliticalreport.eu/russia-must-be-held-accountable-for-stealing-and-selling-ukrainian-grains/>

CONCLUSION

Indicators of widespread logistical operations by rail, road, and sea relating to the extraction of grain have been detected at sites across newly occupied areas of Ukraine. This report ties these logistical efforts, recorded on social media and by international journalists, to specific enterprises associated with

occupying authorities and, by extension, the Russian state. These enterprises, and the occupying authorities that engage them, have seized the means of grain storage and export to a point where they essentially control the grain trade in the areas they operate.

ANNEX 1: MARITIME DOCUMENTATION

Commercial maritime information collected via 'Equasis' on ships owned by Crane Marine Contractor LLC.

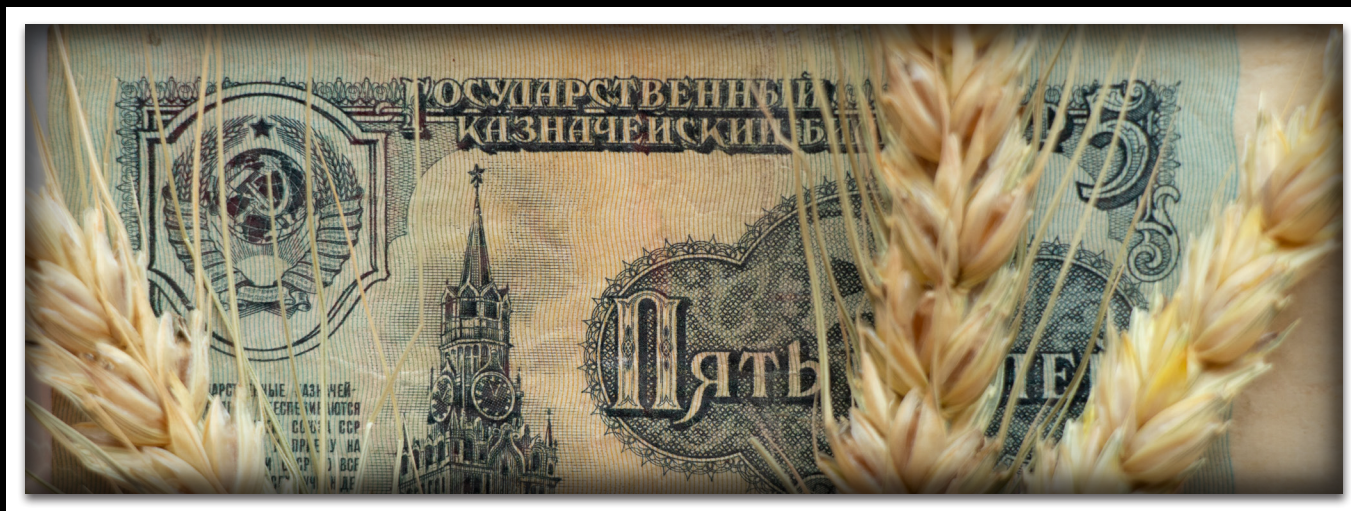
Company fleet

• Fleet

IMO	Ship	Gross tonnage	Ship type	Year of build	Current flag	Current class	Detention in last 3 years for this company	Detention in last 3 years for all company	Acting as (Since)
9515539	MIKHAIL NENASHEV	17018	Bulk Carrier	2009	Russia	NKK		1	Registered owner (since 23/12/2021) Ship manager/ Commercial manager (since 23/12/2021)
9550137	MATROS KOSHKKA	17039	Bulk Carrier	2009	Russia	NKK		1	Ship manager/ Commercial manager (since 09/12/2021) Registered owner (since 09/12/2021)
9573816	MATROS POZYNICH	17025	Bulk Carrier	2010	Russia	NKK			Registered owner (since 08/02/2022) Ship manager/ Commercial manager (since 08/02/2022)

Eyes on Russia

Mapping grain seizure and extraction under Russian occupation authorities



MAY 2023