

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Polish Minister of Agriculture Resigns Under Growing Pressure from Farmers with Initial Mixed Public Reaction

Country: Poland

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Report Highlights:

Polish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and Deputy Prime Minister Henryk Kowalczyk resigned from the Ministry of Agriculture on Wednesday, April 5. The resignation follows criticism, protests, and pressure from farmer organizations over the past several months targeting Kowalczyk for his alleged lack of action to prevent an influx of Ukrainian grain and oilseeds. This influx has caused an oversupply of grains and low prices within Poland. Farmers' storage facilities are already full with a new harvest approaching. Initial public reactions are mixed, and a new Minister has been identified who is expected to be appointed within days.

Polish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) Henryk Kowalczyk resigned Wednesday, April 5 under growing pressure from farmers angry at an influx of Ukrainian grain and oilseed imports. These imports have flooded the Polish market, causing low prices and full storage facilities heading into another harvest season. Complaints by farmers about the lack of action by Minister Kowalczyk have also increased with ongoing protests. Kowalczyk is expected to retain his position as the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM). He was appointed to the positions by President Andrzej Duda in October 2021.

In Kowalczyk's resignation statement, he noted he made the decision following the European Commission's proposal to extend duty and tariff-free access for Ukrainian products for an additional year. Kowalczyk made an agreement with farmers on March 29 that included a key point that the Polish government would request the European Commission (EC) apply the safeguard clause on duty-free grain imports from Ukraine. However, the EC published a draft Act on duty-free access for grains from Ukraine for the next year, applicable until June 5, 2024. Kowalczyk noted that the EC proposal undercuts the agreement he made to farmers and the demands Poland made in a letter to European Union (EU) President Van de Leyen on March 31. (Four other Central and Eastern European member states – Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary -- co-signed the letter to Van der Leyen).

According to several media reports, Polish farmers are skeptical this resignation will result in any real solutions. They say the resignation does not address the fundamental market issues, and many farmers think this position change is an effort by the government to buy time. In the meantime, farmer protests continue in several regions across Poland, including in Czerniczyn, Hrubieszów, and Szczecin.

Farmer organizations have spoken publicly about Kowalczyk's resignation with mixed reactions. Monika Piątkowska, President of the Grain and Feed Chamber, noted disappointment in Kowalczyk's justification, noting "blaming the EU is a sad maneuver that shows that the government still does not understand anything." According to Michał Kołodziejczak, the leader of AgroUnia Association, Kowalczyk's resignation does not change anything and shows that the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party has admitted to mistakes in agricultural policy. He said Kowalczyk ran away and left huge problems, including leaving six deputy ministers at MARD who do not know anything about agriculture. According to Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, president of the Polish People's Party, the government has no idea how to protect the countryside and agriculture, and this move is a measure of "powerlessness and helplessness."

Among the comments after Kowalczyk's departure, there were also some less critical voices. Jacek Zarzecki, president of the Polish Association of Beef Cattle Breeders and Producers, notes that Kowalczyk's term of office coincided with a very difficult time in agriculture, including war and international situation and negotiations with the EC. He also noted that the greatest success of Kowalczyk's tenure was support for animal welfare. Other representatives took the opportunity to advocate their agendas to the next Minister, including Marcin Hydzyk, president of the Association of Polish Milk Processors. He said he hopes Minister Kowalczyk's successor will withdraw from the Agricultural Protection Fund, which collects money from food processors to secure farmers in case the processors go bankrupt and cannot pay for delivered raw materials.

Media reported late Wednesday April 5 that Robert Telus, a PiS MP and head of the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, will likely be appointed as the next Minister of Agriculture within days.

Attachments:

No Attachments.