

Greece paralysed as farmers ratchet up protests

By [Global Research](#)

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*Tractors and trailers blockade 70 main roads
Compensation demanded for low food prices*

Thousands of Greek farmers demanding compensation for low commodity prices have threatened to step up a nine-day protest which has paralysed the country, cutting road links with its neighbours and leaving tonnes of fruit and meat rotting in lorries. Using tractors and trailers, the farmers have blockaded around 70 main roads, cutting Athens off from the second city of Thessaloniki in the north and closing border crossings with Bulgaria, Macedonia and Turkey.

“Tractors are our weapon and we are determined to use them until our demands are met,” said Christos Sideropoulos, a farmer and one of the leaders of the protests. “Let them say what they like. We are not going to give in.”

Two months after the country’s cities were hit by the worst rioting in decades, the latest protests have exposed the frustrations of [Greece](#)’s underdeveloped agriculture regions. Despite EU subsidies, successive governments have failed to modernise a farming industry that remains dependent on state handouts, said Dimitris Keridis, a political scientist. “It’s an industry that depends on government handouts and is incompatible with the demands of modern societies. They produce produce that nobody buys.”

Industry, business, the tourist and manufacturing sectors have been affected by blockades that stretch from the Evros region in the north to Crete in the south. Holidaymakers have been stranded, hospitals and chemists have run short of medicine and exports have been stopped at frontier crossings. After cutting the country in half, the farmers blocked central Greece’s link with the southern Peloponnese region barricading the Corinth Canal with black-flagged tractors on Monday and refusing passage to travellers including sick and elderly people.

In northern Greece, near the border with Bulgaria yesterday, queues of vehicles reportedly stretched for more than 12 miles. Lorry drivers have confronted farmers, in some cases trying to disperse the protesters by driving into the barricades.

Under the headline “Is Greece a dangerous country”, an editorial in the daily To Vima said: “Now the country is cut not only in two, but in many pieces, everyone should think of ways of confronting a crisis which is sure to hurt the Greek economy severely.”

Yesterday, farmers’ leaders rejected a €500m (£465m) subsidy package offered by the conservative government, demanding tax rebates and interest free loans. With a majority of one, the ruling New Democrats are under pressure to resolve the crisis.

The prime minister, Costas Karamanlis, this week appealed to the farmers to remove the roadblocks, saying: "There is an urgent need to free up the roads . A whole society cannot be held hostage."

Yesterday, Bulgaria called on the European commission to intervene, saying that the protest was stopping its goods reaching Greek markets.

Saddled with the biggest public debt in the 16-member eurozone and mounting pressure from Brussels, the Greek government has little room for manoeuvre. "This is a very generous package, especially in light of the financial crisis," the agriculture minister, Sotiris Hatzigakis, said. "The longer [the farmers] wait, the worse things will become for them."

Last night, there was little indication that the protesters would back down. "If need be we will stay here until Easter. If need be, our tractors will grow roots," said one farmer. "We are bankrupt. We've got nothing to lose."

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