

Examining The Evolution Of Algerian Exports Under The Algeria-European Union Association Agreement

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Received: 2024/11/15

Accepted: 2025/11/28

Published:29/12/2025

Abstract:

Effective from September 1, 2005, the Association Agreement between the European Union and Algeria outlines the gradual creation of a free trade area, which is to be realized through a phased tariff dismantling process. By entering into this Agreement, Algeria aimed to improve its access to the European market and bolster its export sector. This study focuses on the trade part of the Association Agreement, analyzing the evolution of Algerian exports to the European Union between 2005 and 2024. The analysis of the evolution of Algerian exports to the EU reveals that, the most of exports to the EU benefit from the preferential regime. The exported products are mainly hydrocarbon derivatives, which affirm the lack of diversification in the Algerian economy.

Keywords: Association Agreement, preferential regime, Algerian exports, free trade zone.

Jel Classification Codes : F13; F14; F15; O24.

Résumé:

Entré en vigueur le 1^{er} septembre 2005, l'Accord d'Association entre l'Union européenne et l'Algérie prévoit la création progressive d'une zone de libre-échange, qui doit être réalisée par un processus progressif de démantèlement tarifaire. En signant cet accord, l'Algérie visait à améliorer son accès au marché européen et développer ses exportations. Cette étude se concentre sur la partie commerciale de l'Accord d'Association, en analysant l'évolution des exportations algériennes vers l'Union européenne entre 2005 et 2024. L'analyse de l'évolution des exportations algériennes vers l'UE révèle que la majorité des exportations vers l'UE bénéficient du régime préférentiel. Les produits exportés sont principalement des dérivés des hydrocarbures, ce qui souligne le manque de diversification de l'économie algérienne.

Mots clés: Accord d'association , régime préférentiel, exportations algériennes, zone de libre échange.

Jel Classification Codes : F13; F14; F15; O24.

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I. Introduction

In the aftermath of World War II, nations, recognizing the imperative of international cooperation after years of rivalry and conflict, embarked on processes of reconciliation and rapprochement, particularly on the economic and commercial levels. The signing of the GATT agreements aimed to promote the exchange of goods through significant tariff reductions, while the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sought to harmonize and ensure the sustainability of the international financial system. These steps represented a fresh impetus in multilateral economic relations. Nevertheless, the most significant advances in cooperation among sovereign states have primarily occurred at the regional level. Indeed, one of the defining features of international economic relations over the past three decades is the surge in regional trade agreements, reflecting the rise of economic regionalism. Various agreements, ranging from simple interregional forums to economic unions, including free trade zones and customs unions, have been established in most regions around the world: Latin America (MERCOSUR), North America (NAFTA), Asia-Pacific (ASEAN), Africa (UEMOA, SADC, ECOWAS, COMESA), and Europe (EU, Euro-Med Partnership, ACP Agreements).

Algeria, which embarked on a transition to a market economy in the 1990s, could not remain on the sidelines of this movement. The political and economic developments the country experienced following the crisis triggered by the fall in oil prices in 1986 led to structural reforms aimed at abandoning a centrally managed economic and social system in favor of a liberal orientation (Abbas, 2012). Within this context of economic liberalization, Algeria engaged in multiple bilateral and regional free trade agreements and integrated into the WTO's multilateral trading system. Among these agreements are the trade agreement with Jordan (1999), the Association Agreement with the European Union (2005), the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (2009), and the preferential trade agreement with Tunisia (2014). However, the most significant agreement is the one concluded between Algeria and the European Union, whose importance is evident from the content and trade volume between the two parties. The European Union is indeed Algeria's largest trading partner.

Economic ties between Algeria and the European community date back to the 1960s. The EEC concluded preferential agreements with Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) as early as 1969. These agreements allowed industrial products originating from partner countries to access the European market free of customs duties and without reciprocity. In 1976, the EEC signed new bilateral trade and cooperation agreements with Central Maghreb countries under the Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP). The GMP went beyond strict

trade cooperation and provided economic and financial assistance. In 1991, it was replaced by the Renewed Mediterranean Policy, which maintained the previous cooperation framework but increased support for economic reform processes that many Mediterranean countries were beginning to implement under structural adjustment programs.

The geopolitical shifts following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the United States' embrace of regionalist policies, exemplified by the creation of NAFTA, led to significant changes in the European Union's approach to its neighbors, both in Central and Eastern Europe and the southern and eastern Mediterranean. This shift culminated in the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership for Mediterranean Basin countries.

Adopted in November 1995 in Barcelona, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership brought together the then 15 EU member states and 12 Mediterranean coastal states. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership operates on an institutional framework that includes both bilateral and regional dimensions.

The bilateral framework consists of Association Agreements signed individually between each Mediterranean partner country (MPC) and the EU. The regional framework aims to enhance interregional trade relations. After 21 rounds of negotiations, Algeria signed the Association Agreement with the European Union on April 22, 2002, in Valencia during the fifth Euro-Mediterranean Conference. It entered into force on September 1, 2005, replacing the 1976 Cooperation Agreement.

The Association Agreement encompasses several areas of cooperation, aiming to tighten commercial ties between the EU and Algeria, mainly through the gradual establishment of a free trade zone, which is the cornerstone of the new partnership. A preferential regime with concessions and customs duty dismantling schedules was negotiated to ensure the free movement of goods. Through this agreement, which emphasizes commercial openness, Algeria hopes to increase its non-hydrocarbon exports to the EU and attract more direct European investments. It also seeks support in implementing economic reforms aimed at modernizing the economy and upgrading local enterprises.

In this article, we will focus on the preferential regime established by the Association Agreement. The regulations governing the export of Algerian products to the EU will be critically analyzed, and the impact of this regime on Algeria's non-hydrocarbon exports will be evaluated.

Thus, our research question will be structured as follows:

What is the impact of the preferential trade regime established between Algeria and the European Union on Algerian exports?

In order to answer this research question, we propose the following hypothesis: **The preferential trade regime between Algeria and the European Union has enhanced Algeria's non-oil exports to the EU.**

This study offers valuable insights into the economic and trade relations between Algeria and the European Union. The findings can inform policymakers and business leaders, supporting the development of more effective strategies to strengthen Algeria's economic integration into the global market.

II. Definition, typology, and objectives of Regional Trade Agreements

II.1 Definition of Regionalism and Regional Trade Agreements

In international economics, regionalism refers to an institutional process initiated by states to foster cooperation and policy coordination in specific areas (Echinart, 2007, p. 775). Regionalism materializes through regional trade agreements (RTAs) that establish common cooperation rules among states in various sectors. These regional agreements typically aim to facilitate and develop different types of trade among member states.

Agreements can be South-South or North-North, known as horizontal regionalism, associating countries at similar development levels, or North-South, known as vertical regionalism, which links developed and developing countries (Echinart, 2007).

II.2 Types of regional trade agreements

The classification of regional trade agreements depends on the degree of regional integration among the parties. Inspired by European economic integration, Hungarian economist Béla Balassa (1928–1991) proposed a model in 1961 comprising five increasing levels of regional integration (Siroën, 2004, p. 15).

II.2.1 Free trade area

Free trade area is an economic zone where states, through a preferential agreement, eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers in certain sectors. However, each state retains its trade sovereignty with third countries. Implementing a free trade area requires establishing rules of origin to define the production area of imported goods.

II.2.2 Customs union

Customs union is a free trade area with a common external tariff applied to imports from non-member states. Members renounce trade policy sovereignty and must share customs revenue according to pre-established rules.

II.2.3 Common Market

Common market is a customs union that allows the free movement of production factors, such as capital and labor, and harmonizes policies in fields like taxation and monetary affairs to prevent economic distortions that could disrupt competition.

II.2.4 Economic and monetary union

Economic and monetary union is a common market with harmonized macroeconomic and social policies, including fixed exchange rates or a single currency.

II.2.5 Political union

Political union is the highest integration level where member states become a single entity, ceding economic and social policy sovereignty to a supranational authority and establishing common judicial and legislative processes.

Balassa's typology, while heavily based on the European model, now encompasses other forms of regional integration (Siroën, 2004).

II.3 Objectives of regional trade agreements

The various forms and content of regional trade agreements reflect the diverse objectives states pursue in joining these agreements. Beyond economic reasons, strategic or political motives also play a role, without necessarily being exclusive. The main reasons for regionalism include:

- Reaping trade benefits and improved market access.
- Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and acquiring technology.
- Enhancing the competitiveness of firms in international markets.
- Creating a larger, secure market for goods and services, reducing trade distortions (Walley, 1998).
- Using regional liberalization to support domestic reforms.
- Modernizing the economy to broaden product offerings and improve the quality of available goods and services, thus enhancing living standards (Schiff, 2003, p. 8) .
- Increasing negotiation power at the multilateral level.
- Utilizing regional trade agreements for political or strategic objectives.
- Reducing conflict risks and ensuring regional security and stability (Deblock, 2005, p. 7).

III. Algeria-European Union Association Agreement: Overview and Analysis of the Preferential Regime

III.1 General terms of the preferential regime

The Association Agreement, in its Title II on the movement of goods, sets out various customs terms, some with immediate application and others with deferred implementation, aiming at trade liberalization between both parties. The agreement stipulates different tariff dismantling schedules and concessions based on the nature and origin of the products. Protocols and annexes detail the tariff dismantling for each product type: industrial, agricultural, processed agricultural, and fishery products.

The free trade area applies only to industrial products, with a pre-established dismantling schedule. Agricultural products receive partial concessions revised at periodic review clauses. Moreover, conditions for the preferential regime's application are specified, including rules of origin, the territoriality requirement, the direct transport principle, and the non-refund principle (Délégation de l'Union Européenne, 2005). The agreement also allows for trade defense measures, such as anti-dumping, countervailing, safeguard measures, export restrictions, and exceptional measures.

III.2 Preferential tariff regime for Algerian products exported to the EU

III.2.1 Industrial products

From the agreement's entry into force, the Community admits industrial products originating from Algeria, listed in Annex 2, exempt from equivalent customs duties and quantitative restrictions (Ministère du Commerce, 2005). Notably, Algerian industrial products have already entered the Community duty-free since the 1976 agreements, except for textiles, which receive a 20% tariff cut.

III.2.2 Agricultural products, fishery products, and processed agricultural products

The agreement includes three protocols outlining the concessions for each type of Algerian-origin product exported to the European Union (Ministère de la Petite et Moyenne Entreprise et de l'Artisanat, 2005).

- Protocol 1 (Annex 1): Agricultural products eligible for the preferential regime.
- Protocol 3: Fishery products eligible for the preferential regime.
- Protocol 5 (Annex 1): Processed agricultural products eligible for the preferential regime.

a. Agricultural Products

From the agreement's entry into force, agricultural products originating from Algeria and listed in Annex 1 of Protocol No. 1 of the agreement are admitted for import into the Community under the following concessions:

- Duty-free access without quantity restrictions for 120 tariff lines. Examples: asparagus, onions, and leeks.
- Duty-free access under a tariff quota (39 tariff lines). Examples: natural honey (100 tons/year), fresh potatoes (5,000 tons/year, exportable between January 1 and March 31).
- Partial duty reduction without quantity restrictions (7 tariff lines). Example: citrus pulp, without added alcohol or sugar (40% reduction in customs duty).
- Duty-free access within a reference quantity (15 tariff lines).

b. Fishery products

Fishery products originating from Algeria, listed in Protocol No. 3, are admitted into the Community exempt from customs duties and charges of equivalent effect. The European Union offers full customs duty exemption for around twenty types of fish. Examples: salmon, anchovies, caviar, sardines, etc. Notably, fishery products are not subject to preferential tariff quotas.

c. Processed agricultural products

From the agreement's entry into force, processed agricultural products originating from Algeria and listed in Annex 1 of Protocol No. 5 of the agreement are admitted for import into the Community under the following concessions:

- Duty-free access without quantity restrictions.
- Duty-free access within a quota for the following products: pasta (2,000 tons/year), couscous (2,000 tons/year), and preparations based on fermented milk (1,500 tons/year).
- Duty-free access with a specific agricultural duty, where the duty on the agricultural component (EA) may take the form of a fixed amount or an ad valorem duty.

IV. Method and materials

To carry out this study, we relied on the following methodology:

1. **Analytical study:** To assess the benefits granted by the Association Agreement to Algerian products exported to the European Union, we conducted a critical analysis of the preferential regime outlined in the commercial section of the agreement.
2. **Descriptive study:** To determine the impact of the agreement on Algerian exports, we conducted a descriptive analysis of the evolution of Algerian exports to the European Union by product type benefiting from the preferential regime between 2005 and 2024. The data for this analysis were collected from the National Center for Informatics and Statistics (CNIS) and the National Agency for the Promotion of Foreign Trade (ALGEX).

V. Results and discussion

V.1 Critical analysis of the preferential regime of Algerian products exported to the European Union

The analysis of the preferential regime established between Algeria and the European Union, aiming to create a free trade area, reveals several anomalies and imbalances in the concessions, particularly for agricultural and agri-food products. Below are the main observations:

- **Unbalanced concessions:** The concessions granted for some agricultural and agri-food products are significantly skewed, giving a clear advantage to the EU. This imbalance is especially apparent in the concessions for cereal products and potatoes.
For cereals, Algeria grants a quota of 403,000 tons of wheat to the EU (this quota was modified from 300,000 tons since the agreement's entry into force on September 1, 2012), in exchange for a quota of 4,000 tons of cereal products processed in Algeria, representing only 1% of the advantage provided (Algeria-European Union Association Agreement., 2005).
Regarding potatoes, the agreement allows Algeria to export 5,000 tons of fresh potatoes between January 1 and March 31 (Association Agreement between Algeria and the EU, 2005, protocol No.1 annex No.1). In contrast, the EU receives a quota of 45,000 tons of seed potatoes, equating to over 600,000 tons of fresh potatoes, exportable at any time (Algeria-European Union Association Agreement., 2005).
- **False concessions:** The EU grants Algeria concessions for products with little to no export potential. For example, in the fisheries sector, the EU offers duty-free access without quantity restrictions for caviar, a product that Algeria does not export significantly (Algeria-European Union

Association Agreement., 2005). These concessions can be costly for Algeria because all concessions under the agreement are compensated by counter-concessions.

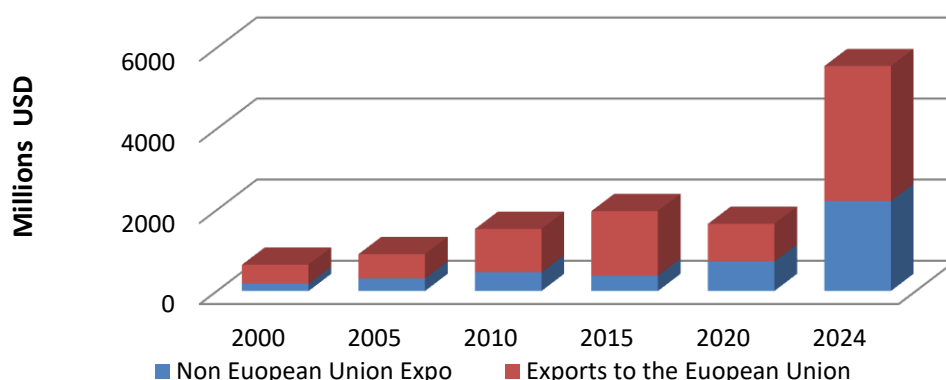
- **Fixed concessions:** The EU's expansion from 15 states at the agreement's ratification in 2002 to 28 states today has not been accompanied by an expansion of the concessions granted to Algeria for its export products.
- **Tariff barriers:** The concessions granted to Algeria for agricultural products are mostly subject to specific duties, often higher than customs duties. Likewise, concessions for processed agricultural products are frequently paired with a duty on the agricultural component (Algeria-European Union Association Agreement., 2005).
- **Non-tariff barriers:** The EU imposes conditions that complicate exports, such as requiring the export of certain products within specific timeframes, which often do not align with the production season of the fruit or vegetable covered by the concession (Algeria-European Union Association Agreement., 2005).

V.2 Descriptive analysis of the evolution of Algerian non-hydrocarbon Exports to the European Union:

V.2.1 Evolution of the European Union's Share in Algerian Non-Hydrocarbon Exports:

The European Union is Algeria's primary trading partner in terms of exports. The graph below illustrates the trend in Algerian non-hydrocarbon exports to the European Union compared to exports outside the European Union.

Figure (1): Evolution of the EU's Share in Algerian Non-Hydrocarbon Exports between 2000 and 2024:



Source: Developed by the author based on CNIS data

Unit: Million USD

Algerian non-hydrocarbon exports recorded substantial growth between 2005 and 2024, rising from 597 million USD to 3,326.52 million USD, an increase of nearly 457%. Throughout the period, the European Union (EU) remained Algeria's main trading partner, accounting on average for around 70% of non-hydrocarbon exports, even before the Association Agreement came into effect.

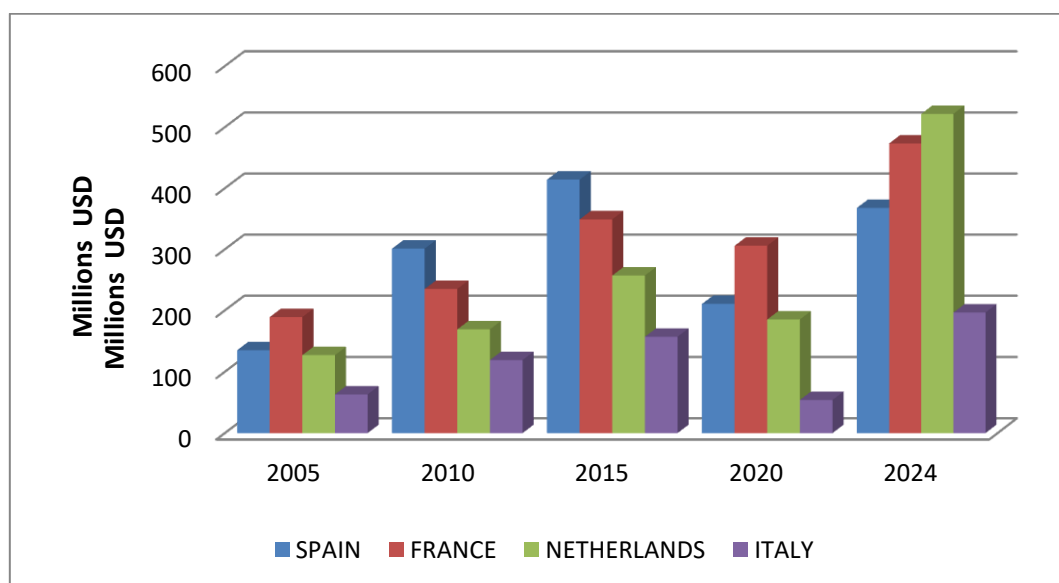
However, when compared with exports to non-EU markets, the EU's relative share declined from 73% in 2000 to 60% in 2024, reflecting a 13% decrease. This shift illustrates Algeria's strategic effort to diversify its export destinations and reduce reliance on the European market.

The year 2020 marked a temporary setback due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted trade flows and reduced demand in Europe, leading to a sharp decline in exports. Nevertheless, by 2024, exports had rebounded strongly, confirming the resilience and gradual diversification of Algeria's non-hydrocarbon export base, even as the EU continues to represent its largest export destination in absolute terms.

V.2.2 Main European Union countries importing from Algeria

Over 50% of Algeria's non-hydrocarbon exports to the European Union are absorbed by just four member states. The following graph illustrates the evolution of non-hydrocarbon exports to the primary EU countries importing from Algeria.

Figure (2): Evolution of Non-Hydrocarbon Exports to the Main EU Countries Importing from Algeria (2005–2024)



Source: Developed by the author based on CNIS data

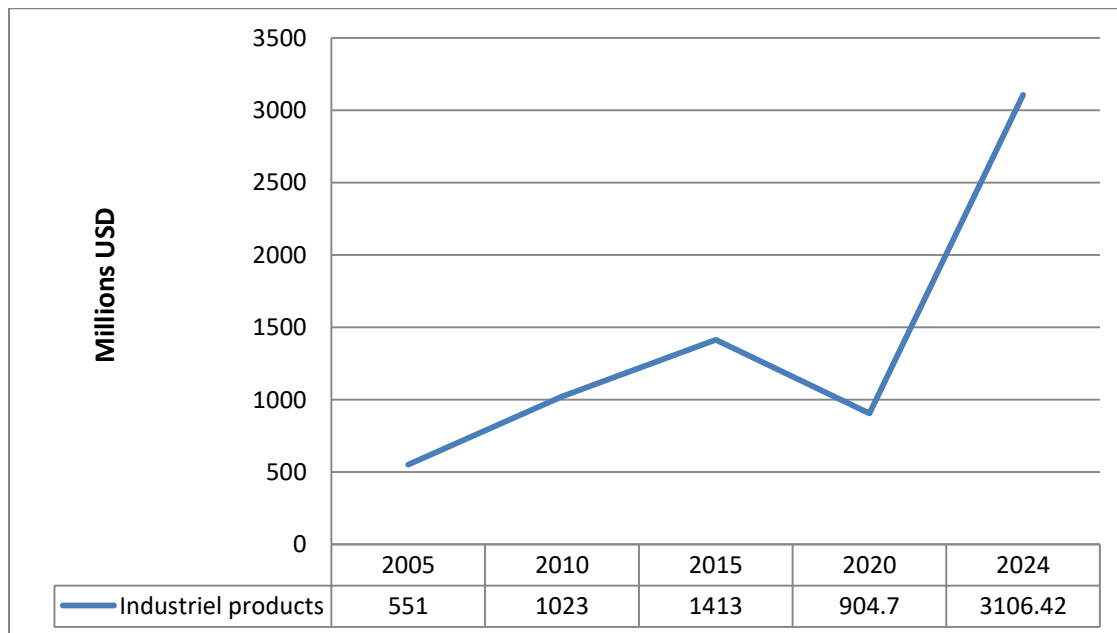
More than half of Algeria's non-hydrocarbon exports to the European Union are absorbed by France, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. Exports to these four partners experienced significant growth between 2005 and 2024, increasing by 373% for France, 268% for Spain, 421% for the Netherlands, and 96% for Italy. Exports to the Netherlands recorded the strongest increase, mainly due to a surge in naphtha solvent sales.

V.2.3 Trends in Algeria's Exports to the EU under the Association Agreement

V.2.3.1 Industrial Products Exported to the European Union

Exported entirely duty-free to the EU, industrial products have accounted for an average of over 90% of non-hydrocarbon exports since 2005.

Figure (3): Trends in Exports of Industrial Products to the European Union from 2005 to 2024.



Source : CNIS

Exports of industrial products to the European Union experienced significant growth over the period from 2005 to 2024. Despite a sharp decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these exports have increased by 463% since the agreement came into effect, rising from 551 million USD in 2005 to 3,106.42 million USD in 2024.

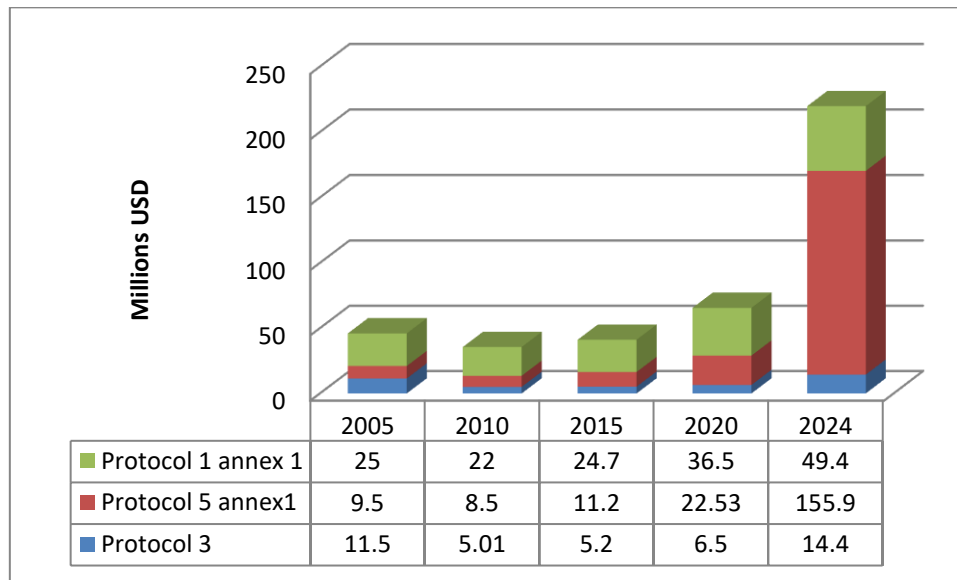
The year 2020 witnessed a decline in Algeria's industrial exports, mainly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted supply chains and reduced industrial demand across European markets.

Algeria's exports in 2024 were largely concentrated in transformative industries, particularly coke and refining, chemical products, and metallurgy. These sectors represent the backbone of Algeria's non-hydrocarbon exports.

V.2.3.2 Agricultural Products, Processed Agricultural Products, and Fishery Products:

The table and graph above illustrate the export trends for each category of preferential products over the 2005–2024 period.

Figure (4) : Evolution of Exports of Agricultural Products, Processed Agricultural Products, and Fishery Products under the Agreement from 2005 to 2024



Source: Developed by the author based on CNIS data

Unit: Million USD

Agricultural products benefiting from preferential advantages under Protocol 1 (Annex 1) continued to represent the predominant share of exports throughout the entire period, although their value registered only a moderate increase, rising from 25 million USD in 2005 to 49.4 million USD in 2024.

Conversely, processed agricultural products covered by Protocol 5 (Annex 1) recorded a substantial expansion, with exports increasing from 9.5 million USD in 2005 to 155.9 million USD in 2024, thereby emerging as the leading export category in recent years.

Similarly, fishery products under Protocol 3 exhibited a modest upward trend, growing from 11.5 million USD in 2005 to 14.4 million USD in 2024, although their relative contribution to total exports remained limited in comparison with the other two categories.

Taken together, these developments reveal a profound transformation in the export structure since 2005. Whereas exports were initially dominated by products under Protocol 1, by 2024 Protocol 5 had clearly taken the lead, reflecting a structural shift toward higher value-added processed agricultural goods within Algeria's export profile.

The table below presents the evolution of exports by type of tariff preference.

Table (1): Evolution of Exports of Agricultural and Processed Agricultural Products by Type of Tariff Preference from 2005 to 2024

Type of Tariff Preference	protocol	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024
Products without quantity restrictions	protocol 1	22	20	23,76	35	47
	Protocol5	9,08	8,35	9,93	21,5	153
Products subject to quotas	Protocol 1	3	1,5	0,01	0,8	1,5
	Protocol 5	0,32	0,1	0,22	0,4	1,8
Products subject to reference quantities or an agricultural component tax	Protocol 1	0,03	0,5	0,96	0,7	0,9
	Protocol 5	0,07	0,05	1,05	0,63	1,1

Source: Algex

Value: Million USD

The table shows that 94% of products are exported to the European Union without quantity restrictions. Products subject to quotas account for an average of 4% over the 2005–2024 period, followed by 2% products subject to reference quantities or an agricultural component tax.

However, it is important to note that the European Union continues to protect its agricultural sector through non-tariff barriers and seasonal calendars, which make the export of certain Algerian agricultural products more difficult.

IV. Conclusion

Economic regionalism is regarded as a political construct between states aimed at coordinating their economic relations. It materializes through Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs), which define the common rules of cooperation. Regional agreements can play a significant role in promoting trade, foreign investment, and scale economies. These agreements take various forms depending on the political and economic objectives of the partner countries, which determine the level of integration.

Developing countries view the agreements proposed by the North as opportunities for growth and development. Increasingly, countries are seeking to integrate into the global trade system in this manner, and Algeria, which signed an association agreement with the European Union in 2002, serves as an example.

The association agreement covers various areas of cooperation, including trade cooperation, with the goal of creating a free trade area between Algeria and the European Union through the gradual dismantling of customs duties. Protocols and annexes attached to the agreement outline the dismantling process and concessions related to each type of product: industrial, agricultural, processed agricultural, and fish products.

A critical analysis of the preferential regime granted to Algerian exports to the European Union highlights a significant imbalance in the concessions, particularly for agricultural and processed agricultural products. Some concessions are granted for products for which Algeria lacks export potential, while others are accompanied by conditions or specific duties that make exportation challenging. Furthermore, the expansion of the European Union has not led to an expansion of the benefits granted to Algeria under the association.

The analysis of the evolution of Algerian exports to the EU reveals that, on average, 99% of non-hydrocarbon exports to the EU benefit from the preferential regime, with 93% of these exports being industrial products. These products are mainly hydrocarbon derivatives, which affirm the lack of diversification in the Algerian economy.

Processed agricultural products benefiting from preferential advantages constitute the largest share of exports compared to agricultural and fish products. However, agricultural and processed agricultural products benefiting from preferential treatment are mostly exported under exemptions with no quantity limitations.

The analysis of Algerian exports to the main European clients reveals four primary partners: France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy, with whom Algeria conducts more than half of its trade. This indicates that the agreement has not encouraged Algeria to diversify its European trade partners.

The statistical analysis we conducted on the evolution of Algerian exports to the European Union shows that the preferential regime has had no significant impact on the evolution of Algeria's non-hydrocarbon exports to the EU. In fact, the EU's share of Algeria's total trade has decreased by 13% between 2000 and 2024.

Furthermore, the critical analysis of this regime demonstrates a significant imbalance of negotiating power between Algeria and the EU, leading to trade terms largely set by the EU.

It appears from the analysis conducted in this study that the association agreement has not had the expected impact, and that trade liberalization alone is insufficient to promote a country's exports.

Therefore, it is imperative for Algeria to understand its export potential in order to determine whether the conclusion of an international trade agreement is advantageous for its economy. Algeria must also diversify its economy, which is highly dependent on hydrocarbons, and develop an export strategy to better benefit from free trade areas and increase its exports. Additionally, Algerian exporters should be involved in the negotiation process of trade agreements to better understand their expectations and negotiate more favorable concessions.

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