

EU-Russia Trade under Sanctions: An Analysis of Trade Dynamics and Intensity

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been a marked escalation in tensions between Russia and Ukraine, culminating in an armed conflict. In response to this aggression, the international community has adopted a series of sanction measures as a form of protest. The European Union joined this effort, significantly affecting the development of bilateral relations not only from a political perspective but also in terms of trade. This has led to a substantial decline in the volume of mutual trade and a reduction in Russia's share of the EU's total trade. The aim of this paper is to highlight the development and changes in EU-Russia trade relations by analyzing EU trade with Russia and its intensity from 2004 to 2023.

Keywords: EU, Russia, Sanctions, Trade relations

JEL Classification codes: F10, F19, F51

INTRODUCTION

Sanctions are a foreign policy instrument of a state or integration grouping that is used to coerce a response from the affected country or individual. In the international environment, such measures have been taken since antiquity. These instruments have evolved over time, as have the objectives they are intended to achieve. While at the beginning they were adopted with the aim of harming the sanctioned economy, over time they began to pursue specific objectives in a given territory, such as the promotion of the fight for human rights or against terrorism.

In the 21st century, the most significant sanctions measures are without doubt those imposed on Russia. They have been introduced because of various events relating to the situation in Ukraine and Russia's activities on its territory, starting in 2014, with the aim of appealing to Russia, through bans and restrictive measures, to change its policy towards Ukraine and to respect the laws of international law, democratic principles and Ukraine's sovereignty.

The EU, as an independent actor in the world economy, also imposes restrictive measures on other actors. These are mainly sanctions imposed on specific individuals, companies or governments of third countries in the form of asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes or other sectoral measures. The adoption of sanctions in the EU is ensured by the Council of the EU, while their uniform application is the responsibility of the European Commission. In practice, EU member states are responsible for enforcing sanctions and they apply not only to EU citizens but also to companies and their subsidiaries established under EU law. These

principles are maintained for all sanctions regimes on specific entities, including EU sanctions on Russia (EEAS, 2021).

The imposition of sanctions against the Russian Federation is very closely linked to the situation in Ukraine after November 2013. In the context of events in Ukraine, the aim of the sanctions is to weaken Russia, i.e. to limit its resources, technology and economy so that it is no longer able to participate in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These restrictive measures first came into force in 2014 and can be divided into two periods.

The first period represents the sanctions adopted between 2014 and 2022. These are restrictive measures that were adopted in several sets, starting on 17 March 2014. They included individual measures, travel bans to the EU and asset freezes on persons who violated Ukraine's territorial integrity and misappropriated Ukrainian funds, or other sanctions in response to the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. Since June 2014, in view of the deteriorating situation, the EU has also decided to adopt economic sanctions, including, for example, a ban on trade with Crimea. This sanctions regime was also linked in March 2015 to the implementation of the terms agreed in the Minsk agreements. However, due to the ongoing unfavorable situation between Ukraine and Russia, these restrictions are regularly extended on an annual and biannual basis (European Council – Council of the EU, 2024).

The second period includes the sanctions imposed on Russia following the recognition of the independence of Luhansk and Donetsk and the subsequent deployment of troops to these territories in February 2022. During this period, the EU has stepped up its sanctions against Russia much more than in 2014. By the end of 2022, it had adopted up to 10 sanctions packages. (European Commission, 2024; European Council and Council of the EU, 2024).

Although the aim of the sanctions is to force Russia to stop funding its military activities in Ukraine, they affect the overall economy and may also affect its people. Thus, to minimize the impact of these sanctions on society, restrictive measures are not taken in areas such as agriculture, food or health (European Council – Council of the EU, 2023).

In February 2025 the Council adopted the 16th package of economic and individual restrictive measures against Russia, primarily aimed at targeting systemically important sectors of the Russian economy (energy, trade, transport, infrastructure, financial services) and strengthening anti-circumvention measures (European Commission, 2025).

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many definitions of international sanctions can be found in literature. In general, however, they are restrictive measures aimed at forcing the country or individual concerned to change its policies and thus prevent the further spread of a crisis or violation of international law. Thus, in practice, they most often take the form of some form of diplomatic or economic punishment against a country or individual whose behavior in the global economy does not meet expected international norms (Hufbauer et al., 2007; Kochajdová, 2019; Morgan, 2023). In this context, various classifications of sanctions can also be found, which stems from the fact that these restrictive measures are imposed on entities for different reasons and affect various economic sectors of the respective economies. Since 1966, the UN has created 31 sanctions regimes, 15 of which are still in force (Kochajdová, 2018; United Nations, 2023), and some of them are also applied by the EU, using mainly asset freezes and travel bans, economic and financial restrictive measures in the form of restrictions on imports, exports and banking services, but also arms embargoes.

Kašťáková and Luptáková (2022) state that the basic types of sanctions include cultural and sporting sanctions, which are mainly symbolic in nature; diplomatic sanctions, which target state representatives; sanctions imposed on individuals; military sanctions, most often in the

form of suspension of training activities or exchange sessions of weapons and dual-use goods; and economic sanctions (trade, financial, monetary, asset freezes). Different views on the effectiveness of sanctions in the world economy resonate in economic theory. Some experts take the view that sanctions, especially economic ones, are merely a 'cosmetic' adjustment and do not have the desired effect, while others advocate their use and speak of the fulfilment of the desired objective. Hufbauer et al. (2007), based on research, concluded that about a third of such measures achieved the desired result.

Restrictive measures in the form of sanctions can most often be seen in the macroeconomic indicators of the country on which they have been imposed. They are manifested in the form of an increase in inflation, unemployment, a slowdown in GDP growth or a depreciation of the domestic currency (Kaš'áková & Luptáková, 2022; Klinova & Sidorova, 2016).

On the other hand, Neuenkirch and Neumeier (2015), who examined economic sanctions imposed on 67 countries between 1976 and 2012, showed that over the 10-year period during which sanctions were actively applied, GDP per capita fell by approximately 2.3-2.5%. In addition to these findings, it is also important that the countries between which the sanctions measures were imposed were traditional economic partners. This is precisely when they are gaining momentum. Hence, according to Klin and Sidorova (2016), EU-Russia sanctions have a greater impact on Russia's economy than those imposed by the US. Prior to the sanctions, the EU was building a strategic partnership with Russia.

Aslund (2014) also argues that among the most effective measures are sanctions taken to change a state's policies. Their success rate is as high as 51% compared to sanctions to stop military conflict, which were effective in only 21% of the cases studied.

The ability of sanctions to achieve the desired objective also depends on the number of countries imposing sanctions. If some states do not comply with them, they lose their force and create room for circumvention. Moreover, countries that adopt sanctions must be prepared to face their consequences, especially if their economy is heavily intertwined with the sanctioned country (Hufbauer et al., 2007; Bapat & Morgan, 2009; Rogoff, 2015).

2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to highlight the development and changes in EU-Russia trade relations by analyzing EU trade with Russia and its intensity from 2004 to 2023.

In collecting data on trade relations' development, we used Trade Map, the ITC database, as the underlying database, based on data valid for the 27 EU Member States (EU27). We have focused on the period from 2004 to 2023 - 20 years, examining the period of strategic partnership building and the post-sanctions period (2014-2023).

We used trade intensity index (TII) to assess the impact on mutual EU-Russia trade relations. The purpose of TII is to determine whether the value of trade between two partners is greater or smaller than it would be expected based on their importance in world trade. The calculation of the index was carried out according to the World Bank (2010) methodology as the share of one country's exports going to a partner divided by the share of world exports going to the partner. It is calculated as:

$$TII_{ij} = \frac{\frac{x_{ij}}{x_{it}}}{\frac{x_{wj}}{x_{wt}}} \quad (1)$$

where x_{ij} is the value of country i 's exports to partner country j , X_{it} is the value of total exports of the country i ; x_{wj} – value of world exports to country j , and X_{wt} is the world exports' value.

The TII values range from 0 to $+\infty$. A value greater than 1 indicates a relationship more intense than the world average for the partner country (World Bank, 2013). If the index is more than 1, it indicates a more intensive trade between the partner countries than expected given their position in the world economy; and if the TII is less than 1, the intensity of trade is at lower level, than it would be expected.

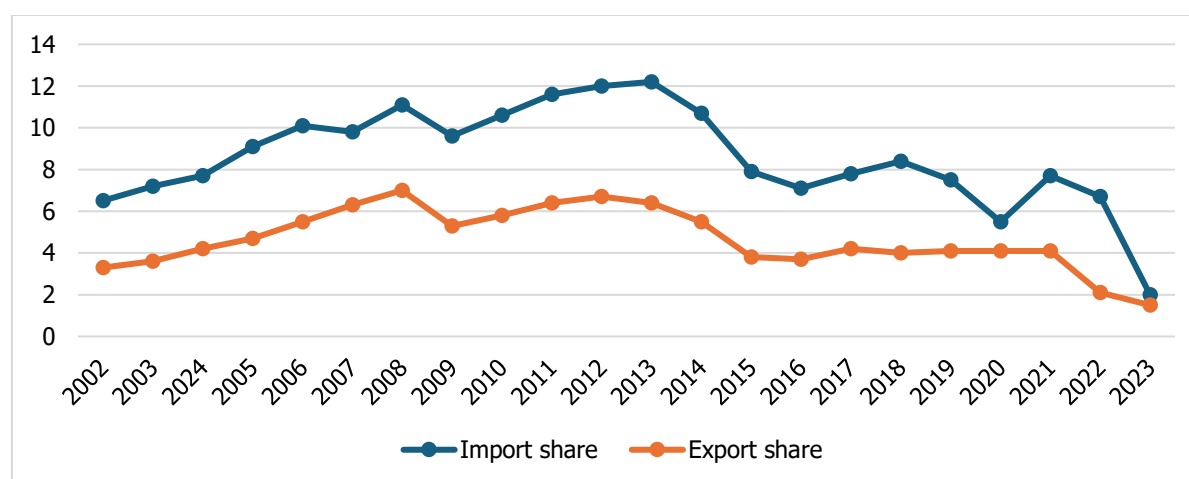
3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trade relations between the EU and Russia have undergone their own development – from the relatively slow establishment of relations and cooperation in the 1990s to the building of a strategic partnership in the first decade of the 21st century. Since 2014, restrictive measures have been adopted, which were significantly strengthened in February 2022. In the following sections, we analyze the development and changes in trade flows between the EU and Russia in two periods – before (from 2004 to 2014) and after the introduction of the sanctions regime (from 2014 to 2023).

3.1 EU-Russia trade relations until 2014

The fact that the strategic partnership has not remained just at the level of theory and political agreements can be seen in the mutual trade relations between the EU and Russia. Over time, EU-Russia economic cooperation has strengthened thanks to efforts to cooperate on foreign trade and the positive economic growth of both economies. Between 2004 and 2014, Russia was the EU's third most important trading partner after the US and China, mainly in terms of imports into the EU. Between 2005 and 2014, its share of EU imports stood at 9% - 12%. Its share of EU exports ranged between 5% - 7%. This is illustrated in more detail in Figure 1.

Fig. 1 Development of Russia's share of EU exports and imports, 2004-2023 (%)

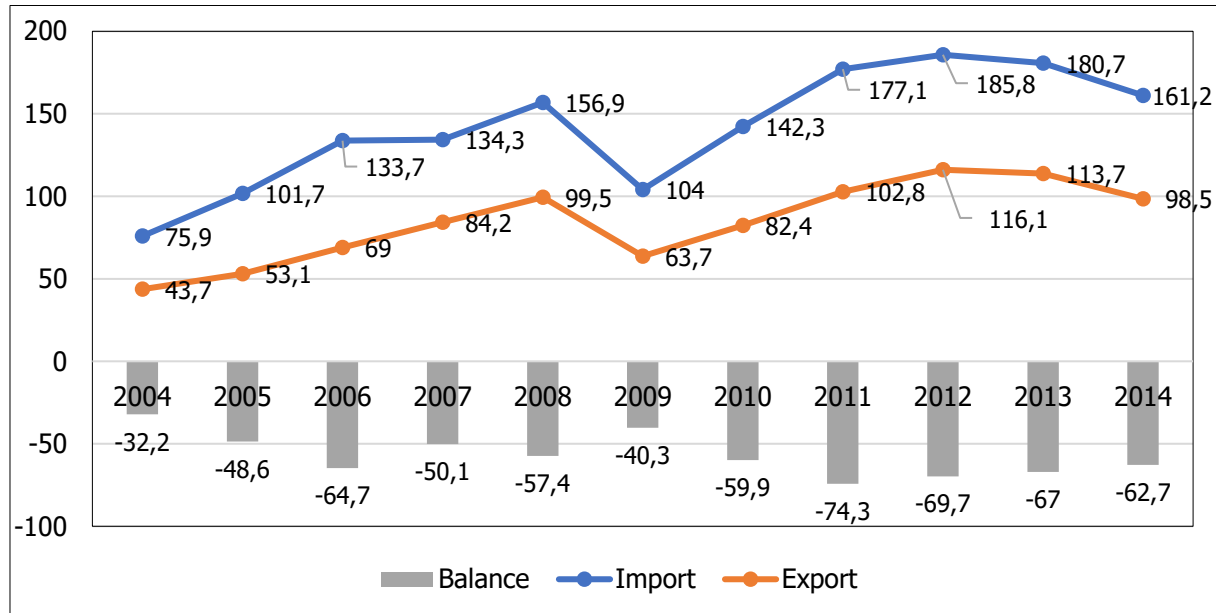


Source: Own elaboration according to Eurostat, 2025.

Mutual trade relations were continuously strengthening until the global financial crisis and its aftermath in 2009, when a decline in the value of mutual trade on both the export and import side can be observed. Later, however, they recovered, Russia became the third fastest growing economy after China and India, which has also had a positive effect on trade with the EU. Eurostat (2015) indicates that over the period 2002-2014, Russia's share in EU trade in goods

increased from 5% in 2002 to 8% in 2014 (Eurostat, 2015; Grešš, 2018; Drieniková, 2019). Figure 2 documents the development of trade between the EU and Russia between 2004 and 2014.

Fig. 2 EU trade with Russia in 2004-2014 (in billion EUR)



Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

After recovering from the crisis, export and import values started to grow again, with a slowdown and subsequent decline after 2012, despite Russia's accession to the WTO at that time. However, the positive prospects of this step for mutual relations have not been fulfilled. This was partly due to the problems in the Russian economy, which included a reduction in investment activity, the continued imposition of measures to protect domestic production against imports, and a poor agricultural harvest. Finally, lower oil prices or the first sanctions for the emerging conflict between Russia and Ukraine contributed to the declining intensity in EU-Russia trade towards 2014. Despite all these factors, both EU exports and imports to Russia were still well above the lows measured during the global financial crisis in 2009 by the end of the period under review. EU exports and imports to Russia in 2014 thus amounted to EUR 98.5 billion and EUR 161.2 billion respectively, further confirming the trend of the EU's long-term trade deficit with Russia (Drieniková, 2019; 2023a; Tajoli, 2022).

The EU's trade deficit with Russia stems from the high energy dependence of EU members on Russia, reflected in the high share of mineral fuels and mineral oils in the structure of imports from Russia. Other relatively important import items are shown in Table 1 (Drieniková & Zubaľová, 2013; European Commission, 2016).

Tab. 1 Major EU27 import items from Russia 2004 - 2014 (in billion EUR)

Product	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Mineral fuels and mineral oils	50.4	71.5	93.6	95.7	125.3	84.7	114.1	143.2	154.0	150.9	130.5
Iron and Steel	4.0	4.8	5.6	6.4	7.3	3.0	4.6	5.2	4.7	4.3	4.2
Genuine pearls, precious and semi-precious stones	1.3	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.1	2.3	3.0	2.8	3.2

Product	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Aluminium	1.9	1.6	2.3	2.5	1.8	0.8	1.7	2.1	1.7	1.9	3.1
Inorganic chemicals	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.6	2.1	1.7	2.4	2.7	2.9	2.7	3.0

Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

The EU also exported industrial products to Russia, in particular nuclear and electrical equipment and machinery, non-road vehicles pharmaceuticals and plastics (Table 2). These export commodities were also the largest items in the EU's total exports, as they come from sectors that are most important for the EU economy, such as the automotive industry. All the EU export items mentioned above show the same trend, after 2012, in the context of the uncertain situation in Ukraine and the steps taken from the Russian side or the first sanctions imposed, export volumes decreased in 2013 and 2014 (ITC, 2024, Eurostat, 2015; 2016; 2023a).

Tab. 2 Major EU27 export items from Russia 2004 - 2014 (in billion EUR)

Product	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, apparatus and mechanical equipment	9.5	12.5	15.6	19.6	22.3	13.8	17.1	22.6	25.1	24.8	22.1
Vehicles other than rail vehicles	3.1	3.9	6.9	10.5	14.1	4.7	8.6	13.8	16.8	14.3	10.3
Electrical machinery, apparatus and equipment	6.5	7.7	8.3	9.5	10.8	6.6	8.7	10.2	10.7	10.4	9.7
Pharmaceutical products	1.7	2.4	3.5	3.6	4.6	4.6	6.1	6.8	7.4	7.9	7.4
Plastics and articles thereof	1.8	2.3	3.1	3.6	3.5	2.4	3.3	3.7	4.2	4.2	4.0

Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

Russia has been one of the EU's most important trading partners, and the EU has also occupied an important place in Russia's trade relations. Already in 2011, EU Member States were Russia's most important trading partner, accounting for up to 48% of its foreign trade. For 2013, the EU accounted for 57% of Russian exports and 46.5% of imports (ITC, 2024; Drieniková & Zubařová, 2013). Economic relations between the EU and Russia have developed mostly positively since the 1990s, when deeper economic and political relations were established, until 2013-2014, when, because of conflicts and activities between Russia and Ukraine, EU sanctions against Russia were adopted, followed by Russia's retaliatory sanctions.

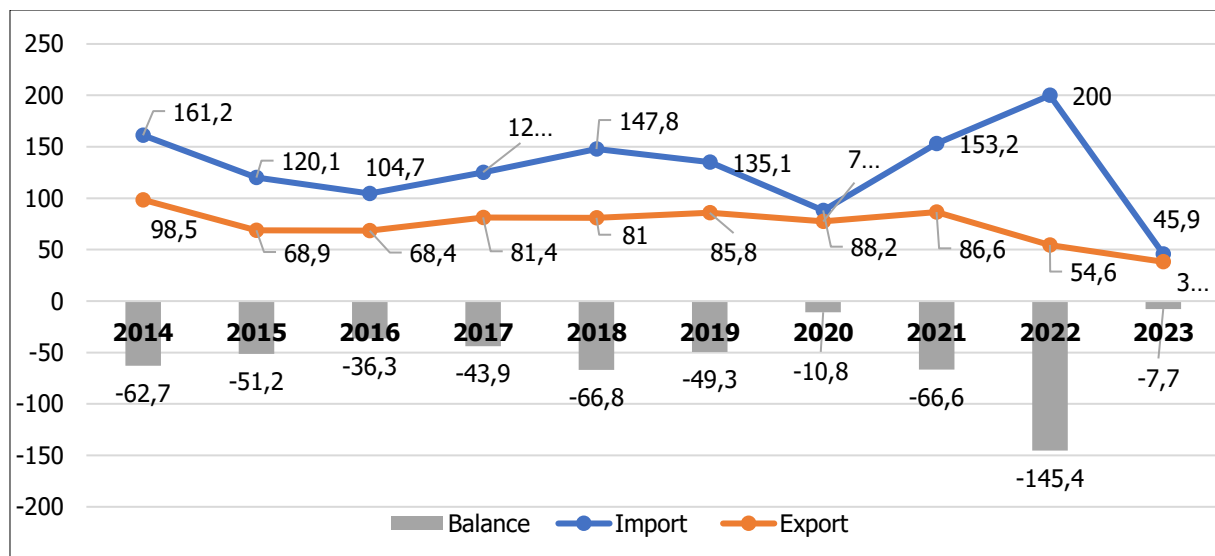
3.2 EU-Russia trade relations after 2014

As a result of disagreement with Russia's activities on Ukrainian territory, the first sanctions were imposed on Russia as early as March 2014. At first, these were individual restrictive measures, i.e. travel bans to the EU or freezing the assets of sanctioned persons, but the impact of the sanctions on economic and political relations cannot be overlooked. Already in

2014, the EU stopped inviting Russia to bilateral summits. In the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU has suspended cross-border cooperation programs, namely the European Neighborhood Instrument and the Interreg program for the Baltic Sea region, which means that projects on Russian territory will no longer be funded by the funds (Trend, 2022b; European Council and EU Council, 2023c, 2023d).

Trade flows between the EU and Russia have also undergone changes following the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, with the subsequent adoption of restrictive measures against Russia. These changes are also captured in Figure 3, which illustrates the development of the EU trade balance, exports, imports to and from Russia between 2014 and 2023.

Fig. 3 EU trade with Russia in 2014-2024 (in billion EUR)



Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

While the decline in the values of EU countries' exports to Russia in 2014-2016 is partly due to the sanctions measures taken, the decline in the nominal values of imports has been influenced not only by the deteriorating relations between the two partners, but also by the devaluation of the Russian ruble. Although there was a slight recovery in relations after 2017, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 dampened trade cooperation, resulting in falling energy prices, which account for a significant part of European imports from Russia, and a drop to a value of EUR 88.2 billion in 2020. In 2021, there is a recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and by 2022, an increase in imports from Russia to the EU can be seen, due to rising energy prices. On the other hand, EU countries' exports to Russia fall again already in 2022, i.e., in the period of the adoption of a new wave of sanctions against Russia, this time for the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict in February 2022. The decline is even more intense in 2023, both for imports and exports, as European exports fall to a value of EUR 38.2 billion, imports even to EUR 45.9 billion (Eurostat, 2021; ITC, 2024, European Commission, 2023, 2024).

In 2023, an additional 4 sanction packages were added to the existing 10 sanction packages. Together with the previous ones, they represented a number of trade restrictive measures, such as bans and restrictions on the import of iron, steel, coal, gold, certain types of oil, vehicles, jewelry, diamonds and rubber from Russia to the EU, or on the export of oil refining technology, aircraft and their parts, various dual-use goods, luxury goods, computers and their components, vehicles, chemicals, etc. from EU Member States to Russia. The EU sanctions against Russia are therefore targeted in particular at industrial goods, as they represent an important part of the Russian economy and the revenues from this activity are used by Russia

to finance its activities on Ukrainian territory. Also, for this reason, the trade balance remains passive in 2023, representing only EUR 7.7 billion compared to 2022 (ITC, 2024; European Commission, 2023, 2024).

The decline in imports from Russia can be attributed not only to the sanctions imposed, but also to the decrease in energy prices on world markets. While in 2022 the average price of Brent crude oil on world markets was 100.93 USD/bbl, a year later it was 82.49 USD/bbl (Statista, 2024).

According to the European Parliament (2017), the EU economies that traded most intensively with Russia, such as Germany, Italy and France, had to cope with the largest export losses in the period 2013-2016. However, Central and Eastern European countries and countries in the Baltic region were also affected.

According to Eurostat (2024a), the export value of EU goods fell by 61% between February 2022 and December 2023 due to the introduction of sanctions, while imports fell by up to 82%. The development of overall EU-Russia trade is also described by the most traded products of the two partners. Energy raw materials still dominate the first place, followed by iron and steel, nickel, aluminum and fertilizers shown in Table 3.

Tab. 3 Major EU27 import items from Russia 2015 – 2023 (in billion EUR)

Product	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Mineral fuels and mineral oils	90.9	76.4	93.6	110.8	100.8	60.1	107.7	159.3	29.6
Iron and Steel	4.3	3.8	4.5	6.2	5.1	4.3	8.0	5.9	3.0
Nickel and articles thereof	0.6	0.7	1.1	1.6	1.6	1.5	2.0	2.9	2.1
Aluminium and articles thereof	2.9	2.8	3.3	3.0	2.7	1.9	2.3	2.9	1.6
Fertilisers	1.7	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.3	1.90	2.7	1.4

Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

Most of these commodities saw a decline between 2022 and 2023 due to the reaction to the sanction's measures and the situation in Ukraine, as in March 2022 the EU banned imports of e.g., iron ore, steel and luxury goods, including pearls, from Russia. It was pearls that represented the 3rd largest import item from Russia in 2022 with a value of €3.6 billion, but in 2023 it saw a drop to €1 billion, making it the 7th largest item. Imports of mineral fuels and mineral oils, however, continued to increase from €107.7 billion in 2021 to €159.3 billion in 2022, an increase of 47.9% as there were significant increases in oil prices on world markets during this time, which were reflected in the captured nominal values. In 2023, these values have already fallen by 81.4% (Eurostat, 2023b, European Commission, 2023, 2024).

In terms of export structure, industrial goods still represent the most important product group in EU exports to Russia. Over the 2015-2023 reporting period, exports of pharmaceuticals have also started to gain prominence, especially from Germany, Italy and France (European Parliament, 2017; Zoshchouk, 2021). More detailed data is documented in Table 4.

Tab. 4 Major EU27 export items from Russia 2015 – 2023 (in billion EUR)

Product	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Pharmaceutical products	5.6	5.7	6.8	6.4	8.8	6.4	7.4	9.7	8.7

Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, apparatus and mechanical equipment	15.6	14.7	18.2	18.3	18.7	18.2	19.0	9.7	5.0
Optical, photographic, cinematographic and other apparatus	2.6	2.7	3.4	3.5	4.1	4.0	3.9	3.0	2.3
Essential oils, perfumes...	1.8	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.23	1.8	2.1	1.7	1.9
Non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.8

Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

While in 2023 electrical apparatus and equipment still ranked 4th in the largest export items with a value of EUR 2.8 billion, in 2023 they have already dropped to 9th place, partly as a result of the sanctions imposed on 25 February 2023 in the 10th package, but also in the sanction packages afterwards, so the value for 2023 is EUR 1.0 billion. Decreases in values were also recorded in optical and photographic instruments or nuclear reactors, boilers and mechanical equipment, which are also subject to sanctions. In this context, essential oils, perfumes, and beverages, which are not affected by the sanctions introduced from 2022, were the most exported items in 2023 (ITC, 2024; European Commission, 2024).

While Russia was one of the EU's most important trading partners until 2014, it has already weakened its position in the second decade of the 21st century. By 2021, it was the EU's 5th largest partner, compared to the 3rd place it held before the first sanctions were imposed in 2014. As imports of goods from European countries declined due to deteriorating relations, Russia was only the EU's 9th largest partner in 2022. On the other hand, it maintained an important position in imports, as the EU's 4th largest import partner with a share of 7% of EU imports from third countries (European Commission, 2023; Eurostat, 2015; 2023c).

According to Eurostat (2024b), Russia's share of EU trade will have declined even further in 2023. In exports, it was the EU's 16th largest trading partner with a share of 1.5%, while in imports it was the 10th largest partner with a share of 2%. It is thus evident that the sanctions measures have significantly dampened EU-Russia trade relations, as since 2014 Russia's share of total EU trade has fallen to as low as 10th place in 2023.

There have also been slight changes in the structure of Russia's largest trading partners itself. While in 2012 the European countries dominated the top 5 places for Russian exports, in 2021 their share has fallen. China has become the largest trading partner for both exports and imports. Even in 2022, after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Russia has a stable trading partner in China, as after the Western countries curtailed their trade relations with Russia due to the imposition of sanctions, there was room for increased trade cooperation, which is shown by the fact that while China's exports to the rest of the world grew by 29% from 2021, in the relationship with Russia it was a 121% increase (ITC, 2024; Graham, 2024).

However, the data for 2023 best demonstrates the declining share of European countries in Russia's trade. Reuters (2024a) reports that Russian exports to the EU fell by 68% this year. On the other hand, Asian countries are becoming increasingly important in Russia's exports, as their share grew by 4.6% last year. However, the share of Asian countries has gained more momentum, rising from 49% in 2022 to 72% in 2023. As for imports into Russia, these were down 12.3% for EU countries as of 2023, but were replaced by imports from Asia, which grew by 29.2%.

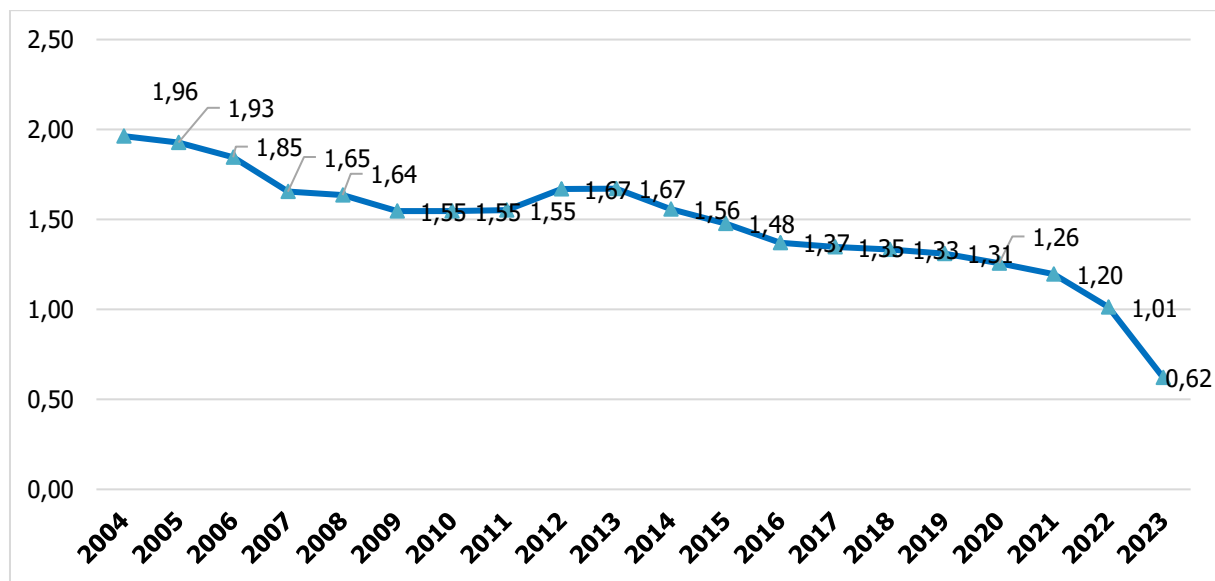
Thus, the overall change in trade flows over the period 2014-2023 was driven by the effects that occurred in this period in the different parts of the Russia-EU cooperation. Sanctions

imposed on the import and export of goods have weakened the intensity of mutual trade, especially in product categories that were intrinsically affected by the sanction measures.

3.3 Intensity of EU trade with Russia

The intensity of trade between the EU and Russia was quite high, with values greater than 1 during the years 2004–2022. It was not until 2023 that it fell below 1 (0.62) for the first time in the monitored period (Figure 4). The two countries therefore export goods to each other in a larger proportion than to the whole world.

Fig. 4 Intensity of EU trade with Russia 2004- 2023



Source: Own elaboration according to ITC, 2024.

As for the EU-Russia TII, the relationship of European exporters with Russia is quite intense, but a downward trend can be observed in it. This can be observed more sharply since 2014, when it fell by 0.11 points from 1.67 to 1.56, precisely during the period of the introduction of the first EU sanctions against Russia, which mainly affected export trade relations and therefore the behavior of European exporters. In 2022, the values even came close to the limit of 1 for the first time, and in 2023 they already exceeded this limit, with a significant decrease of 0.38 points. This is due to a sharp drop in EU exports to Russia, again due to new sanctions imposed for the conflict in Ukraine.

All sanctions adopted since 2014 therefore have an impact on the EU's trade with Russia, whether in connection with its dependence on Russian energy imports, or in its exports of food and agricultural products, which are among the sensitive products of an important EU sector, or are reflected in the very decrease in the intensity of trade between the EU and Russia, which also affected specific EU economies. Such an example could be the member states Latvia and Finland, which are historically and geographically connected to Russia. For the same reason, however, these are also the countries of Central Europe, which undoubtedly includes Slovakia (Schönwiesner, 2005; European Commission, 2016).

The results of the analysis confirm that the impact of the sanctions imposed on Russia can be seen mainly in the negative trend of foreign trade between the EU and Russia, in the gradually decreasing intensity of mutual trade relations, in the redirection of trade flows to other partners, which also has an impact on the gradual weakening of economic cooperation.

The decline in trade is undoubtedly the most significant economic impact related to sanctions, although it should be noted that it is difficult to assess the impact of sanctions on EU-Russia relations in isolation from other factors, such as fluctuations in energy prices on world markets. Nevertheless, it is obvious that they contributed to the weakening of trade. In 2014, i.e. after the introduction of sanction measures, and after 2022, i.e. after the start of the conflict in Ukraine, both EU exports and imports to and from Russia decreased. The steepest decline can be seen in imports, which in the EU in 2023 decreased by 77.1% year-on-year, while exports decreased by 30%. Overall, over the period under review, 2023 saw the most significant decline in both EU export and import values in trade with Russia since the first sanctions measures were introduced in 2014 (ITC, 2024).

The negative trend in EU foreign trade with Russia is caused by a decrease in values in individual items of the commodity structure, both in exports and imports. According to Borin et al. (2023), export restrictions and embargoes were imposed mainly on transport equipment (45% of the total value of sanctions), followed by chemicals (19%), electronics (12%) and machinery (11%). We agree with this view, as these are essential commodities and products for the Russian economy, which can further use the items or the income from them in military activities in Ukraine. Regarding import items, it should be mentioned that sanctions have negatively affected, for example, imports of iron ore, steel and luxury goods, including pearls, which recorded a decrease in nominal values in 2023. However, the largest commodity in imports is mineral raw materials, and Russia supplied up to 28% of energy raw materials to the EU in 2021. These represented the most important item in trade with Russia, and the introduction of sanction measures is mainly reflected in this sector of the economy (ITC, 2024; Eurostat, 2024d).

The impact of the sanctions can also be seen in the EU's shift away from trade and economic cooperation with Russia. In September 2022, the EU suspended the EU-Russia visa facilitation agreement. This has affected Russian citizens applying for visas to the EU in practice. Visa fees have increased, waiting times for documents have increased, and Russian citizens are required to provide additional necessary documents. The EU has also suspended all negotiations and cooperation with Russia (RTVS, 2022a; 2022b; Trend, 2022b; European Council and Council of the EU, 2023c, 2023d).

Another impact of the sanctions can be seen in the change in the structure of Russia's trading partners. The EU's relations as an important partner of Russia have been weakened in favor of China. It has become Russia's largest partner not only in terms of trade, but also politically, as the countries share the same global outlook for the future. In 2022, trade between these two trading partners reached a record of 190 billion USD. Russia's increasing trade flows were also recorded with Turkey and India, which have long maintained positive relations with Russia, so we expect Russia to support these economic relations in the future (Reuters, 2024b; The Moscow Times, 2023; ECB, 2023). The EU is also trying to diversify its trading partners, especially when it comes to importing energy raw materials. In this regard, cooperation with the United States has begun to gain intensity. Natural gas supplies from the US have been among the most intense, as the US has been the most flexible in adapting to new demand from the EU. The new US administration under President D. Trump also plans to significantly increase exports of liquefied natural gas (Gurzu, 2025). Azerbaijan, Qatar, Kazakhstan and Algeria may also become potentially important energy suppliers (Kardaś, 2023).

With the adoption of the 16th sanctions package in early 2025, we expect sanctions to continue impacting bilateral trade relations and cooperation in the coming period, unless a change in the situation occurs that would halt this trend.

CONCLUSION

The EU sanctions against Russia are a set of measures imposed by the EU in response to the situation in Ukraine. They aim to put pressure on Russia to change its behavior, to comply with international law and standards and to respect the principles of the democratic rule of law, while expressing the EU's general disapproval of Russia's actions against Ukraine. The sanctions imposed from 2014 up to and including 2024 have a long-term impact on the EU's foreign trade relations with Russia, although their overall impact is currently difficult to estimate, as changes in prices in the world economy or other variables also have an impact on the situation. While in 2014 Russia was the EU's 3rd largest partner, by 2023 it had dropped to 10th place. The EU's position in Russia's trade has also undergone a significant change, while in 2011 it was the EU's largest partner, in 2022 it has lost this position to China.

Import bans on industrial products and commodities representing a substantial part of the Russian economy, as well as bans on EU exports to Russia, have caused declines in trade in goods such as vehicles, electronics, machinery and equipment, luxury goods, steel and iron ore. However, the most significant changes can be seen in the energy sector, which is one of the EU's sensitive sectors. EU countries have been dependent on imports of these raw materials, and in 2021 Russia was its largest partner with mineral raw materials. The negative impact of sanctions on trade with Russia is confirmed by the declining intensity of the EU's trade relations with Russia. Since 2004, it has largely been on a downward trend.

The overall impact of sanctions is also difficult to predict due to the still unclear prospects for an end to the conflict in Ukraine. It is therefore likely that sanctions against Russia will continue to be adopted by the EU in the period ahead, and so the results of this work can serve as a basis for compiling similar research in the future.

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