

Encourage and Support Lebanese SMEs to benefit from growth markets
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Policy Brief

THE EU EXPORT HELP-DESK

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The EU Export Help-Desk was created by the Commission in 2004 as an accompanying measure to the preferential trade arrangements granted by the EU to developing countries.

Description of content

Intrinsically, the Export Help-Desk is not more than an online tool to make it easier for businessmen in third countries to get practical access in real time to reliable information about the EU market regulations. Consequently, it is not another policy initiative as could be the Generalised System of Preferences, or the simplified preferential rules of origin that came into force in January 2011, but it is a platform providing free online information for economic operators in developing countries on the conditions of access to the EU market. Every internet user can obtain complete information about virtually any import of any product originating in a third country and destined for any Member State within the EU Single Market.

The EU Export Help-Desk is the one-stop-shop designed for companies and notably SMEs from third countries to access the EU market, *rectius* the national markets of its Member States.

The information available in this web relates to all rules applicable to imports to the different Member States that compose the EU Single Market (or the EU Internal Market) as a whole, and to the specificities that apply to certain national markets, i.e. to the markets of each of the 28 EU Member States. As Member States must comply with the international trade policy of the European Union, no single Member State is in a position to legislate independently about the entry of foreign products and other issues that are subject to legislation adopted by the EU institutions; if national provisions contemplate certain products these rules are reflected in the Common Customs Code. Thus, exporting from a third country to any destination within the European Union means that basically the same rules will apply to exports to any other EU destination as far as foreign trade legislation is concerned. In this sense, it is frequently recalled that the former Common Market has reached meanwhile more than half a billion of potential consumers and that it is actually the biggest single market in the world. The size of the business opportunities for foreign product and

services offers is immense. This is the main reason for a SME established in a third country to focus on sales contracts (i.e. exports) towards the Single Market.

Some basic features of the EU Single Market

It is useful to recall here that the idea behind the Single Market is simplicity itself: the whole Single Market is treated as one territory with common trade laws (and others). This enhances competition and improves efficiency. It is also the basic recipe for prosperity.

The idea of simplicity permeates also the management of EU imports.

Once the industrial product originating in a third country reaches a Member State of the EU, the principle of free movements of goods applies entirely; the products are then “in free circulation”. It can thus be transported to another Member State and be traded there without any distinction to EU products.

Basic features and significance of the EU Export Help-Desk

Simplicity also governs the use of the Help-Desk. The user just selects a commodity by clicking on the webpage the 10-digits code that corresponds to his product according to the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, or ‘HS Nomenclature’ and the countries of origin and destination, and immediately the relevant information will be displayed on his or her screen, starting with the binding tariff information.

The significance of the Export Help-Desk cannot be underestimated. In fact, it discharges a basic rule in GATT, article X, that requires that all laws, regulations, judicial decisions and administrative rulings of general application dealing with international trade should be published promptly, in such a manner as to enable governments and traders to become acquainted with them. WTO members must administer in a uniform, impartial and reasonable manner all its trade-related laws, regulations, decisions and rulings. This provision has been interpreted as aiming, at least in part, at ensuring that due process is accorded to traders when they import or export.

Transparency becomes thus a cornerstone of the international trade system. At a very practical level, economic operators need to have a clear view of all regulations that apply to a given product or service when imported into a given market. Without such transparency, and the resulting predictability in the application of trade regulations and procedures, the implementation of the party’s lawful rights would become chimerical. In fact, reliable and easily accessible information is a must for the development of an international dimension to SMEs.

Trade openness is perceived as a necessary condition to lasting economic development. The purpose of the EU Export Help-Desk is precisely to help SMEs from third countries seize the opportunities that the EU Single Market offers. To this

effect, the Help-Desk releases its content in six languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic).

Other “Export Help-Desks” exist around the world, but the EU claims to be the most open market in the world for developing country’s exports.

In the ten years of existence, the Export Help-Desk has been used extensively. In its first year of existence, the number of hits (or page requests) amounted to more than 500.000. Over 4 years, this number increased by more than 500% with more than 7.500 hits per day in 2007.

The homepage of the Export Help-Desk is:

<http://exporthelp.europa.eu/thdapp/index.htm?&newLanguageId=EN>

Structure of the EU Export Helpdesk

Its structure reflects all regulatory matters that exporters must take into consideration for exporting to the EU. Thus, the webpage allows us to link dependably to EU market rules.

The reader can choose among the following hyperlinks:

- My export
- Requirements
- Tariffs
- Preferential arrangements
- Statistics

“MY EXPORT” provides information about the tariffs, requirements and preferential arrangements that apply to the exports’ country of origin and product. The exporter needs to enter simply the product code, the country of origin and destination and the date. A hyperlink guides the exporter through the Harmonized System of Tariff Nomenclature, which classifies traded products. The result of this search allows then the exporter to choose for any product among the following:

- Requirements
- Tariffs
- Rules of Origin

“REQUIREMENTS” allows the exporter to choose among the product-specific conditions applicable to the entry of products to the EU market. The exporter can select among the following categories of requirements:

- Understanding the EU market
 - EU product classification system
 - EU import procedures

- Documents for customs clearance
- EU Customs Union
- Value Added Tax (VAT)
- Excise duties
- Sanitary and phytosanitary requirements
 - Official controls
 - Food and feed safety
 - Animal health
 - Plant health
 - General requirements
 - Additional requirements
 - CITES
 - Public health
- Environmental requirements
 - Chemicals
 - Ozone-depleting substances (ODS)
 - Fluorinated greenhouse gases
 - Endangered species
 - Waste
- Technical requirements
 - Product safety
 - Technical standardisation
 - Packaging
 - Labelling
- Marketing standards
 - Marketing standards for agricultural and fishery products
 - Marketing standards for products from organic production
- Import restrictions
 - Agricultural products
 - Textiles
 - Iron and steel products
- Tips and tricks on EU requirements
 - What is the Single Administrative Document (SAD)?
 - Are my textiles “green”?
 - Are my textiles made of cotton?
 - Trading with endangered species? No thanks
 - How to export honey?
 - Is my meat safe for consumption?
 - Are pesticides bad for health?

“TARIFFS” provides exporters with information about:

- Binding tariff information
- Duty relief and suspensions
- Quotas
 - Preferential tariff quotas
 - Autonomous tariff quotas
 - Management of quotas

- Antidumping
- Tips and tricks on EU tariffs

PREFERENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS refers the exporter to specific customs unions and free trade areas entered into by the EU, and to other country-specific trade rules. These include relevant data about:

- Rules of origin
 - EU preferential rules of origin
 - EU non-preferential rules of origin
 - Binding origin information (BOI)
- Generalised scheme of preferences
- Economic Partnerships Agreements (ECA)
- Free trade agreements
- Autonomous trade regimes
- Overseas countries and territories (OCTs)
- Customs Unions
 - Turkey
 - Andorra
 - San Marino

STATISTICS provides the exporter with export-import data from EUROSTAT.

Final remarks

The Export Help-Desk does not intend to supplement professional advice that any exporter needs when exporting to the EU. It intends to give guidance to exporters, but it should not be used as the only source of advice for exporters.