

## **IMPORT AND EXPORT REGULATIONS IN THE EU IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine measures has led to an unprecedented drop in the global economy. Thus, in the first half of 2020, the European Union faced economic problems due to the coronavirus pandemic, which directly affected international supplies. During 2020, the activities of EU member states and EU institutions were aimed at strengthening the coordination and cooperation at the interstate level. Although these events had a significant impact on the development of

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international trade, it will continue to play a crucial role in ensuring the economic recovery of the world when the pandemic is over.

Many European countries, responding to the pandemic, actively implemented measures to regulate imports and exports: on the one hand, they reduced or completely eliminated import duties on goods (primarily medical ones), and on the other hand, they restricted or banned exports of «critically important» goods.

Regarding the regulation of imports, there were mainly measures to liberalize and simplify trade, aimed at reducing the cost of imports. The weakening of the import regime primarily affected the goods needed specifically to fight COVID-19 – medical supplies, test systems, disinfectants, artificial lung ventilation (ALV), etc. Conversely, the strengthening of regulation concerned the export of such goods. For example, Belgium banned the export of a number of pharmaceutical products to countries outside the European Economic Area [1]. Among the banned products for export are anti-malaria medications. The ban on exports of these goods was imposed due to the expected shortage of them in the country after the COVID-19 outbreak. Similar measures have been taken in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Bulgaria imposed a ban on exports of quinine-based medications. Poland imposed an export ban on respirators and cardiac monitors, as well as an authorization requirement for the export of certain personal protective equipment after the COVID-19 outbreak. Similar measures were adopted in Germany and France.

The European Commission also issued a number of documents aimed at changing the regulation of exports and imports due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will consider the main ones.

Thus, the European Commission issued the Decision (EU) 2020/491 to abolish duties on goods imported to contain COVID-19. The lists of such goods were to be determined in each individual member state based on the epidemiological situation in the country before July 31, 2020.

According to Decision 2020/491, goods shall be admitted free of import duties and exempted of value added tax (VAT) the goods are intended for one of the following uses [3]:

- distribution free of charge to the persons affected by or at risk from COVID-19 or involved in combating the COVID-19 outbreak;
- being made available free of charge to the persons affected by the COVID-19 outbreak while remaining the property of the bodies and organisations;
- the goods satisfy the requirements laid down in Regulation (EC) No 1186/2009 and Directive 2009/132/EC;
- the goods are imported for release for free circulation by or on behalf of State organisations approved by the competent authorities in the EU Member States;

– the goods are imported for release into free circulation by or on behalf of disaster relief agencies in order to meet their needs during the period they provide disaster relief to the persons affected by COVID-19.

Later, Commission Decision (EU) 2020/1101 of July 23, 2020, amending Decision (EU) 2020/491 was adopted and remained in force until the end of 2020 [4].

Commission Executive Regulation (EC) 2020/633 of May 8, 2020 established temporary measures to accept electronic copies of original official documents for import tariff quota applications for agricultural products managed by the import license system and import license applications for refined rice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document introduced temporary measures that provide for the acceptance of an electronic copy of the original of the official documents required to accompany the following applications: applications for import licenses and tariff quota import rights to which Regulation (EC) No. 1301/2006 applies; applications for licenses to import husked basmati rice, which falls under the scope of Regulation (EC) No. 972/2006 [5].

The next document is Communication from the Commission on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services 2020/C 96 I/01. The Communication urges Member States to implement the Guidelines for border management in full on all intra-EU freight transports, and provides specific additional guidance to Member States on how to implement certain paragraphs of those guidelines [6].

According to COVID-19 Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services 2020/C 86 I/01, Member States should not undertake measures that jeopardise the integrity of the Single Market for goods, in particular of supply chains. They must always admit their own citizens and residents, and facilitate transit of other EU citizens and residents that are returning home. Therefore, these guidelines set out principles for an integrated approach to an effective border management to protect health while preserving the integrity of the Single Market [7].

The export of vaccines is regulated by Commission Implementing Regulation (EC) 2021/442 of March 11, 2021, which provides for the export of certain products subject to export authorization. In particular, this document requires an export authorization for the following goods: vaccines against SARS-related coronaviruses (SARS-CoV species) and active substances, including master and working cell banks used for the manufacture of such vaccines [2].

Thus, the practice of export and import regulation measures in international trade of EU member states in 2020 indicates a synchronous change in their policies and a significant change in the nature of foreign trade regulation as a result of the global pandemic. Against the background of the elimination of import restrictions by European countries, their export policy becomes mostly restrictive, starting from the second quarter of 2020. The imposition of restrictions occurs primarily in relation to medical goods necessary to combat COVID-19, as well as certain groceries. They are adopted in the form of direct export bans, quantitative restrictions or the introduction of permissive export procedures (licensing, control, monitoring of imports). These restrictions are imposed on a temporary basis under emergency circumstances in order to meet the domestic market needs of countries after the COVID-19 outbreak.

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