

DOSSIER

DISCREPANCIES IN EXTERNAL-TRADE STATISTICS IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

With the aim of facilitating the work involved in studying and identifying international transport priorities in the Western Mediterranean, CETMO has been regularly updating the CETMO-FLUX database since 1987. This database contains goods flows between the seven countries in the region (Algeria, France, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia).

Different national organisations participate in the updating process of CETMO-FLUX by providing external-trade statistics between the countries in the area under study. This dossier comments briefly on the discrepancies between the data provided by the different sources which often force CETMO to process the data before it can be entered into the database.

- **The CETMO-FLUX database**

The CETMO-FLUX database is designed to include information on estimated goods flows based on each country's national external-trade statistics. When presenting these flows, the database groups goods according to the ten NST nomenclature chapters and breaks them down by region in the four European countries and by mode of transport.

The process involved in producing the updated version of CETMO-FLUX begins with requesting data on external trade from each of the countries in the area. The requested data are presented in total metric tonnes and tonnes of goods classified by type, which means that, in general, all data are duplicated. Therefore, the goods imported by country A from country B should coincide with those exported from country B to country A, and vice versa.

- **Discrepancies in national statistics on external trade between countries**

First let's analyse the discrepancies in the 1999 statistics on total external trade in the twenty country-country relationships for which CETMO has data from the two different sources (figure 1).

Figure 1. Origin-destination table of goods flows – 1999 (in tonnes)

		DESTINATION						
		Spain	France	Italy	Portugal	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia
O R I G I N	Spain		11.276.609		5.714.702		1.300.182	378.388
	France	19.236.127		5.987.923	5.928.850	1.035.066	1.295.667	379.199
	Italy	7.385.889	12.285.185		1.214.347		359.237	2.156.145
	Portugal	10.566.890	1.154.864				107.457	58.392
	Algeria	10.896.555	1.243.410	552.591		39.966	121.062	42.980
	Morocco	14.380.888	13.259.999		184.528		686.284	1.132.957
	Tunisia	3.850.339	2.540.023		140.915			105.700
		4.017.717	2.628.238	559.760	116.333	7.735		84.785
		977.070	1.133.866		230.536		51.866	
		1.027.322	1.277.696	2.611.789	227.301	191.169	42.980	

Some significant points to be made are as follows:

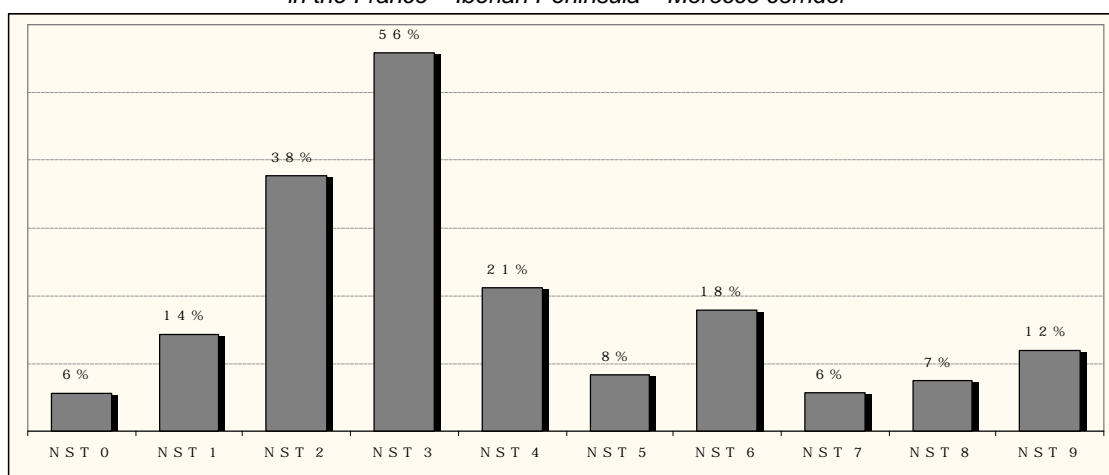
- In most cases, the declared exports are higher than the corresponding figure for imports.

- In trade between European countries, there are no great discrepancies in the data provided (in general, they are less than 4%, except in the Spain ⇒ France relationship, where the discrepancy is more than 10%).
- The differences are greater in the figures on trade between European and North African countries, both in terms of the average and the spread. Data on trade between Spain and countries to the south stand out for being very consistent (with differences of less than 0.3%); the contrary is true for exports from Tunisia to France, where the difference between one source and the other is 11%.
- The most marked differences can be seen in relationships between North African countries (some are more than 20%), although these exchanges involve lower volumes.

• Discrepancies in statistics according to goods categories

Figure 2 shows the distribution of these country-country discrepancies by goods category and for the countries in the France – Iberian Peninsula – Morocco corridor. The percentages in the figure were calculated taking the absolute value of the sum of differences between the two sources with regard to total external trade between the countries in this corridor.

Figure 2. Discrepancies in data by goods category in the France – Iberian Peninsula – Morocco corridor



External trade between the countries in the corridor (1999)

NST	Tonnes	Description of the chapter
NST 0	17.171.878	Agricultural products and live animals
NST 1	5.588.648	Foodstuffs and animal fodder
NST 2	100.855	Solid mineral fuels
NST 3	5.764.270	Petroleum products
NST 4	2.356.632	Ores and metal waste
NST 5	6.458.172	Metal products
NST 6	7.431.316	Crude and manufactured minerals and building materials
NST 7	4.535.062	Fertilisers
NST 8	6.595.121	Chemicals
NST 9	11.430.231	Machinery, transport equipment, manufactured articles and miscellaneous articles

It should first be stated that the goods-classification system used to provide data differs from one country to another. For the 1999 update, for example, France and Portugal provided data directly in accordance with the ten NST chapters. Spain, on the other hand, provided data based on the combined nomenclature, with four-digit codes. Morocco provided data using its own classification system, which only made it possible to extract data for the combined nomenclature using six-digit codes. The fact that the CETMO-FLUX database uses the NST system makes it necessary to harmonise the different classification systems, which could lead to slight errors (estimated to be about 1%).

Regarding figure 2, it should be noted that, in general, there are considerable differences in most chapters, particularly NST 3 (where the disparity in the statistics for the Portugal ⇒ Spain relationship stand out), NST 2, NST 4 and NST 6. These discrepancies bring to light the lack of standardisation in these countries when assigning codes to certain goods (e.g., in the categories of petroleum products, solid mineral fuels and crude minerals).