



PRESS RELEASE

5 October 2022

Public thematic report

EXPORT SUPPORT SCHEMES

For the last 15 years, foreign trade has been experiencing growing difficulties and the French trade balance has continued to worsen. In 2021, in an admittedly unusual context, it reached an all-time low of -€84.7bn. The low buoyancy of exports, compared to that of imports, puts France in a recurrent situation of external deficit. To restore France's export performance, France has been implementing a policy to support business competitiveness since the 2000s. However, it was only in 2012 that France formally adopted a strategy to support foreign trade. The current strategy is based on three focal areas, including the identification of measures to strengthen the competitiveness of businesses and the structuring of sectors. The report published today by the Court of Accounts analyses the factors behind the decline in France's export performance and the successive strategies implemented to respond to the difficulties that businesses face. It also presents the mechanisms for financing businesses wishing to export, as well as the support offering and its business model.

A decline in French export performance

The French economy's structural weaknesses and its insufficient competitiveness are handicaps in the face of competition from our main European and Western partners. This comes on top of the growing trade power of emerging economies, such as China, which France has been unable to withstand. France's low price competitiveness has exacerbated its poor export performance, due to high labour costs. The export support policy implemented, which consists of support and financial assistance for businesses wishing to export, has been steered since 2014 by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs and conducted by numerous public and private stakeholders (including Business France, Bpifrance, chambers of commerce and industry, regions, ambassadors, etc.). Adopted in 2018, the latest strategy to support foreign trade, known as the "Roubaix strategy", aimed to improve France's trade balance through actions to foster competitiveness, with a priority placed on very small enterprises (VSEs) and intermediate-sized enterprises (ISEs), to set sectoral priorities with the main economic and industrial sectors and to highlight a geographical priority, Africa. Lastly, it aimed to set up a one-stop shop, "Team France Export" (TFE), for businesses wishing to export. The purpose of this one-stop shop was to bring together the services offered by all the public stakeholders in the export sector to make them more complementary, clearer and more accessible. This support policy is struggling to clearly state its geographical priorities, apart from Africa, partly for dip-

lomatic reasons. In terms of sectors, no priorities have been set and the priority placed on SMEs and ISEs that are first-time exporters seems questionable.

A rethink needed on export support policy

Over four years after the Roubaix strategy was implemented, and despite the progress made in coordinating the main stakeholders in France and abroad, the reform of governance that should have been possible with the establishment of TFE has not been completed. Public stakeholders still appear to be too often in competition with each other, one example being the difficulties in coordinating the ministries in charge of foreign affairs and the economy. Some stakeholders are also less involved in TFE, including Bpifrance, which does not coordinate its efforts with other public stakeholders. To remedy these difficulties, the Court suggests that the Strategic Export Council, which brings together all relevant stakeholders, be reformed to play a more strategic role. In addition, regional strategic committees should be established to facilitate coordination between stakeholders at a local level.

Public measures with modest effects, a business model in need of reform

The commitments made by central government to support certain businesses are very substantial, amounting to €61bn at the end of 2021. However, although the financial support offering in France appears comprehensive, its effects remain modest: just 27% of recipient businesses feel that their international growth has been facilitated. The operator Business France, whose funding is based almost equally on public support and commercial revenue, is given objectives that encourage it to maximise its commercial revenue. However, this quest for commercial resources encourages Business France to sell as many services as possible, without necessarily seeking to support the businesses best equipped to expand internationally, and by favouring a “one-off” approach that does not allow for long-term support. The Court therefore proposes reconfiguring this support under a two-level system: a first-level offering, free of charge, would be available to all businesses (notably all SMEs and ISEs), thus enshrining TFE’s public service mission. For certain businesses deemed priorities, tailored support, free of charge or at very low cost, would be offered to limit any crowding-out effect. Such a transformation would have an effect on the business model of Business France, which would then rely more on public resources, like many of its counterparts abroad.

[Read the report](#)

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