EU TRADE EXPLORER

Market evolution: Alcohols (CN 2905) — 2015–2025

Introduction

Acyclic alcohols and their halogenated, sulphonated, nitrated or nitrosated derivatives (CN 2905) form a cornerstone of the EU's organic chemicals trade, spanning bulk methanol and ethylene glycol to higher-value diols and glycerol. This report examines the 2015–2025 period, tracing the combined effects of price surges, geopolitical realignments and shifting supply-chain dynamics. The analysis draws exclusively on the figures provided in the accompanying data set, with all numbers cited from the General trade overview and the underlying dashboards.

A price-driven divergence: rising values, falling quantities

Export and import volumes contracted over the decade while unit values surged.

EU-27 exports of CN 2905 fell from 1.625 million tonnes in 2015 to 1.243 million tonnes in 2025, a drop of 23.5 %. Yet the value of those exports rose by 5.3 %, from €1.661 billion to €1.749 billion, because the average unit price jumped 37.7 % (from €1 022/t to €1 407/t). Imports followed a similar pattern: volume shrank moderately (–2.5 %, from 7.289 million to 7.103 million tonnes), while import value climbed 17.7 %, driven by a 19.1 % increase in the average import price (€404.5/t → €481.7/t). Consequently, the EU's trade deficit in this category widened from €1.287 billion to €1.720 billion (a deterioration of 33.6 %). The overall picture is one of a market where physical flows have been restrained, but the monetary dimension has expanded sharply on the back of higher prices.

The trade deficit widened in value terms but the EU's net import reliance remained relatively stable.

Despite the worsening nominal deficit, net import reliance – the share of extra-EU imports in EU apparent consumption – was 22.2 % in 2015 and 21.7 % in 2025, a marginal change of –2.1 % (Net import reliance). This suggests that the EU production base, though shrinking in volume (–27.1 % between 2006 and 2024), has adapted to maintain a broadly similar degree of external dependence over the decade.

A reshuffled map of partners: from Russia to the United States

Imports: the US becomes the dominant supplier as Russian flows collapse and other traditional sources decline.

A dramatic reordering of import sources occurred (Top partners by value). The United States surged from €370 million in 2015 to €1 035 million in 2025 (+179.8 %), becoming the largest supplier. The Russian Federation, a major partner in 2015 (€333 million), had disappeared almost entirely by 2025 (€37 thousand), a direct consequence of sanctions and self-sanctioning. Saudi Arabia dropped by 46.6 % (€513 million → €274 million), while Equatorial Guinea collapsed from €131 million to €5.6 million (–95.8 %). Offsetting these falls, imports from Egypt exploded from €30 million to €213 million (+621.3 %), and Trinidad and Tobago grew by 20.9 % (€399 million → €482 million).

Partner	Import value 2015 (€)	Import value 2025 (€)	Change
United States	369 926 011	1 034 946 515	+179.8 %
Trinidad & Tobago	398 903 393	482 356 943	+20.9 %
Saudi Arabia	513 199 981	274 199 089	–46.6 %
Russian Federation	332 657 609	36 673	–100.0 %
Egypt	29 549 553	213 145 742	+621.3 %
Equatorial Guinea	131 318 975	5 568 483	–95.8 %
Norway	155 782 288	156 952 843	+0.8 %

Exports: the UK loses ground while the US and Turkey gain share; Taiwan and some others slump.

On the export side, the United Kingdom – a top destination – saw EU sales fall from €379 million to €295 million (–22.0 %), influenced by post-Brexit trade frictions. The United States, in contrast, increased its purchases by 58.3 % (€190 million → €300 million), and Türkiye rose by 32.8 % (€94 million → €124 million). Switzerland, India and Korea remained relatively stable. However, Taiwan experienced a sharp contraction (–60.2 %, from €81 million to €32 million), and some other Asian markets lost momentum.

Partner	Export value 2015 (€)	Export value 2025 (€)	Change
United Kingdom	378 835 817	295 499 339	–22.0 %
United States	189 570 373	300 110 335	+58.3 %
Türkiye	93 575 307	124 252 350	+32.8 %
Switzerland	114 635 263	138 805 672	+21.1 %
India	90 525 629	117 472 402	+29.8 %
Taiwan	80 553 996	32 052 212	–60.2 %
Korea, Republic of	73 130 136	73 576 687	+0.6 %

Rising concentration and price volatility: new supply risks

Import supplier concentration increased markedly, driven by the growing weight of the United States.

The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) for extra-EU imports rose from 969.9 in 2015 to 1 370.2 in 2025, a jump of 41.3 % (HHI concentration). This shift reflects the replacement of a relatively diversified set of suppliers (Russia, Saudi Arabia, Equatorial Guinea) by an increasingly dominant US position, raising potential concerns about over-reliance on a single major source. Meanwhile, export concentration remained broadly unchanged (HHI from 896.6 to 879.4), indicating that EU-27 sales are still spread across many markets.

Price shocks in the early 2020s hit key import and export flows, highlighting market fragility.

The data reveal several significant price shocks, particularly around 2021, a year of post-pandemic recovery and supply-chain disruptions (Price shock events).

- On the **import** side, Saudi Arabia saw a price hike of 43.2 % in 2021 compared with the 2019-2020 baseline, compounded by volatility in subsequent years. Norway and Russia also experienced sharp price increases (35.7 % and 49.2 % respectively) while volumes dropped.
- On the **export** side, EU sales of alcohols to Türkiye, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and the United States all registered price jumps of 57 % to 103 % above pre-2021 levels, accompanied by temporary quantity adjustments.

Volatility coefficients (CV) confirm that several partners exhibit highly erratic trade flows: for imports, Azerbaijan (0.78), Equatorial Guinea (0.69) and Oman (0.69) stand out; for exports, Russia (0.73) and Ukraine (0.63) show extreme instability (Volatility bars). These patterns underline a trade environment in which both importers and exporters have been exposed to abrupt price and volume shifts.

Conclusion

Over 2015–2025, the EU's trade in acyclic alcohols and their derivatives was defined by a persistent decoupling of values from volumes. Prices – whether for bulk methanol or specialty diols – rose substantially, inflating trade values even as tonnes shipped fell. Geopolitical forces redrew the supplier map: Russia's near-total exit was offset by a surge from the United States and, to a lesser extent, Egypt. The resulting concentration on a handful of large suppliers – together with repeated price shocks – points to a more fragile and shock-prone import structure, even though the EU's overall net import reliance remained stable. Export propensity more than doubled (from 19.2 % to 37.3 % of production), signalling a sector that has become more internationally oriented despite the challenges. Future monitoring should focus on whether the current concentration of import sources persists and how the market absorbs the next wave of input-cost volatility.

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