EU TRADE EXPLORER

Market evolution: Iron steel articles (CN 73) — 2015–2025

Introduction

This report examines the extra-EU trade dynamics of **Articles of Iron or Steel (CN 73)** from 2015 to 2025. The data, sourced from the EU Trade Dashboard, cover a broad basket of products ranging from tubes, pipes and structures to fasteners, household items and cast articles. Throughout the period, the European Union remained a net exporter, but the composition, direction and pricing of its trade have undergone significant changes. Three defining dynamics are explored below: the erosion of the traditional surplus, the realignment of partner-country shares, and the growing divergence between export and import unit values.

A shrinking surplus: the growing weight of extra-EU imports

The trade balance contracted markedly, even as export value grew

Total extra-EU exports of iron and steel articles rose from **€36.8 bn** in 2015 to **€44.5 bn** in 2025, a **+20.9 %** increase. However, imports rose much faster, from **€20.9 bn** to **€35.3 bn** (**+68.9 %**). As a result, the EU's traditional surplus dropped from **€16.0 bn** to **€9.2 bn** (–42 %) and touched a low of only **€3.2 bn** in 2022. The overall trade balance thus shrank considerably.

Year	Exports (€ bn)	Imports (€ bn)	Balance (€ bn)
2015	36.8	20.9	16.0
2020	32.6	23.5	9.1
2022	42.5	39.3	3.2
2025	44.5	35.3	9.2

Import volumes surged while export volumes steadily declined

The quantity of goods imported jumped from **8.5 million tonnes** in 2015 to **12.9 million tonnes** in 2025 (**+52.9 %**). Export quantities, by contrast, fell from **12.1 million tonnes** to **9.7 million tonnes** (–19.9 %). This divergence highlights that the EU is absorbing considerably more physical steel articles from abroad, while its own shipments rely on higher-value items.

EU member-state importers reflect the broad-based rise in external sourcing

All major EU importing economies recorded substantial increases. Germany’s imports grew from **€5.4 bn** to **€7.7 bn** (+42 %), France’s from **€2.2 bn** to **€3.5 bn** (+61 %) and Poland’s more than doubled, from **€1.0 bn** to **€2.4 bn** (+127 %). The top EU importers show that the import boom was not confined to a single country but was spread across the Union’s largest economies.

Geopolitical realignment and supplier concentration

Russia’s near-total disappearance reshaped trade flows

The most dramatic shift concerns Russia. Imports from Russia collapsed from **€220 million** in 2015 to barely **€4.4 million** in 2025 (–98 %). Exports to Russia fell from **€1.35 bn** to **€133 million** (–90 %). The volatility analysis confirms that Russian trade flows exhibited the highest coefficient of variation (0.98 for imports, 0.81 for exports) of any major partner, reflecting the abrupt severance of commercial ties.

China and Türkiye cemented their position as dominant import sources

China’s share of EU imports rose from **€6.6 bn** to **€14.0 bn** (+112 %), making it by far the largest supplier. Türkiye’s deliveries surged from **€1.6 bn** to **€4.5 bn** (+175 %). Together, these two countries accounted for a growing portion of total imports, pushing the import concentration (HHI) from **1 429** in 2015 to **1 956** in 2025 (+37 %). The EU has therefore become more dependent on a narrower set of suppliers.

Import partner	2015 (€ bn)	2025 (€ bn)	Change (%)
China	6.6	14.0	+112
Türkiye	1.6	4.5	+175
United Kingdom	2.3	2.8	+26
India	1.0	1.8	+82
Taiwan	1.4	1.5	+11
Russia	0.2	<0.01	–98
Switzerland	1.7	1.6	–3

Exports remain anchored by advanced economy partners

On the export side, the United States remained the largest destination, growing from **€5.4 bn** to **€8.1 bn** (+49 %). The United Kingdom held steady at **€6.0 bn**, while Switzerland and Norway each surpassed **€3 bn**. Despite the loss of the Russian market, these four markets provided a stable base. The concentration of exports rose only modestly, with the HHI moving from **618** to **793**, indicating a still well-diversified customer base.

A tale of two price trends: soaring export unit values meet subdued import prices

Export prices jumped by 51 %, driven by high-value segments

The average unit value of EU exports climbed from **€3 034/tonne** in 2015 to **€4 578/tonne** in 2025 (+50.9 %). This was propelled by products such as **screws, bolts, nuts and similar fasteners (CN 7318)**, whose export price rose from **€6 985/tonne** to **€10 586/tonne**, and **structures (CN 7308)**, which went from **€2 802/tonne** to **€3 769/tonne**. The product segment breakdown shows a clear shift towards higher-value, more technologically intensive iron and steel articles.

Import prices rose only 10 %, keeping many input costs in check

While EU exporters realised strong price gains, the average import price moved from **€2 469/tonne** to **€2 728/tonne** (+10.5 %). This modest increase meant that the volume-driven import surge did not translate into proportional cost pressures. Even for fast-growing segments like **welded tubes (CN 7306)** the import price only edged up from **€901/tonne** to **€1 005/tonne**, well below the export price of similar goods.

2022 price shocks temporarily disrupted several trade channels

The year 2022 saw synchronised price spikes, notably a **33.7 %** jump in the unit value of imports from the **United Kingdom** and a **39.7 %** rise for **Viet Nam** imports, both flagged by the shock detection algorithm as highly abnormal. Indian import prices also jumped **33.5 %** that year. On the export side, shipments to **Algeria** experienced a **57.7 %** price spike already in 2020, while **United Arab Emirates** export prices surged **78.1 %** in 2022. These shocks were short-lived but illustrate how energy costs, supply bottlenecks and global steel market tensions can abruptly alter landed values.

Export product (CN)	Unit value 2015 (€/t)	Unit value 2025 (€/t)	Change (%)
7318 (fasteners)	6 985	10 586	+52
7308 (structures)	2 802	3 769	+34
7326 (articles, n.e.s.)	4 291	5 831	+36
7304 (seamless tubes)	2 488	3 296	+32
7306 (welded tubes)	1 711	2 812	+64

Conclusion

Over the 2015-2025 period, EU trade in iron and steel articles underwent a profound transformation. What was once a large and stable surplus has been steadily eroded by a wave of imports, particularly from China and Türkiye, while exports grew only through sharp price increases rather than volume expansion. Geopolitical sanctions removed Russia almost entirely from the trade map, raising concentration risks on the import side. The EU's ability to command ever-higher prices for fasteners, structures and other sophisticated products has helped preserve a positive, albeit shrinking, trade balance. Looking ahead, the resilience of this sector will depend on maintaining its technological edge in high-value articles and on the capacity to diversify supply chains further, should external shocks once again disrupt international markets.

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