FOREIGN TRADE POLICY

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Abstract

Foreign trade policy impacts the economy of a country in such a measure in which the country is incorporated into the international division of labour. The level of this incorporation is given namely by the shape of economy, that is by the amount of consumers in the internal market. Therefore the smaller is the market; the higher is the openness of the economy and vice versa. At the same size of the internal market, the more developed countries usually have a higher share of foreign trade in GDP. A certain influence is exerted also by the natural and geographical conditions of the individual countries.

Key words: autonomous tools, tariff, non-tariff tools, agreemental tools

INTRODUCTION

Foreign trade policy represents a set of rules, principles and means according to which the governments of individual countries regulate their economic relationships to other countries.

The definition further distinguishes and defines two main directions: free trade (liberalism), as a gradual removing of the trade obstacles both of tariff and non-tariff character, and protectionism, as such form of trade policy which ensures a special protection of home production towards foreign competition.

The basic concept of foreign trade policy oscillates between the free trade principle and protectionism. The division into these two poles of the foreign trade policy concept lasts in the economic theory already since the end of 18th century and in practice since the beginning of the 19th century.

The profits issuing from the liberal concept can be divided into five spheres. First of them are consumers profits issuing directly from the lower consumer price. The further two belong to the production sphere. It regards growth of specialisation and therefore utilisation of comparative advantages of the given country and further also extending of the markets. After the implementation of liberalism, the amount of the traded commodities increases and the unit production costs decrease with the transition to the one product production, the so-called standardisation of products.

Further two spheres are influenced not only by the growing or declining liberalism, but also by the complex state policy. It regards the growth of competition in the home market and the question of price stability in the home economy. The inflation problem is one of the basic ones in the monetary policy and growing liberalisation should help its solution. Lower production prices influence wholesale prices and in consequence also consumers prices.

On the other hand, it is possible to define in general four areas, which incorporate the advantages connected with introducing protectionism. So-called transfer effect characterises the impact of import at the home economy and is explained based on the problem of the consequent employment, which is by some economists mistakenly regarded as permanent. The fact remains, however, that growing production in the exporting branches secures increased number of jobs, often even with higher Wales. Negatively impacted is thus only a certain group of people (usually people unable to adept to the changing qualification demands), the society as a whole remains, however, and the unemployment growth is not necessary.

Second problem is the impact of the economy openness to the macro-economic stability, since there exist fears that the profits issuing from liberalism might be overcome by the growing vulnerability of the economy. At fixed exchange rates, entering the markets of other countries, which are as a whole currency-stable, might bring disadvantages. Floating exchange rates mitigate the impact of the foreign macro-economic influences.

The third problem is the excessive dependence on imports regarding the key products. The higher ids the share of imports in home consumption, the more is the country open to the danger of producer's embargo. With that, also the third discussed question of the protection of national habits is connected.

A generally accepted argument for protectionism is the need to protect the "infant industry". In the frame of the relationships between the developed and developing countries, there was accepted the need to protect the staring industry in the less developed countries.

The autonomous tools are historically older. But their importance decreases with the development of international trade in favour of the agreemental tools, be them prevalently bilateral (trade agreements) or multilateral ones (international economic organisations and institutions). Nevertheless, neither can the application of autonomous tools be regarded as absolutely independent, since any use of e.g. a quantitative restriction or a higher customs tariff evokes usually a similar negative measure applied by the impacted partner country (a retorse customs tariff or other deterioration of conditions) and can lead even to trade wars and the total closing of the mutual economic relationships. The negative impacts of the insensitive use of autonomous tools can be to a certain extent removed with the help of the agreed agreement tools, the most important of which are the bilateral trade agreements. Their utilisation in the post-war development of international trade is still growing and it aimed at the universality in the form of international economic organisations, institutions and conferences. Still more important questions of international trade as well as of other forms of the international economic co-operation call for multilateral discussing and searching for an acceptable compromise among the different groups of countries viewpoints in the interest of setting the "rules of the game" with regard to the reality and the present level and character of the international division of labour.

Autonomous tools of foreign trade

By the autonomous, one-sided tools, the country tries either:

- to limit imports of the more competitive foreign commodities and thus to protect home production – to this aim, the tools limiting import serve,
- or to support by different ways export of home products into the international markets – to this, there serve the tools supporting export.

The autonomous regulation tools of import can be dividend into so-called tariff and non-tariff measures.

Tariff tools

The tariff tools include customs duties, which are the payments for commodities crossing the border (it need not be identical with the geographical border). They represent the oldest tolls of trade policy, but not the most efficient one, and their importance recedes in favour of new, less visible and less controllable forms of preventing import. Their origin is fiscal; they developed from the trade and transport duties paid for the use of roads, bridges, ports and for the protection of tradesmen. Customs in the present form developed in the Great Britain, in European countries the process of customs unification went on from the end of the 18th to the half of the 19th century.
Customs can be dividend according to different viewpoints, above all according to the aim of customs taxation, the object of taxation and the method of computing the customs rate.

With regard to the aim, customs can be divided into:

a) **financial (fiscal)**, which are imposed on the imported commodities the home production of which is subject to consumer tax (e.g. a high consumer tax on home produced beer demands high financial custom duties on imported drinks). Their main aim is to acquire financial income for the state. At present, customs of this type are in total minority.
b) **protectionist**, the aim of which is the protection of home market from the imports of cheaper foreign goods by the worsening of their competitiveness towards the home products. If the rates are so high that they exclude foreign competition totally, they are called prohibitive and their impact is equal to the prohibition of import.

Home production is protected by the customs duty. Simultaneously, the high price of the competitive commodity enables home producers also to increase the prices of their own products, since the consumer cannot buy in the market any other cheaper product.
In such a case, even the enterprises that would have been otherwise excluded from the competition by their high production costs, i.e. the enterprises which would have not survived economic competition in the existence of free trade can enter the production process of the given commodity.
However, customs duties do not represent a completely reliable means to protect home products from the foreign competition. The foreign producer can then face the imposed customs duty – and that by decreasing the price of hi/her products so that even after adding the customs duty the price is almost comparable with the original one before the duty was imposed. Then the intended aim of protecting home production might not be at all reached.
Besides that, customs might show one negative side effect – it might happen that the customs duty is imposed on a product, raw material or intermediate product used by home producers to produce final goods. In such a case, customs duty increases their input prices and consequently decreases their competitiveness towards foreign enterprises.

Protection custom duties might be of a specific character, for example they might be:

a) **Preferential** with advantaged rates granted only to some of the countries, namely in the trade with the former metropolises and their colonies. A new type of this kind of customs are preference granted to developing countries from the side of developed market economies (DME) in the frame of the so-called General System of preference accepted at the beginning of the 70s.
b) **Differential**, which apply higher rates on commodities transported on foreign ships. Thus, home shopping companies are advantaged.

Differential customs developed from the hard measures of the mercantilist policy (Cromwell Navigation Act), and were still not fully removed from trade policy, notwithstanding the Geneva Conference from 1922 recommendations, that "under no conditions should handling of the foreign states goods be dependent on the flag of the transporting ship".

c) **Levelling**, which represent top-ups to the ordinary custom duties with the aim of levelling the advantages granted to certain commodities of export countries (usually export premiums or subsidies) or specific tools of home market protection. It is set or takes into consideration the price of certain commodities in the home market and import prices are thus increased to the home prices level.
d) **Anti-dumping**. The notion of commodity dumping has stabilised after a long discussion and discrepancies in the understanding of the general Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as an export at a price lower than the common selling price in the home market of the exporting country, or at the price not covering production costs (i.e. unfair competition, trade at a loss). It is in fact an unfair price competition. In such a case, the home producers in the importing country of course react and place a complaint to their administration offices to this dumping export. The administration offices start so-called anti-dumping procedure, which might be very long, evokes a felling of uncertainty at the importer side (he/she does not know whether the custom duty will be necessary to pay or not) and warns him/her off trading with the partner accused of dumping. Dumping procedure usually ends by a "voluntary" increase of price from the exporter side or, less often, by imposing the anti-dumping customs duty. The rate of this is that high as to make the commodity practically unsalable and further export in thus made impossible. Exporters can usually avoid being accused of dumping by a careful and qualified price policy.
e) **Compensation duties**, which are of special high rates compared to the ordinary customs tariff, with the aim to mitigate the disadvantages of home production, caused usually by increasing the price of raw materials necessary for production.
f) **Reciprocal (retorse) duties** are of especially high rate compared to the ordinary customs duty. These customs are imposed often on a certain state commodity as a return for the similar trade policy measures aimed against its interests. Mutual increase of retorse custom duties can led in the end even to the customs war.

From the viewpoint of the direction of commodity flows, custom duties can be divided into:

a) **Import custom duties** – the most important measures of trade policy, namely the protection custom duties.

Export custom duties – financial or protectionist. Financial custom duties use to be imposed namely at the main items of export as a source of the state budget incomes. This protection is supposed to make difficult the export of raw materials and intermediate products, so that the home industrial production is supported or the competitiveness of foreign products in the world market deteriorated. Export customs duties are at present utilised only exceptionally.

b) **Transit customs duties**. Their importance was mainly of fiscal character. With the development of transport, namely railway transport, they were abolished in most developed countries, however (the Barcelona Convention on the free transit from 1921). Transit payments (for the gas-pipes transit etc) should not be mixed with transit customs duties.

From the viewpoint of the methodology of customs duty computation, they can be divided into:

a) **Ad valorem**, set as a certain percentage of the commodity price (from the invoice value). Te advantage is that they burden in the same level also the cheap commodities, but their problem is setting the base for the computation. Some countries use their own lists of commodity prices set officially for the customs offices use, without regard to the really declared price.
b) **Specific**, using fixed sum per physical unit (ton, barrel, hectolitre etc). These are simple but their disadvantage is that they burden, with regard to their volume and weight, more the gross and cheaper commodities, and wit the increase of the abroad price, they become less efficient: the higher is the abroad price, the lower is the customs burden.
c) **Combined, fluctuating**. They represent combination of the ad valorem and specific customs duties. Their aim is to remove the impact of the fluctuating foreign prices on the home prices. Customs burden is changing in the reverse rate to price changes.

Customs scale of rates is a systematic structuring of custom duties for all kinds of commodities, liable as well as non-liable to customs taxation in import to the customs area of a given country.

It is usually published in the form of a legal act. Customs duty rates use to be structured according to production branches and they either include one (simple tariff), two or more (the system of maximum and minimum tariff, where the lower rate is the border which can be reached at advantaging certain countries) customs duty rates per every customs item. The higher tariff is then valid for imports from other countries: the system of general and conventional tariff, where the conventional tariff is valid for countries for which there

exists a special mutual agreement, and the general tariff is valid for the rest of the countries.
Customs procedure is organised differently in different countries, but basically it is of two kinds, and that the procedure to free turnover (commodities permanently left in the area of the country) and the customs procedure, when a temporary customs-free import of the goods which will be consequently exported again is admitted (fairs, improvement active or passive).

Non-tariff tools

The most usual form of non-tariff **barriers of import** are quantitative restrictions, which set thee highest possible level of import of the given commodity. In difference to customs duties, which reach limiting of import by the increased price of the imported commodity, restrictions work on the opposite direction – first they limit trade and thus the increase of price in the home market is reached. For home producers, volume restrictions are much surer tool of protection than customs. When the import reaches a certain level, then it is stopped in administrative way without regard to the fact whether foreign exporters decreased their prices or not.
The maximum possible level of the commodity import is in the form of **contingent**. The administration offices of the importing country then distribute the contingent among home importers through the so-called **licensing procedure**. The importer applies at the relevant office for granting the allowance to import the commodity in question – for the so-called **import licence**. The licences are distributed according either to the time sequence of the supplied applications, or according to the principle of ancienity, that is prevalently to the forms which have already traded the commodity in question. The licensing procedure brings about a series of unpleasant externalities, which might dissuade the importer from importing into the country where a contingent is set on his/her commodity, and to persuade him/her to seek his/her supplier at home or in a country, which is not included into the restriction. It regards namely administrative delays, late announcement of the contingent level, its possible division among the quarters of the year etc., but also black market with licences, if the quota is too low, or a possible acquirement of the licence by a competitive firm, which then, of course, does not utilise it at all.
A diplomatically covered form of quantitative restrictions is so-called agreements on **voluntary limitation of export**, called also auto-limiting agreements. The restriction there acquires the seeming shape of a bilateral agreement. The base of these agreements is the obligation of the exporting country to limit "voluntarily" the given commodity export to the agreed level, eventually to observe the agreed price in exchange for the obligation of the importing country not to apply one-sided quantitative restrictions.
These agreements are on a wide level used namely by the European Union and the U.S. to the protection of their insufficiently competitive branches – e.g. metallurgy, textile industry, but also chemistry, car industry and agriculture. Afflicted by them are namely developing countries, Eastern European countries and Japan. In the area of textile industry, there was even signed a special agreement by GATT, called the agreement on Trade with Textile Products, more well known under the name Multifibre, which gives the agreement parties the possibility to sign between them auto-limitation agreements regarding textile trade.
The measure called minimum **price** is an anti-dumping measure. There is set a minimum price and it is not possible to import the commodity into countries in question for a lower price. Minimum price can also be set according to the selected importer import price.
Another tool to limiting import might be also **foreign currency restrictions**, i.e. the interventions of the state into the economy of home and foreign currency means of payment. These are used by countries with insufficient resources of convertible currency or a prominently passive balance of payments. Foreign currency restrictions take on mainly the form of the obligatory give-over of foreign currency in export or an obligatory application for foreign currency in import; eventually they can be manifested as a limitation or even prohibition to export capital.
Another obstacle which can limit import without being of discrimination character towards the foreign subjects are different, more strict **technological, health and hygienic norms**. If the imported goods cannot meet them, it is automatically excluded from the relevant market.
Besides the support of home production by limiting the access of foreign competition on the home market, most countries try to stimulate **export expansion** of home products by different means.
In all the DMEs, there exist institutions analysing foreign markets and supplying the firms either paid or even free information on foreign markets the possibilities of export and market risks.
The government can support the home companies export by supplying **governmental export credit**s. They are in fact state credits supplied by one country to another under the condition that the lent sum will be used for purchases in the country, which supplied the credit. A disadvantage for the debtor country lays in the fact that it has a limited possibility to choose the supplier of the commodities it is interested in, since it can buy only in the country, which has supplied the credit. On the other hand, the advantage is that the credit conditions are favourable, namely a longer repayment period and lower interest rates of the governmental credits. In the creditor country, it is namely the home producers, which take advantage from these credits, since they get demand for their production under favourable conditions. A risk for the creditor country

might lay in the possible problems with the supplied credit repayment.

During the last 10–15 years, the ability to supply favourable credit condition to the customer becomes one of the very important tools of the competition fight, namely in the export of machinery and investment complexes. If the individual exporting countries want to get deals, they are forced to supply, under the pressure of competition, to supply a longer-term credits and to undergo higher credit risks. The state tries to help them through **state guaranties for credits**. The exporter can insure the granted credit against political and credit risks to the account of state budget. The insurance is granted by state or semi-state organisations which in case the importer does not pay cover to the exporter even up to 90% of the supplied credit value.

The state can also support export on a general level by the **home currency devalvation** (of a similar impact is also devaluation, i.e. decreasing the home currency exchange rate, in the system of floating exchange rates). Devalvation makes the imported goods cheaper – its price expressed in the devalved currency is lower for the foreign importer, since he/she gives less home currency units per one unit of the devalved currency than before the devalvation. Therefore, the goods are cheaper. The state increases by this measure artificially the home production competitiveness and often it enables the existence of even such kinds of production, which could not have survived under the ordinary conditions. However, devalvation and devaluation of currency are a double-edged tool – on one hand, it. Makes export cheaper, but on the other hand, it makes more expensive the imports for which home importers have to pay more devalved (or devaluated) home currency units. Consequently, there decreases the competitiveness of commodities produced from imported raw materials or components.

Direct financial support of the state is represented by export subsidies. The state either supplies to the exporter a premium in form of a certain percentage from the export volume or returns (restitutes to him/her the formerly paid home duties (taxes).

In case of restituting the home tax, it regards so-called tax restitution, in the case of returned customs duty paid for import of the given material or component necessary for production of the exported commodity, it regards so-called customs restitution.

An indirect subsidy might also be supplied in the form of accelerated depreciation, discounts from the price of electricity, gas, transport etc.

In some countries, exporters are granted credits with a lower interest rate.

An important support of exporters is represented also by the contributions for technological research or supplying the scientific and technological research results of the state-financed research.

Agreemental tools of foreign trade

By the agreemental tools of foreign trade policy, there is regulated trade among two or more countries in the way agreed by them. The agreement regards namely the rules of utilising autonomous trade policy tools in the mutual trade among the negotiating countries. The advantages of such agreement for adaptation of the individual countries depend of course on the strengths of their negotiation position and on what is then the country able to push into the agreement contents. However, there usually is also a way to agreement even for weaker countries, when it is possible to influence the political frame of the mutual trade in a more advantageous position than the simple one-sided forming of the trade conditions by the stronger country.

If the participants of negotiations on the mutual trade conditions are two countries, we include the results of the negotiations among the bilateral agreement tools of trade to this group, there belong trade treaties and agreements and payment agreements.

Trade treaties, which originally used to be more general and more long-term ones, and **trade agreements**, originally more concrete and short-term, become more similar during the last years and the distinctions between them tend to disappear. Often their name as well as the content is extended from the sphere of the pure trade to the more general sphere of economic co-operation among the countries in question. The acts and agreements are framework negotiations, which include namely the principles and rules of the agreement parties mutual behaviour in the economic relationships sphere.

Trade treaties belong among the oldest trade policy tools: they are the framework negotiations, which include namely the principles and rules of the agreement parties mutual behaviour in the economic relationships sphere. They are signed on the highest level (heads of states), are long-term and highly formalised (introduction part, meritory, protocolar parts, supplements). From the fact viewpoint, the most well known is the meritory part, which includes the agreement on the conditions of import and export of commodities, customs matters, tax and other duties agreements, which are usually formulated as a special clauses. The most well known are: **reciprocal clause, parity clause and the most-favoured-nation clause**.

Reciprocal clause binds the partners to grant each other the same or equal advantages. At the economic inequality of the partner countries this clause is, however, problematic. Therefore, in the 60s it was pushed through – namely owing to the well-known Argentina economist Raul Prebisch – a new understanding, so-called effective reciprocity, where the measure of advantages should be the real result of the granted advantage (e.g. growth of export).

Parity clause (national regime, equal handling) is the agreement of equal treatment with the citizens and commodities of the other state as the agreement parties grant to their own.
Most-favoured-nation clause is the most important clause used in agreement acts. This clause binds the agreement countries to grant each other all the advantages which they have granted and will grant in future to any third country. The sense of the clause is to prevent discrimination (different) treatment, to reach equality in treatment of commodities and citizens of the state, which has concluded the most-favoured-nation clause, by the state, which has reached by other, previous or later agreement any other (higher) concrete advantages in the area of external relationships. There are known two forms of the most-favoured-nation clause – conditional (called also the American, from which, however, the U.S. have withdrawn already in 1922) and non-conditional, automatically granted one, which is the basic rule of the GATT.
Into the range of the most-favoured-nation clause, there do not belong non-tariff tools, advantages granted in the frame of integration projects, escape clause (it enables the agreement parties to withdraw one-sidedly from the agreed liabilities for the reason of economic difficulties), and neighbour clause. An exception from the most-favoured-nation clause is also the general System of Customs Preferences granted by the GATTT to developing countries.
Trade agreements (commodity) are of single bilateral type, they issue usually from the trade acts, represent their concretisation and adapt for the period of their validity (usually one year) trade relations, set the scope and commodity structure of the commodity exchange between the agreement parties. In the supplement, they contain the commodity lists, which might be either contingent ones, containing the fixed contingents (amounts) of the individual kinds of the traded commodities, or non-contingent ones (only of an indicative character).
They are expressed either in global value or in the specification of the individual kinds of commodities, and that individually for export and import of the agreement countries. Besides the individual contingents, the commodity lists can also include the global contingents (e.g. sum of the chemical commodities etc.).
Contingent trade agreements originated as a protection against quantitative restrictions and their aim was to enable access to the included countries markets and to influence the mutually levelled trade or payment balances. Contingent trade agreement does not mean an obligation to realise trade in the mentioned scope, they represent an obligation that the state will not prevent export or import up to the agreed contingent (e.g. it will issue import licence).
Payment agreements are signed in the cases when the question of payments is nit solved in the trade act or when such an act does not exist.
It is an agreement between states or also between emitting banks on the way of the mutual settling of claims and liabilities issuing from the economic relationships. It determines the currency of accounting, number of accounts, payment titles, interest rate, credit limit etc. There exist two types of payment agreements, in free currency and clearing, when the individual payments do not cross the borders of the states and the exporters in both countries send payments to the clearing bank in their own countries and importers got paid their claims from the same bank in their own currency. The balance is then settled among the entitled banks in the agreed period (usually one year) in the agreed way (foreign currency, additional amounts of commodities etc.).
There is set the so-called marginal credit to prevent a too high unbalance of the mutual trade that is the amount after the overreaching of which the debtor has to settle the overdraft, and that usually in the free currency. The clearing payment agreement has the advantage that it enables to develop trade even in the case of the lack of freely exchanged currencies, but it often creates the relationships of permanent creditors and debtors and imposes on the debtors an undesirable structure on imports.
Barter trades are bound trade transactions when realisation of one trade operation is bound by the realisation of another, exported of the given commodity in the fixed scope is bound by import of another given commodity of the same value scope. Exporters transfer their claims in the other country to importers in their own country without the payments crossing the borders or even without being submitted to clearing. There are two types of barter trades: compensation – in case there does not exist either trade or payment agreement, or reciprocal – when settling of payments is done through clearing. These are usually agreed on in case of overdrawn contingents in trade agreement.
Signing of trade acts and agreements might be done also by a higher number of countries. In such case we speak of multilateral agreement tools of the trade policy. There belong some international organisations or institutions, which represent in fact an agreement signed between the interested countries – for example the GATT or some integration associations.
An important influence on the international trade proceeding have **integration associations**. Already the simplest form of integration – **free trade zone** – removes customs in the mutual trade among the countries. Already in this stage, then, mutual trade among the member states is advantaged to the detriment of the trade with third countries.
A higher form of integration is **customs union**, when member countries create, besides free movement of commodities inside the association, also a common customs tariff to outside countries. At the same time, part of the decision-making on the trade policy matters is delegated to the supra-national level.

Third stage of economic integration is represented by the **common market**, in which there exist, besides free flows of commodities, also free flows of other production factors, i.e. services, capital and labour.
Fourth and hitherto the highest form of integration is the **economic and monetary union**. In the frame of the integration whole, there exists one currency and the unified economic policy.
Another type of international trade agreements is represented by the **international raw material agreements**. These are agreements signed either only among the producers of a certain agricultural commodity or mineral raw material (coffee, cocoa, wheat, tin, India-rubber etc.), or agreements signed between the producers and consumers of the commodity. Their aim is the long-term price stabilisation. In the frame of the agreement, there is set the aimed range of prices (minimum and maximum prices) inside which the real market price will move. The international raw material agreement then in case of bigger price fluctuations influences artificially demand or supply of the given commodity (with the help of export and import quotas or intervention purchases or sales from the so-called buffer stocks) so that the price is kept in the settled range. However, in reality the raw material agreements are not very successful since in case of big price drops we are envisaging since the beginning of 80s the individual countries are not able to come to agreement on the common price policy and many of them prefer their own interests to the interests of the whole association.

Conclusion

The theory of international trade proves that liberalism of a given country maximizes its welfare. However, the group of the defendants of liberalism often finds support among the politicians; Chat influences the final decision-making, which reflects the distribution of political forces in the country.
For realisation of the trade policy aims, the state utilises the set of the trade policy measures and tools. By the law, it defines the institutions entitled to decide on the trade policy measures in harmony with the set aims. These are usually central administrative institutions of the country, namely the individual ministries (of trade, economy, foreign trade, finances, foreign affairs). From the legal viewpoint, the foreign economic policy tools are dividend into **autonomous** – on the introduction of which the state decides out of its sovereign power, and **agreemental** – which become valid as a result of the international negotiations, agreements between two (bilateral) or several (multilateral) states.
From the above-mentioned division of tools into two groups, it is obvious that the autonomous tools can be regarded as primary (basic) and the agreemental as the secondary ones.

Resources

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