

## Tunisia trade deficit widens to all-time high

The USD 6.3 billion deficit came as a result of USD 13.9 billion in exports and USD 20.2 billion in imports last year.

**From the Newsroom\***

Tunis – Tunisia posted a record-high TND 15.6 billion (USD 6.3 billion) trade deficit in 2017, the result of TND 34.4 billion (USD 13.9 billion) in exports and over 50 billion (USD 20.2 billion) in imports. The numbers were made public this Thursday (11) by Tunisia’s National Institute of Statistics, *Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP)* reported.

Exports were up 18.1% in 2017 from 2016, while imports climbed 19.8%. Energy sector imports soared by 40% on the back of oil and oil products.

Imports also went up for agricultural products (20.8%), especially wheat, raw materials and intermediate goods (23.5%), capital goods (9.7%), and ores, phosphates and their products (23.8%).

Consumer goods imports climbed 18%, driven by automobiles, essential oils and perfumes, plastic items and other products.

Exports increased across the board, including energy (oil products), agribusiness – especially olive oil and dates – mechanical and electrical industry items, textiles, clothing and leather, and other process industries. Foreign sales dropped 1.6% for ores, phosphates and their products, especially phosphoric acid.

Tunisia ran deficits in trade with China, Italy, Turkey, Russia and Algeria, and surpluses with France, Libya and the United Kingdom. France is the North African country’s biggest trade partner.

Tunisia saw a USD 236 million deficit in trade with Brazil. Sales from Brazil to Tunisia came out to USD 286.6 million, up 45% from 2016, driven by sugar, soy, maize oil, soya oil and coffee.



Sales from Tunisia to Brazil reached USD 50.5 million, up 6% and driven by naphtha, calcium phosphate, aluminum fluoride, superphosphate and phosphate. The information is from the Brazilian Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services.

## **Protests**

*TAP* reported that Tunisia's minister of Trade Omar El Béhi imputed the recent price hikes to a drive to reduce the country's trade and fiscal deficits. He also said other measures were taken to curb imports, such as the return of customs fees on imports from Turkey, effective as of January 1st.

The rising cost of living has been sparking protests in Tunisia since last Sunday. Taxes and fuel prices were hiked. This month it has been seven years since the ousting of dictator Zine El Abdine Ben Ali, who ruled the country for over two decades. The Tunisian uprising that ended his regime triggered the so-called Arab Spring.

**\*Translated by Gabriel Pomerancblum**

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