



## FOREIGN TRADE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AND THE SHARE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS FOR EXPORT

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### Abstract

Despite its numerous resources, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the poorest countries in the world. The DRC also has underutilised resources of arable land and good conditions for agricultural production. This study analysed changes in the volume of foreign trade in the DRC and assessed the share of its agricultural exports in the years 2015-2019. The analysis covered the volume of total imports and exports, as well as imports and exports by sector. The foreign trade balance and the dynamics of change in the years under analysis were calculated. Structural indicators as well as fixed and variable-based dynamic indices were used. As a result of the conducted research, fluctuations in the export of all goods were found along with a decrease in the export of numerous significant agriculturally produced goods: rubber, palm oil and medicinal plants.

**HANDEL ZAGRANICZNY DEMOKRATYCZNEJ REPUBLIKI KONGA  
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Słowa kluczowe: handel zagraniczny, eksport produkty rolne, Demokratyczna Republika Konga.

**Abstrakt**

Demokratyczna Republika Konga, mimo licznych zasobów, jest jednym z najbiedniejszych krajów na świecie. DRK ma również niewykorzystane zasoby ziemi uprawnej i dobre warunki do produkcji rolnej. Celem badań była identyfikacja zmian w wielkości handlu zagranicznego w DRK oraz określenie udziału w eksporcie produktów rolniczych w latach 2015-2019. Przeanalizowano wielkość eksportu oraz importu ogółem oraz według sektorów. Obliczono saldo obrotu zagranicznego oraz dynamikę zmian w badanych latach. Posłużono się wskaźnikami struktury oraz indeksami dynamiki o podstawie stałej i zmiennej. W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań stwierdzono wahania w eksporcie wszystkich towarów i spadek eksportu wielu znaczących towarów produkcji rolnej: kauczuku, oleju palmowego, roślin leczniczych.

**Introduction**

International trade is undoubtedly an important factor in the economic development of countries. Its importance has been repeatedly discussed and is described by numerous economic theories starting with mercantilists (A. de Montchrestien, J.B. Colbert, Th. Mun, W. Petty). Klimiuk (2016, p. 7-25) writes about it in depth. According to mercantilists, the most important thing was for a given country to achieve a surplus of exports over imports, so that it could receive gold from abroad, because in the accumulation of bullion they saw the wealth of nations. This theory was criticized by the classical D representatives: Hum, A. Smith and D. Ricardo. They emphasized not the accumulation of gold resources but the volume of production. Ricardo (1957, p. 141-167) denied the possibility that there could be a serious crisis of overproduction and long-term unemployment in the economy. At that time such problems did not yet occur on a large scale. Mill even denied any need to develop export expansion in order to create a market for production,

which allegedly could not find a market in the country (Mill, 1865). The classics also did not consider carefully the relationship between the pace of changes in foreign trade and the long-term economic development of the country. Only after the economic crisis of 1929-1933 (Machlup, 1943; Meade, 1951; Johnson, 1958) were the problems of international trade linked to income. After the Second World War, the relationship between foreign trade and the long-term economic development of the country began to be addressed (Klimiuk, 2016, p. 7-25). The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a parliamentary republic with a semi-presidential system<sup>1</sup>. Situated in Central Africa, this country was given a new name in 1997 (as a result of the first Congo war). In the colonial period, the DRC was referred to as Congo Free State (until 1908) and then Belgian Congo (until 1960). After regaining independence in 1971-1997, the DRC was referred to as Zaire. The monetary unit is the Congolese franc. At the beginning of 2019, its population was estimated at around 92 million and the area of the country was 2,345,409 km<sup>2</sup>, making the DRC the largest country in the region. This territory is only slightly smaller than Algeria, ranking second on the continent and fourth after Nigeria, Ethiopia and Egypt in terms of population. Its capital city is Kinshasa. The country has the world's largest reserves of cobalt, germanium, tantalum, diamonds, uranium, tungsten, copper, zinc, tin, beryllium, lithium, and niobium; as well as significant deposits of oil, coal, iron ore, manganese, gold, silver and bauxite. It is a leader in the supply of natural malachite. The country has large hydropower capacities<sup>2</sup>, forest resources<sup>3</sup> and a well-developed network of waterways<sup>4</sup> (Ushakova, 1974, p. 46-47).

However, despite its numerous resources it is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to purchasing power parity, in 2017 it amounted to 68.45 billion dollars. This ranked Congo 185<sup>th</sup> in the world (with about 800 dollars per capita) (Sidorova, 2014, p. 296-297), even though after the end of the civil wars, the economic situation of the country started to improve. In 2002, the DRC authorities renewed their relations with international financial organisations and support providers. The restructuring of the mining sector, the main source of export earnings, led to GDP growth in 2006-2008. Nevertheless, since the end of 2008, the fall in demand and prices for key export goods of the DRC has led to a new stagnation in the economy of this country. The question arises as to how, after years of wars and economic reorganization and almost 15 years after the adoption of the new constitution, the foreign trade of the DRC is developing. Given the production capacity of farming land, what is the place of agricultural products in exports?

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<sup>1</sup> The form of government in-between the parliamentary and presidential systems, functioning today e.g. in France.

<sup>2</sup> The complex of two hydroelectric power plants, Inga, which supplies the southern, industrial part of the country through the Inga-Shaba HVDC power transmission system.

<sup>3</sup> 60% area of the country.

<sup>4</sup> Eighth in the world in terms of length, network of waterways, amounting to 15,000 km.

This study aimed to identify changes in the foreign trade volume in the DRC and to assess the share of agricultural export.

## **Research methodology**

The study concerned the area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 2015 and 2019. The research covered the area of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the years 2015-2019. The decision on the choice of the temporal scope was dictated by a rather long period of time since the political and economic changes (the new constitution approved in a referendum on December 18-19, 2005 and announced on February 18, 2006) and at least five years of analysis. The analysis covered the volume of total export and import, as well as imports and exports by sectors. All calculations were based on trade value data (USD). The foreign trade balance and the dynamics of changes in the analysed years were calculated. Structural indicators as well as fixed and variable-based dynamic indices were used. Information collected from the FAO and Trade Maps; while international trade statistics provided the data sources.

## **The agricultural economy of the DRC**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which means that it is obliged to adjust its internal legislation to the standards of organisation and to grant trade concessions to foreign entities. It is also a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC<sup>5</sup>).

The economy of the DRC is mostly based on the mining industry (diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, zinc). Production primarily includes consumer goods (textiles, footwear, cigarettes, food products and beverages) and wood. Despite the existing waterways, there is no developed internal transport system, which makes it impossible to effectively supply food to cities. Almost half of the country's population (2/3 of the village inhabitants) have access only to improvised or natural drinking water tanks. Only 29% of inhabitants have access to toilets with a sewerage system or a septic tank. Despite the fact that the DRC is an electricity exporter, around 69 million people have no access to electricity. Electrification of urban areas in 2016 amounted to 47%, and of rural areas to only 0.4%. A comparison of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with other sub-Saharan African countries shows that this country, along with a significant part of the African continent, continues to be marginalised also in terms of attracting foreign direct investments. The absence of satisfactory economic impact from

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<sup>5</sup>SADC, Réalisation des critères de convergence macroéconomique SADC en R.D. Congo 2009.

foreign business investments is caused by various reasons, and is described in more detail in Ambukita (2014, p. 36-47).

Agriculture is another important sector of the economy, yet it is not sufficiently developed, although the agricultural sector in the country employs two-thirds of the population. Agricultural land used for cultivation of arable crops represents only 3.5% of the total land area. There are two main directions of agriculture in the country: subsistence agriculture, which employs the vast majority of the labour force, and commercial, export-oriented, production-based agriculture, on plantations. There are over 4 million farms in the DRC with an average area of 1.6 hectares. These lands are mainly situated in the savannah zone, and less frequently in the tropical forests. The main crops include cassava, sweet potatoes, bananas, rice, sorghum and maize. Average yields in the country are as follows: cassava – 14.95 million tonnes, sugar cane – 1.787 million tonnes, maize – 1.155 million tonnes, peanuts – 0.364 million tonnes, rice – 0.315 million tonnes, bananas – 0.313 million tonnes, sweet potatoes – 224.5 thousand tonnes, yams – 84 thousand tonnes, and pineapples – 193 thousand tonnes. However, domestic production of food crops is insufficient to meet the country's needs, which is why many basic food products must be imported (Musala, p. 615-618). Summing up, the structure of the economy is based on industry – 43.5%, agriculture – 20% and services – 37%. Globalisation can help to increase the role of agriculture as a driver of economic growth in countries with low levels of national income by ensuring that agricultural production is more dynamic than domestic consumption and can contribute to an improvement of their food security (Mellor, 2003, p. 99). The DRC adopted the concept<sup>6</sup> underlying the agricultural financial support mechanism with two main categories: support that has no or minimal impact on production and trade and support that limits production and trade. Consequently, all support measures are divided into so-called “amber”, “green” and “blue” categories (Abramova, p. 160). The national support measures for agriculture in the “amber category” include: compensation of expenditure on the purchase of energy carriers, mineral fertilizers, seeds, mixed feeds and plant protection products, as well as on the repair and purchase of machinery, including leasing. These actions are most often subject to restrictions imposed by the WTO on countries applying for membership. State agricultural support activities related to the “green category” include improvement of soil fertility, land management, improvement of the natural environment, construction of roads, housing, health facilities, schools in rural areas, agricultural development, etc. These measures do not significantly affect the volume and cost of the agricultural products produced. State support measures for agriculture related to the “blue category” are budget subsidies in the form of direct payments under programmes

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<sup>6</sup> The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) signed in Geneva in 1947 and the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organisation (WTO) signed in Marrakesh in 1994 (OJ L 336 of 23.12.1994).

designed to reduce agricultural production. Like the “green category” measures, they fall outside the scope of the WTO Member State’s obligation to limit domestic support to domestic producers.

The rules and mechanisms governing foreign trade in agricultural products and food are also regulated by other GATT/WTO instruments. Currently, there exists a set of principles based on which trade negotiations are conducted and their implementation is monitored.

### Foreign trade in the DRC in 2015-2019

The DRC foreign trade is mainly linked to the markets in highly developed countries, most of which are EU countries, China and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Ambukita, 2019, p. 36-46 after Hugon, 2009, p. 48). In the middle of the period under examination, exports from the DRC amounted to USD 8.3 billion in 2017. The main products exported were copper, cobalt, diamonds, gold, oil, wood and coffee. The major purchasers in 2017 were: China – 39.7%, Belgium – 21.7%, South Korea – 7.2%, and Saudi Arabia – 7.1%. Imports at that time amounted to USD 5.0 billion. Imported products primarily included food, machinery industrial products, means of transport and fuels. The largest suppliers were China with 19.4%, South Africa with 9.9%, Zambia with 10.6%, and Belgium with 9%. The external debt at the time amounted to USD 5.324 billion. Taking into account the changes in the volume of foreign trade in the years under review, there were generally minor changes. Imports remained at similar levels and exports increased by 11.7%. The foreign trade curve is similar to the export curve (Fig. 1), while the import curve has a moderate increase that does not reflect the foreign trade curve.

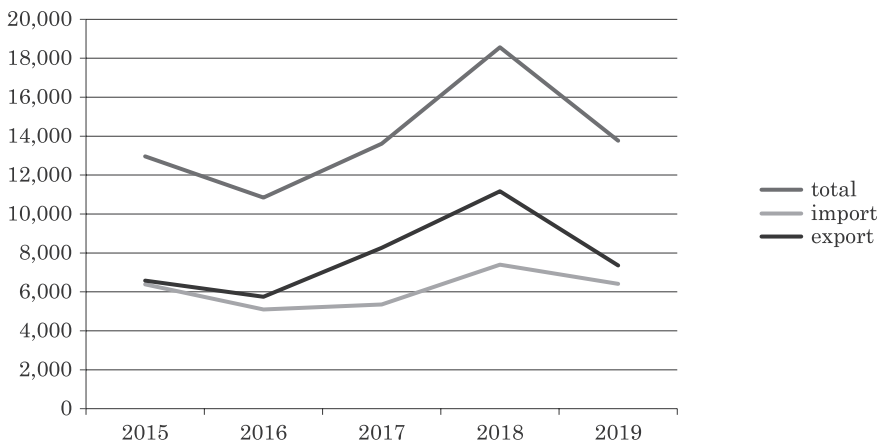


Fig.1. Foreign trade turnover [mln USD]

Source: based on the FAO data.

It follows from the above considerations that the rapid growth of export, observed trade surpluses and the increase in export volumes do not give reasons for satisfaction. For the stable growth of foreign trade turnover, it is necessary to develop and effectively use the country's export potential.

However, fluctuations can be observed when analysing the dynamics of change based on a variable-based index (Tab. 1). There was a clear increase in imports and exports in 2017 and 2018 as compared to the previous year and a very clear decrease in 2019 as compared to 2018.

Table 1

The dynamics of changes in the value of foreign trade [%] in relation to the previous year

| Years | Total | Import | Export |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 2015  | –     | –      | –      |
| 2016  | 83.6  | 79.8   | 87.3   |
| 2017  | 125.6 | 105.0  | 143.8  |
| 2018  | 136.3 | 138.3  | 135.1  |
| 2019  | 74.2  | 86.7   | 65.8   |

Source: based on the FAO data.

Taking into account the structure of foreign trade operations of the DRC (Tab. 2) in import by groups of goods, it should be concluded that industrial goods and equipment prevail in all the years under study.

Table 2

Import volumes by product group, USD '000

| Commodity groups                                                  | Years     |           |           |           |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                                                   | 2015      | 2016      | 2017      | 2018      | 2019      |
| Total                                                             | 2,380,531 | 1,869,616 | 2,066,323 | 2,922,260 | 2,886,820 |
| Consumer products                                                 | 922,260   | 821,590   | 945,046   | 1,059,497 | 1,014,058 |
| Animal production                                                 | 148,145   | 120,136   | 143,657   | 159,385   | 179,025   |
| Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages                             | 74,541    | 112,731   | 145,562   | 154,501   | 119,754   |
| Plant production                                                  | 127,930   | 95,767    | 107,286   | 136,835   | 118,580   |
| Pharmaceutical products                                           | 397,966   | 358,038   | 419,403   | 454,093   | 463,033   |
| Food preparations                                                 | 66,051    | 54,909    | 60,366    | 87,383    | 70,265    |
| Shoes, headgear, bags                                             | 107,627   | 80,009    | 68,772    | 67,300    | 63,401    |
| Industrial goods                                                  | 1,458,271 | 1,048,026 | 1,121,277 | 1,862,763 | 1,872,762 |
| Vehicles, trucks                                                  | 390,803   | 293,274   | 271,395   | 524,219   | 436,835   |
| Medical equipment, furniture                                      | 115,305   | 75,066    | 71,099    | 104,546   | 109,627   |
| Machinery, appliances, mechanisms, electrical equipment, fittings | 832,368   | 597,309   | 625,355   | 1,136,148 | 1,081,247 |
| Chemical production                                               | 119,795   | 82,377    | 153,428   | 97,850    | 245,053   |

Source: Trade Map – international trade statistics,  
[https://www.trademap.org/open\\_access/Country\\_SelProductCountry\\_TS.aspx](https://www.trademap.org/open_access/Country_SelProductCountry_TS.aspx)

This can be observed more clearly when analysing the percentage structure (Tab. 3). An important part of the imports consisted of machinery, equipment and electrical appliances. Thus, in 2015 the share was 35.0% in relation to imports, and in 2019 it increased to 37.5%. Vehicles and trucks also accounted for a relatively large proportion of imports – 17.9% (2018). In 2019, there was a slight decrease in imports of this product group to 15.1%.

Table 3

Import structure by product groups

| Commodity groups                                      | Years |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                                       | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  |
| Total                                                 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Consumer products                                     | 38.7  | 43.9  | 45.7  | 36.3  | 35.1  |
| Animal production                                     | 6.2   | 6.4   | 7.0   | 5.5   | 6.2   |
| Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages                 | 3.1   | 6.0   | 7.0   | 5.3   | 4.1   |
| Plant production                                      | 5.4   | 5.1   | 5.2   | 4.7   | 4.1   |
| Pharmaceutical products                               | 16.7  | 19.2  | 20.3  | 15.5  | 16.0  |
| Food preparations                                     | 2.8   | 2.9   | 2.9   | 3.0   | 2.4   |
| Shoes, headgear, bags                                 | 4.5   | 4.3   | 3.3   | 2.3   | 2.2   |
| Industrial goods                                      | 61.3  | 56.1  | 54.3  | 63.7  | 64.9  |
| Vehicles, trucks                                      | 16.4  | 15.7  | 13.1  | 17.9  | 15.1  |
| Medical equipment, furniture                          | 4.8   | 4.0   | 3.4   | 3.6   | 3.8   |
| Machinery, appliances, electrical equipment, fittings | 35.0  | 31.9  | 30.3  | 38.9  | 37.5  |
| Chemical production                                   | 5.0   | 4.4   | 7.4   | 3.3   | 8.5   |

Source: Trade Map – international trade statistics,  
[https://www.trademap.org/open\\_access/Country\\_SelProductCountry\\_TS.aspx](https://www.trademap.org/open_access/Country_SelProductCountry_TS.aspx)

Pharmaceutical products had the largest share in the import of consumer goods (the share of this product group ranged from 15.5% in 2018 to 20.3% in 2017). Food, textile, chemical and metal products were also imported into the DRC.

As regards agricultural products, animal products dominated in the import structure. This is due to the fact that the country's animal farming area is restricted due to the tsetse fly, which is a carrier of coma in humans and nagana in pets. Export production of agricultural products is focused primarily on plantation farms. Large companies specialize in palm oil, rubber, coffee and cocoa products.

Analysing the volume of the DRC exports by product group (Table 4), it becomes evident that the largest revenue from this product group was obtained in 2017-2018. A huge share of the DRC exports consisted of mining products and hydrocarbons.



Table 4

Export volume of the DRC by product group, USD '000

| Commodity groups                        | Years     |           |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                         | 2015      | 2016      | 2017      | 2018      | 2019      |
| Total                                   | 1,919,618 | 1,708,913 | 2,468,621 | 3,133,298 | 1,502,667 |
| Mining and hydrocarbon industry         | 1,816,624 | 1,631,388 | 2,387,900 | 3,056,496 | 1,441,915 |
| Copper                                  | 422,863   | 616,532   | 990,998   | 1,241,502 | 581,030   |
| Cobalt                                  | 695,424   | 296,450   | 520,546   | 852,797   | 205,409   |
| Diamonds                                | 291,625   | 378,380   | 393,309   | 382,494   | 51,995    |
| Gold                                    | 44,303    | 24,034    | 27,601    | 76,397    | 43,833    |
| Tin                                     | 27,579    | 53,113    | 56,639    | 61,409    | 30,749    |
| Oil                                     | 334,830   | 262,879   | 398,807   | 441,897   | 528,899   |
| Agricultural production                 | 101,515   | 75,846    | 75,897    | 71,922    | 58,711    |
| Coffee                                  | 16,948    | 13,808    | 19,370    | 18,672    | 19,114    |
| tea                                     | 24        | 7         | 177       | 118       | 1         |
| Rubber                                  | 3,583     | 1,543     | 937       | 1,341     | 1,513     |
| Cocoa beans                             | 24,032    | 28,384    | 34,090    | 20,781    | 39,346    |
| Palm oil                                | 5,187     | 6,370     | 4,612     | 6,445     | 54        |
| Sawn wood                               | 38,188    | 11,104    | 3,652     | 12,820    | -3,789    |
| Medicinal plants (rosemary and moringa) | 13,553    | 14,630    | 13,059    | 11,745    | 2,472     |
| Industrial and power products           | 1,479     | 1,679     | 4,824     | 4,880     | 2,041     |
| Chemical products                       | 1,479     | 1,679     | 1,233     | 857       | 2,041     |
| Electricity                             | –         | –         | 3,591     | 4,023     | –         |

Source: Trade Map – international trade statistics,  
[https://www.trademap.org/open\\_access/Country\\_SelProductCountry\\_TS.aspx](https://www.trademap.org/open_access/Country_SelProductCountry_TS.aspx)

Agricultural products constituted a marginal share of export, with a downward trend (from USD 1,015,515 thousand to USD 58,711 thousand). As a result, in 2019 it amounted to only 57% of what was exported in 2015 (Tab. 5).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is primarily an exporter of mining and oil products. The share of these products in the export structure ranged from the lowest (94.6%) in 2015 to the highest (97.5%) in 2018. The main export products were copper and cobalt, whose sale in 2019 brought the state more than half of its export revenues. Diamonds and gold also held an important place on the list of exported goods. The other exports include coffee, cocoa beans, rubber and medicinal plants. However, agricultural exports account for only a few percent. Fluctuations were also observed here. In general, their share decreased by 1.4 percentage points between 2015 and 2019. It was the lowest in 2018 and amounted to only 2.3% of exports. It can, therefore, be noted that

Table 5

## Export structure by commodity group

| Commodity group                         | Years |       |       |       |       |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                         | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  |
| Total                                   | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Mining and hydrocarbon industry         | 94.6  | 95.5  | 96.7  | 97.5  | 96.0  |
| Copper                                  | 22.2  | 36.4  | 40.4  | 39.8  | 38.7  |
| Cobalt                                  | 36.5  | 17.5  | 21.2  | 27.3  | 13.7  |
| Diamonds                                | 15.3  | 22.3  | 16.0  | 12.3  | 3.5   |
| Gold                                    | 2.3   | 1.4   | 1.1   | 2.4   | 2.9   |
| Tin                                     | 1.4   | 3.1   | 2.3   | 2.0   | 2.1   |
| Oil                                     | 17.6  | 15.5  | 16.2  | 14.2  | 35.3  |
| Agricultural production                 | 5.3   | 4.4   | 3.1   | 2.3   | 3.9   |
| Coffee                                  | 0.88  | 0.81  | 0.78  | 0.59  | 1.27  |
| tea                                     | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.007 | 0.003 | 0.000 |
| Rubber                                  | 0.19  | 0.09  | 0.03  | 0.04  | 0.1   |
| Cocoa beans                             | 1.25  | 1.66  | 1.38  | 0.66  | 2.62  |
| Palm oil                                | 0.27  | 0.37  | 0.18  | 0.2   | 0.003 |
| Sawn wood                               | 1.99  | 0.65  | 0.15  | 0.41  | -0.25 |
| Medicinal plants (rosemary and moringa) | 0.7   | 0.85  | 0.53  | 0.37  | 0.16  |
| Industrial and power products           | 0.1   | 0.1   | 0.2   | 0.2   | 0.1   |
| Chemical products                       | 0.1   | 0.1   | 0.1   | 0.0   | 0.1   |
| Electricity                             | 0.0   | 0.0   | 0.1   | 0.1   | 0.0   |

Source: Trade Map – international trade statistics,  
[https://www.trademap.org/open\\_access/Country\\_SelProductCountry\\_TS.aspx](https://www.trademap.org/open_access/Country_SelProductCountry_TS.aspx)

the DRC foreign trade potential has been recognised as significant in two revenue-generating sectors, such as mining and agriculture, which should be developed in the long term. The DRC government is currently developing a strategy to revitalise the agricultural sector in the country and to gain a position in the international agricultural market.

## **The volume of agricultural production in DRC and opportunities for export development**

The government of the DRC has planned an agricultural development programme with an aim to:

- strengthen the contribution of agriculture to economic growth;
- restore food security to the country;

- reduce poverty and uncertainty in rural areas;
- increase food production;
- encourage the substitution of imports.

One of the key crops here is coffee. Among different varieties of coffee grown in the DRC, the two varieties are prevailing, i.e. Robusta and Arabica. Arabica accounts for 10-15%, while the vast majority is Robusta. Arabica coffee is grown on high plantations at an altitude of 1600-2800 m above sea level in eastern villages (Kivu, Ituri). Arabica coffee beans here are of high quality, with high acidity and a rich taste. Robusta coffee is mainly grown in the north-eastern part of the country, in the Congo basin (Isiro, Ubangi, Uele, Kivu, Kasai) (Dmitrievskiy, 1995, p. 304). About 850,000 families in Congo make their living from the coffee industry. Coffee in Congo is one of the most popular beverages, and more than half of the total yield is consumed in the domestic market. About 40% of all produced coffee is exported mainly to Italy, France, Belgium and the USA. The total coffee yield in the Democratic Republic of the Congo averages just over 100,000 tonnes per year. In 1989, coffee exports reached 119,320 tonnes, but fell significantly between 1994 and 2003, mainly as a result of the civil war between 1997 and 1998. Since signing the peace agreement in December 2002 and ending the civil war, coffee production has increased slightly. In 2011, the government developed the “Strategy Paper for the Revitalization of the Coffee Sector 2011-2015” programme with a budget of USD 100 million. The aim of the programme was to increase production to 120 thousand tonnes by 2015. In 2013, there were already more than 11,000 coffee producers in the DRC. Cooperative associations such as Furaha, Muungano and Sopacdi are important sales and distribution partners for coffee producers. Successes on the international scene are also significant. In 2017, SOPACDI was awarded the title of “Best Coffee of the Year” for its coffee. The company won this award for the second time, the previous award being granted in 2014 (Mocratique du Congo, without a year).

The first cocoa tree plantations were established in the Mayumbe region (Central Congo), with plants originating mainly from São Tomé. The crops then extended to the former provinces of Bandundu, Ecuador and the Eastern Province. The production basins are currently located in central Congo, western and northern provinces, Tschopo and North Kivu. Cocoa cultivation replaced coffee plantations damaged by fungal diseases. The producers, grouped into cooperatives, are committed to quality as well as ecological and fair trading niches. About 8,000 of them have received a double UTZ certificate<sup>7</sup> and an ecological certificate. In the Lower Uele Province, the project to create two nurseries should stimulate the development of crops. Other regions are being investigated by commercial companies such as Cargill, Barry Callebaut and Nestlé, as well as NGOs. Nevertheless, the development of the sector still

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<sup>7</sup> In the Mayan language, “utz” means “good inside”. Certification in this system focuses on good agricultural practices, rational management and occupational health and safety.

depends on several factors: improvement of the political and business climate, restoration of orchards, opening up communication channels to transport the beans, harmonisation of rules and the implementation of incentive measures<sup>8</sup>.

Another important export product is palm oil, which is one of the most frequently produced goods. Over the last 30 years, its demand has increased by 3% per year. 80% of its use is for food products, 19% for non-food products and the remaining 1% for biofuel production. Congolese entrepreneurs have gradually taken over almost the entire sector at the cost of the disappearance of many factories and the direct exploitation of old palm groves in low-production regions. This has also been affected by the armed conflicts of the last two decades, which have dealt a severe blow to transport conditions in the equatorial basin. Oil companies have resigned from managing and even exploiting their plantations, often handing them over to the villagers as shareholders. Production and exports have decreased significantly. This is not only a problem for the DRC, but also for many countries in Europe. More about that can be found in Hrybau, Hryshanava, Witkowska-Dąbrowska and Świdyńska (2019, p. 397-406).

However, it seems that the domestic soap and margarine sector, which requires high-quality oils, will still need agro-industrial plantations. The Congolese authorities are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that these regions represent a huge reservoir of high-quality agricultural land and that they are currently underused<sup>9</sup>. More about the needs of using agricultural production for the country's own needs can be found in Ambukita (2019, p. 36-48). "In a situation of lack of resources to finance imports and where imports of equipment should be increased to a maximum, as their production is not developed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a significant proportion of foreign currency is devoted to financing the import of food products that could be produced locally, in the country".

Rubber is the second most important export commodity in the country. Plantation yields are slowly increasing after nationalisation. Some plantations were planted with new trees for the first time in 20 years. As a result of Chinese demand, the international rubber market is now returning to the price of USD 1.62 per kilo. Experts argue that this is a positive development for African producers, although competition from Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam in the Chinese market is more difficult. It should be noted that the price of African rubber is cheaper than the average price paid by China, regardless of its origin. However, there are numerous problems resulting from past events, such as the discontinuation of production or difficult access for customers. Medicinal plants and their extracts are important export products for many developing countries.

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<sup>8</sup> Production mondiale de cacao quelle est la part de lafrique central aujourd'hui; access mode <https://cacao-info.org / 2019 / 04 /11/production-mondiale-de-cacao-quelle-est-la-part-de-lafrique-centrale-aujourd'hui/> (17.05.2020).

<sup>9</sup> Belgeo – access mode <https://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/11772#tocto1n10>(12.05.2020).

In view of population ageing and growing consumer preferences for natural health products, medicinal plants represent a market niche which exporters from many of the least developed countries are trying to develop in order to ensure sustainable production and exports. The quarterly ITC Market News Service (EN) report on herbal medicines and extracts focuses on the lack of available information on international trade in herbal medicines produced and exported by developing and the least developed countries. The production of medicinal plants is not of an industrial nature. Most of them are in the hands of small growers. However, rosemary and moringa are among the main agricultural export commodities and are very promising for the DRC economy.

Considering the volume of exports of the agricultural production goods in question, it should be concluded that the volume of exports of coffee and cocoa beans has increased (Tab. 6).

Table 6

## Export value of basic agricultural export products

| Agricultural production commodities, USD '000 | Years  |        |        |        |        | 2019 vs. 2015 |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|
|                                               | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   | 2018   | 2019   | %             |
| Coffee                                        | 16,948 | 13,808 | 19,370 | 18,672 | 19,114 | 112.8         |
| Cocoa beans                                   | 24,032 | 28,384 | 34,090 | 20,781 | 39,346 | 163.7         |
| Palm oil                                      | 5,187  | 6,370  | 4,612  | 6,445  | 54     | 1.0           |
| Rubber                                        | 3,583  | 1,543  | 937    | 1,341  | 1,513  | 42.2          |
| Medicinal plants                              | 13,553 | 14,630 | 13,059 | 11,745 | 2,472  | 18.2          |

Source: Trade Map – international trade statistics,  
[https://www.trademap.org/open\\_access/Country\\_SelProductCountry\\_TS.aspx](https://www.trademap.org/open_access/Country_SelProductCountry_TS.aspx)

Export volumes of rubber and medicinal plants have decreased significantly, while the export of palm oil has almost completely disappeared. The greatest decrease was recorded in 2019 in the case of rubber, down to only 1% as compared to 2015.

In general, dynamic changes in DRC's exports in different directions of the world should be noted (Tab. 7).

To more than 30 countries, the export growth rate in the years under review remains at a level above 2015. The biggest changes in volumes concern Botswana, Burundi, Benin, Senegal and Poland.

Table 7

The dynamics of changes in export value from the DRC [%] vs. 2015

| Country                | 2016  | 2017  | 2018   | 2019  | Country            | 2016 | 2017 | 2018  | 2019 |
|------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------------------|------|------|-------|------|
| Botswana               | 322   | 44    | 56,822 | 6,944 | France             | 100  | 105  | 142   | 493  |
| Burundi                | 7,698 | 1,974 | 7,846  | 5,570 | Italy              | 194  | 304  | 278   | 333  |
| Benin                  | 281   | 323   | 190    | 5,480 | Spain              | 263  | 261  | 261   | 304  |
| Senegal                | 905   | 7,132 | 863    | 5,132 | Brazil             | 24   | 23   | 169   | 285  |
| Poland                 | 55    | 656   | 266    | 4,341 | Australia          | 88   | 142  | 29    | 230  |
| Singapore              | 40    | 1,115 | 64     | 3,267 | Mauritania         | 100  | 200  | 1,000 | 200  |
| Madagascar             | 181   | 50    | 225    | 2,181 | Netherlands        | 73   | 137  | 332   | 176  |
| Burkina Faso           | 850   | 100   | 300    | 1,750 | China              | 78   | 122  | 213   | 166  |
| Kenya                  | 157   | 374   | 976    | 1,466 | Austria            | 613  | 318  | 2,176 | 166  |
| Portugal               | 61    | 60    | 84     | 1,453 | Canada             | 39   | 56   | 138   | 161  |
| Thailand               | 157   | 200   | 1,124  | 882   | Malawi             | 9    | 14   | 80    | 138  |
| Russian Federation     | 393   | 428   | 736    | 753   | Korea, Republic of | 159  | 198  | 213   | 136  |
| Zimbabwe               | 19    | 709   |        | 700   | Nigeria            | 275  | 120  | 1,040 | 130  |
| Egypt                  | 3     | 12    | 650    | 537   | Malaysia           | 183  | 191  | 208   | 123  |
| Morocco                | 133   | 350   | 816    | 522   | Kazakhstan         | 160  | 14   | 50    | 122  |
| Japan                  | 981   | 357   | 276    | 522   | Sweden             | 86   | 67   | 22    | 109  |
| Hungary                | 150   | 0     |        | 500   | Greece             | 123  | 177  | 108   | 101  |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 0     | 2,700 | 100    | 500   |                    |      |      |       |      |

Source: Trade Map – international trade

[https://www.trademap.org/open\\_access/Country\\_SelProductCountry\\_TS.aspx](https://www.trademap.org/open_access/Country_SelProductCountry_TS.aspx)

## Summary

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is integrating into the world community through active engagement with developed countries. The main export directions are commodity groups such as: mining, oil and agricultural products. The rapid growth of exports, the observation of trade surpluses and the increase in the volume of exports do not give grounds for satisfaction. For the stable growth of foreign trade turnover, it is necessary to develop and effectively use the country's export potential. In the years under study, large fluctuations in both exports and imports were found.

The country has a large amount of unused arable land of good quality and good conditions for the development of agriculture. This can provide a base and an opportunity to develop this branch of the economy. However, the obtained results confirm the hypothesis that the fluctuations in the export of agricultural

products are high. Products such as coffee and cocoa beans are promising. Palm oil, rubber and medicinal plants are also a major part of agricultural exports that have lost their position. It remains to be hoped that the programmes aimed at farmers, which involve an increase in agricultural productivity and an increase in agricultural exports from the DRC, should have a significant positive impact on the economic development of the country. On the other hand, the government should help to create a favourable environment for stimulating entrepreneurship and improving the investment climate for foreign companies.

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