

FRENCH AND CHINESE PROJECTION OF INFLUENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRADE RELATIONS AND BILATERAL AGREEMENTS

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Abstract: *The study is based on a comparative analysis of bilateral agreements between the Republic of Moldova and the two states, France and the China, as well as on the foreign trade of the Republic of Moldova structured by groups of goods according to the Combined Nomenclature. The main objective is to evaluate the implications of these two states—characterized by different models of cooperation—in the Republic of Moldova.*

The study refers to 1) the analysis of the interests of the two states, which employ different models of assistance to a beneficiary state, depending on exports and imports structured by groups of goods; 2) the analysis of the interests of the two states in relation to the bilateral agreements between the signatory states.

By analysing statistical data and bilateral documents, the article seeks to provide an original contribution to the specialized literature. The result offers an integrated perspective on the interests of the two states in the Republic of Moldova.

Keywords: *Development assistance; development grants; bilateral relations; foreign trade; Republic of Moldova, France and China.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a comparative analysis of bilateral agreements between the Republic of Moldova and the two states, France and China, as well as on the foreign trade of the Republic of Moldova structured by groups of goods according to the Combined Nomenclature. The main objective is to evaluate the implications of these two states—characterized by different models of cooperation—in the Republic of Moldova.

This study adopts a meso-level analytical approach, examining trade relations through commodity groups classified under the Combined Nomenclature (CN) rather than through individual products. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on structural changes in bilateral trade at the level of commodity groups, without disaggregating these categories into their constituent products. A micro-level analysis, examining individual products within each CN commodity group, will be undertaken in a subsequent study.

Republic of Moldova constitutes an arena in which different models of external economic engagement intersect. These models are promoted both by donor countries providing Official Development Assistance (ODA), including France, and by China through the provision of economic development grants. They rely on different policy

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instruments, ranging from institutional cooperation and bilateral agreements to the expansion of trade relations.

Existing scholarship has generally examined either international trade or official development assistance as separate fields of inquiry. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to analysing how different categories of external actors shape their economic engagement with Republic of Moldova by linking the evolution of bilateral trade with the development of bilateral legal frameworks.

Furthermore, only a limited number of studies compare traditional ODA donors with China's model of development financing. This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comparative assessment of China as a provider of economic development grants and France as a representative ODA donor.

The detailed analysis of individual products within each CN commodity group is reserved for a separate study employing a micro-level analytical framework. Consequently, the present chapter constitutes an intermediate stage between the macro-level analysis of Republic of Moldova's foreign trade undertaken in previous research and the subsequent micro-level examination of product structures.

The **research design of the study** is organised into five subsections. The first reviews the relevant theoretical framework and the literature review. The second analyses the economic engagement of China and France with the Republic of Moldova through imports by CN commodity groups during 2001–2014 and 2015–2024. The third examines exports to these countries using the same analytical framework. The fourth analyses the bilateral agreements of China and France with Republic of Moldova before 2001, 2001–2014 and 2015–2024. The final subsection synthesises the empirical findings and presents the main conclusions.

The research adopts a comparative, longitudinal, and explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It analyses bilateral trade structures by CN commodity groups and examines changes in trade composition and bilateral economic relations. The objective is to compare China's and France's patterns of economic engagement with the Republic of Moldova and identify differences in their external economic involvement.

The **general objective** of this study is to compare the economic engagement of China and France like an ODA donor country in Republic of Moldova by examining bilateral trade at the level of CN commodity groups during the periods 2001–2014 and 2015–2024, together with bilateral agreements concluded before 2001, during 2001–2014, and during 2015–2024.

The **specific objectives** are to: O1 Compare trade evolution by CN commodity groups during 2001–2014 and 2015–2024; O2 Identify and compare bilateral agreements concluded during the analysed periods before 2001, 2001–2014 and 2015–2024; O3 Assess the relationship between legal frameworks and changes in trade structures and O4 Identify comparative patterns of external economic engagement.

The **research questions**: Q1. How has China's economic engagement with the Republic of Moldova evolved compared with France's engagement? Q2. How do bilateral trade structures differ by CN commodity groups? Q3. What structural changes occurred between the two analysed periods? Q4. Is there a relationship between bilateral agreements and changes in trade structures? Q5. What comparative patterns of external economic engagement can be identified?

The **hypotheses** is H1 The strengthening of the bilateral legal framework is associated with the development of trade relations between Republic of Moldova and

the external actors included in the analysis; H2 China and France like an Official Development Assistance (ODA) donor country employ different models of external economic engagement, reflected in both the structure of bilateral agreements and the composition of bilateral trade and H3 A comparative analysis of trade relations by Combined Nomenclature (CN) commodity groups, together with bilateral agreements, enables the identification of distinct models of external economic engagement.

Methodological Details. The quantitative analysis employs comparative analysis, time-series analysis, analysis of foreign trade by CN commodity groups, structural change analysis comparing the periods 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024, and comparative tables. The qualitative analysis relies on documentary analysis and content analysis of bilateral agreements before 2001, 2001–2014 and 2015–2024. The quantitative analysis uses official trade statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Imports and exports are analysed by CN commodity groups for 2001–2024.

Data exclude trade operations conducted by enterprises located on the left bank of the Nistru River and the municipality of Bender. The symbol “–” indicates the absence of recorded transactions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

To present the importance and relevance of this topic within the current theoretical and scientific context, we would like to bring to the forefront Official Development Assistance (ODA), which, according to the IMF, represents “official flows of financing administered with the primary objective of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries” (IMF, 2003, p. 263).

Starting from this conceptual definition, we can observe the potential benefits that this type of assistance may bring to beneficiary states, as it falls within the framework of development cooperation policies. It can also be argued that this form of assistance provides support to donor states by helping to reduce the pressure they face because of humanitarian crises.

The aim of this research is to examine how a state that has provided Official Development Assistance and another state that has offered economic development grants have generated an impact on an underdeveloped state.

According to Victor Negrescu, the essential concepts that need to be considered when discussing development cooperation are developing countries, power, and the economics of development. These concepts are interconnected with development assistance (Negrescu, 2016).

Negrescu (2016) argues that when the concept of development cooperation is discussed, it is necessary to examine it within the interaction between theories of international relations and theories of development economics. This approach is necessary in order to obtain a more comprehensive perspective, which is also the position adopted in this research.

Sauvy (1952) was the first author to use the term “Developing Countries”, replacing the concept of the “Third World”. This concept gained significant importance only three years after its emergence, when developing countries began to appear and take shape on the international stage following the Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia.

The concept of power can be examined through three different perspectives in relation to development assistance. When viewed through the lens of realism, the

concept of power reveals a reality that can be interpreted through the realist approach of Hans Morgenthau (2007). From this perspective, development assistance is seen merely as a mechanism through which donor states demonstrate their economic superiority at the global level, while simultaneously promoting their own national interests.

However, through another lens, we can observe the realist approach of Nye (2005). From this perspective, the concept of power is expanded through the introduction of the concept of soft power, and development assistance can be understood as an indirect form of influence exercised by donor states over beneficiary states.

When the concept of power is viewed through the lens of liberalism, it reveals a reality in which humanitarianism intersects with development cooperation. In this context, the approach of Keohane and Nye (1977) becomes relevant, as it highlights that the interdependence between donor and beneficiary states increases alongside the expansion of global interactions among states.

Viewed through the third perspective, namely the radical approach, the concept of power can be understood through multiple dimensions. However, the overall perspective suggests that imperialism gains new forms of influence through development cooperation policies, creating and maintaining dependencies between states. One of the perspectives through which development assistance can be analyzed, according to Dunaway (1992), is based on Raoul Prebisch's critique of the relationship between core and peripheral states. According to this view, core states disregard peripheral states except through a capitalist framework that enables their exploitation. For this reason, the Global South has not achieved the same level of development as the Global North, as argued by the economist.

The other dimension is understood according to the perspective of Immanuel Wallerstein (1988), where development cooperation is viewed as a normalization of unequal exchanges due to the existence of a hierarchy among states. From this perspective, exchanges cannot be considered equal, as they are shaped by structural differences between states. This dimension is also addressed by Fernand Braudel through his theory of concentric circles (Roche, 2006).

The perspective explained by Samir Amin (1988) highlights the existence of a vicious circle in which states from the Global South participate in the international system. Within this system, they often assume the role of raw material producers, and consequently, within development cooperation policies, they frequently become beneficiary states.

Following this exploration of the two concepts discussed above, it is essential to also introduce the concept of development economics, together with the concept of international trade. In this context, the aim is to present the theories of international trade and theories of development. These concepts are also necessary in order to obtain a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the concept of development assistance (Negrescu, 2016).

The concept of international trade from the perspective of liberal theorists refers to David Ricardo, who introduced the concept of comparative costs through his works, and Adam Smith, who developed the concept of the international division of labour. In Smith's approach, reference is made to the specialization of states in a specific field of activity that corresponds to their particular advantages, allowing them to develop this specialization and participate in international trade. In contrast, Ricardo

does not argue that a state requires a particular specialization of its own; rather, it is sufficient for a state to participate in international trade (Brasseul, 2008).

Some authors, such as Heckscher, Ohlin, and Samuelson, argue that the existence of advantages between states can also be explained through the variable of production (Negrescu, 2016). Rainelli (1997) refers to the theory of surplus disposal, which he considers appropriate for developing countries.

Through his theory, Mill differentiates between the direct and indirect advantages of international trade (Brasseul, 2008). Raymond Vernon (1966) further developed Mill's theory by introducing dynamic models of comparative advantages into production cycles. An additional improvement was brought by Bela Balassa (1965) to Mill's theory, as he introduced the dynamic model of successive stages of development. Rostow's linear theory of development is closely related to Vernon's and Balassa's theories (Negrescu, 2016).

Regarding development economics, Dimier (2006) argues that Official Development Assistance is an indispensable solution. Through the Harrod-Domar model, we can observe the level of economic development by analyzing the percentage difference between savings and investment, while also providing a calculation formula for this purpose.

This formula offers greater clarity when assessing the effectiveness of development assistance and, not least, the investments made by donor states towards beneficiary states (Negrescu, 2016).

Following the discussion of these concepts, the focus is placed on the theories of realism, where we can mention Richard Ashley (1984) with the theory of impossibility, Robert Jervis (1983) with the theory of reciprocity, Morgenthau with the five principles of realism (Roche, 2006) and the concept of the balance of power (Morgenthau, 2007), as well as Kenneth Waltz (2006) with what he refers to as the search for security.

Regarding the theories of liberalism, we aim to further discuss Robert Axelrod (1992) with the theory of cooperative behaviour, Michael Doyle (1983) with the theory of promoting democracy as a solution for maintaining peace, Andrew Moravcsik (1993) with the role of social actors, and Samy Cohen (2003), who highlights the dependence of social actors on states.

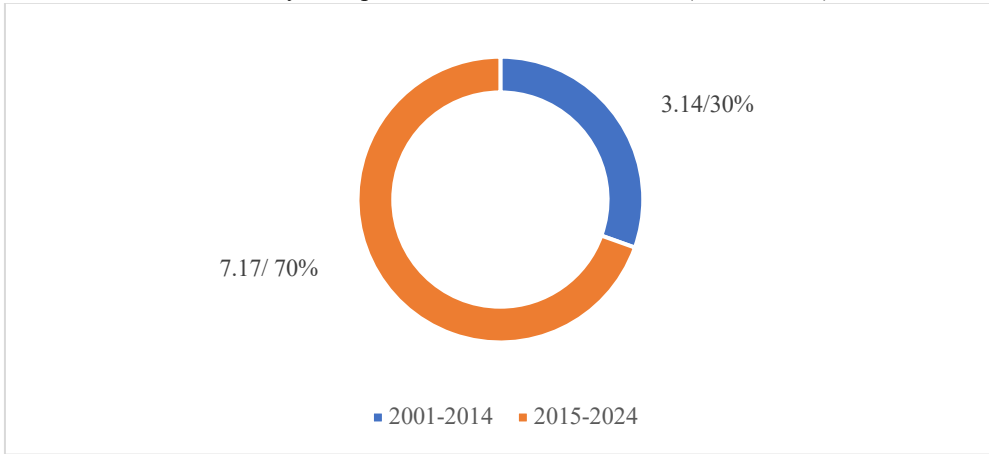
We also refer to Norbert Elias's concept of a society of individuals (Devin, 1995) and to James Rosenau (1990), who extends Elias's perspective by adding the political and private sectors.

3. CHINA AND FRANCE ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S IMPORTS BY CN COMMODITY GROUPS FROM CHINA AND FRANCE DURING THE PERIODS 2001-2014 VS. 2015-2024.

3.1. Imports from China by CN

The analysis of the two distinct periods highlights the evolution of imports, showing that the first stage, 2001–2014, was characterized by a rapid increase in the value of imports and by the consolidation of industrial products within their structure, while the period 2015–2024 represents a new phase of expansion, marked by the growing predominance of highly processed goods with higher added value.

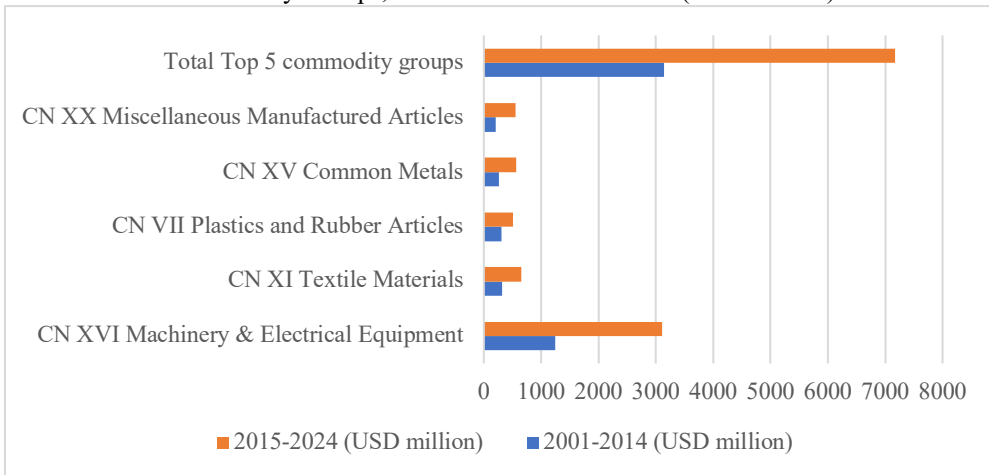
Figure 1. Republic of Moldova's Imports from China, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD billion)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026b)

Statistical data also highlights the gradual consolidation of China's position as a supplier of goods to the Republic of Moldova. Imports followed a sustained upward trend across both periods, with the first period characterized by stronger relative growth and the second by a greater absolute increase. Overall, the findings indicate a persistent expansion of import activity over the entire period. This demonstrates the transition of trade relations into a phase of maturity, in which expansion occurs because of an already substantial volume of trade exchanges. This evolution is accompanied by a structural transformation of imports, characterized by the increasing share of industrial and technological goods.

Figure 2. Top 5 Republic of Moldova's Imports from China, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD million)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026b)

It can be observed that category CN XVI it becomes the dominant category and represents the most important group of goods throughout the entire analysed period. Imports in this category increased substantially throughout the analysed period, while its

share of total imports remained relatively stable. During the second period, the category recorded strong growth and represented the main contributor to the overall expansion of imports.

The second most important category is represented by CN XI. As a result, the share of textiles in total imports gradually decreased, even though their absolute value continued to increase. A similar evolution can be observed in the case of CN VII, with imports increasing substantially over the analysed period. Although growth was more moderate after 2015, the category strengthened and consolidated its position among the main products imported from China.

Imports of CN XV exhibited one of the most stable upward trends throughout the analysed period. Growth remained sustained after 2015, reflecting increasing demand for metallurgical products and semi-finished materials, particularly in the industrial and construction sectors.

CN XX also recorded significant growth throughout the analysed period. The substantial expansion observed during the second period reflects the increasing diversification of consumer goods imported from China.

Traditional product groups, including vegetable products, food products, wood and wood articles, paper and cardboard, as well as fats and oils, maintained relatively low import values throughout the analysed period.

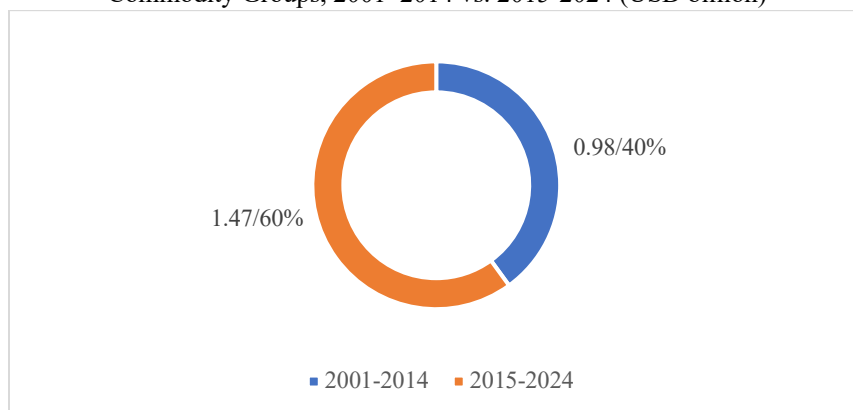
Despite some growth, their contribution to total imports remained marginal, generally accounting for only a small share of overall imports. In 2024, only four categories: CN XVI, CN XX, CN XV and CN XI together account for approximately 68–70% of total imports, demonstrating the increasing concentration of the trade structure.

3.2. Imports from France by CN

The analysis of the statistical data presented in the import table reveals a continuous and substantial expansion of the Republic of Moldova's imports from France throughout the analysed period.

Unlike trade flows characterized by strong fluctuations or dependence on a limited number of products, imports from France demonstrate a relatively diversified structure, with significant contributions from industrial, technological, chemical, agricultural, and transport-related product groups.

Figure 3. Republic of Moldova's Imports from France, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD billion)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026a)

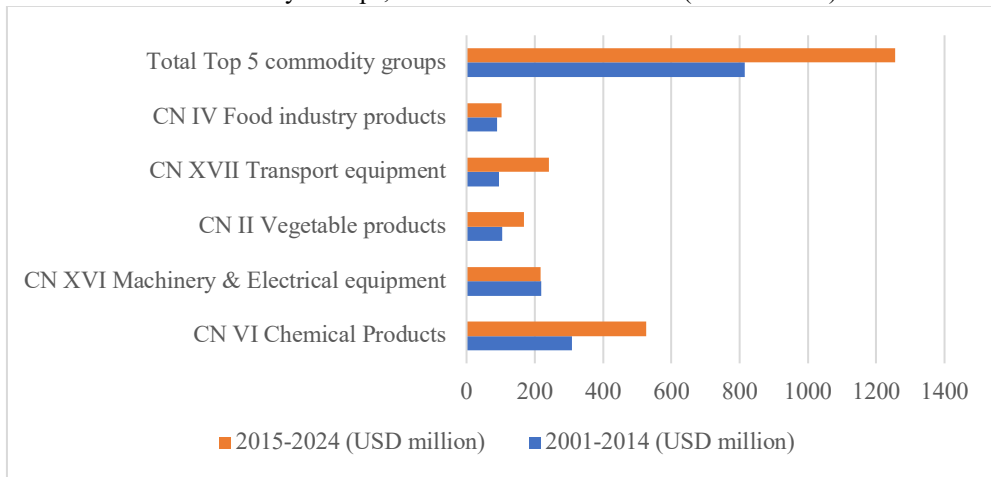
Imports from France exhibited an overall upward trend, although with periodic fluctuations. The first period was marked by dynamic expansion, interrupted by a temporary decline during the global economic crisis, followed by recovery.

The second period recorded higher trade volumes and a stronger expansion of bilateral imports, despite a short-term contraction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The subsequent recovery and sustained growth indicate a strengthening of France's position in the Republic of Moldova import market and a deepening of bilateral economic relations.

The structure of imports from France is considerably diversified, with several major product categories contributing significantly to total import values. The dominant categories throughout the analysed period were CN VI, CN XVII, CN XVI, CN IV and CN II.

Figure 4. Top 5 Republic of Moldova's Imports from France, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001-2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD million)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026a)

CN VI remained the largest and most stable component of Republic of Moldova's imports from France throughout the analysed period, confirming the sustained importance of chemical products in bilateral trade. CN XVI also exhibited substantial growth, particularly in the second period, reflecting increasing demand for machinery, electrical equipment, and technological products. The most pronounced expansion occurred in CN XVII, which recorded exceptional growth during the second period and became one of the major import categories. Overall, the evolution of these categories indicates a diversification and upgrading of Moldova's import structure from France, with increasing importance of chemical products, industrial and technological goods, and transport equipment.

CN II maintained an important position throughout the analysed period, with imports remaining relatively stable at a higher level during the second period. This persistence highlights the continued importance of agricultural and food-related products in bilateral trade. CN IV followed a moderate but generally upward trajectory, with stronger growth during the second period, indicating the increasing importance of France

as a supplier of processed food products and beverages to the Republic of Moldova market.

Manufacturing-related categories also recorded an overall positive development, although their growth was more moderate. CN XV gained importance during the second period, while CN XVIII showed sustained expansion, indicating a gradual diversification of Republic of Moldova's imports towards technological and precision-related products. Other categories, including plastics and rubber, paper, textiles, wood, glass, and ceramics, remained comparatively smaller but contributed to the broader diversification of the import structure. Overall, the evolution of these categories suggests a gradual expansion beyond traditional food-related imports towards a more diversified structure encompassing manufacturing, technological, and intermediate goods.

From a structural perspective, Republic of Moldova's imports from France demonstrate a relatively balanced distribution among several major categories. Unlike trade relations dominated by a single group of products, French exports to Republic of Moldova are characterized by a combination of industrial, technological, agricultural, and consumer-oriented goods. This indicates a more diversified trade relationship and a broader integration of French products into the Republic of Moldova economy.

The comparison between the two periods shows that the second stage was characterized not only by higher import values but also by qualitative changes in the composition of imports. Industrial and technological products gained importance, particularly machinery, electrical equipment, transport equipment, and chemical products. At the same time, agricultural and food-related imports maintained a stable role, contributing to the overall diversity of bilateral trade.

3.3. Comparative analysis of the Republic of Moldova's imports from France and China (2001-2014 vs. 2015-2024)

Imports from France are primarily concentrated in chemical products, which remained the leading category throughout the analysed period, increasing from USD 4.69 million in 2001 to USD 56.41 million in 2024. France also strengthened its position in machinery and electrical equipment, transport equipment, vegetable products, and food industry products, all of which recorded substantial growth after 2015. Compared with China, France's exports are characterized by a greater share of agricultural, food, and higher-value chemical products, while industrial goods account for a smaller proportion.

Imports from China are overwhelmingly dominated by machinery and electrical equipment, which expanded from USD 3.78 million in 2001 to USD 593.73 million in 2024. Other major categories include transport equipment, common metals, textiles, and miscellaneous manufactured articles, all of which experienced rapid growth during the analysed period. Compared with France, China's exports are far more concentrated in industrial and manufactured goods, reflecting its role as Republic of Moldova principal supplier of mass-produced industrial and consumer products.

Imports from China recorded a much more accelerated expansion compared with imports from France. During the period 2001–2014, imports from China increased from USD 8.41 million in 2001 to USD 481.17 million in 2014, representing an increase of more than 57 times. By comparison, imports from France increased from USD 25.60 million to USD 93.82 million during the same period, representing growth of approximately 3.7 times.

The difference became even more pronounced during the period 2015–2024. Imports from China increased from USD 366.43 million in 2015 to USD 1.25 billion in

2024, reaching a level more than five times higher than in 2015. Imports from France also expanded significantly, increasing from USD 81.02 million in 2015 to USD 225.28 million in 2024. However, despite this growth, the value of imports from China remained considerably higher, confirming China's stronger role as a supplier to the Republic of Moldova market.

Compared with France, China's trade expansion was characterized by a stronger concentration in industrial and manufactured goods, particularly machinery, electrical equipment, textiles, metals, transport equipment, and miscellaneous manufactured articles. French imports, although also industrially oriented, displayed a more diversified structure, combining chemical products, machinery, transport equipment, agricultural products, and food-related goods.

The comparison between the two countries highlights significant differences in trade specialization. During 2001–2014, China's exports to Republic of Moldova expanded much faster than France's exports. Chinese imports increased more than fiftyfold, while French imports increased less than fourfold. The main driver of Chinese growth was industrial manufacturing, especially machinery, textiles, metals, and manufactured goods.

During 2015–2024, the gap widened further. Imports from China exceeded USD 1.24 billion in 2024, compared with USD 225 million from France. China therefore became a substantially larger economic supplier for Republic of Moldova. However, the structure of imports differs significantly:

China's exports are highly concentrated in industrial manufactured goods, especially machinery, electrical equipment, textiles, metals, transport equipment, and consumer goods. France's exports are more diversified, combining chemicals, machinery, transport equipment, agricultural products, and food products.

The comparison demonstrates that China has a stronger quantitative presence on the Republic of Moldova market, while France maintains a more balanced and diversified export structure. From a structural perspective, China's relationship with Republic of Moldova is characterized by large-scale industrial supply and manufactured goods trade, whereas France's relationship reflects a combination of industrial specialization, agricultural products, and higher-value-added goods.

Overall, the statistical evidence indicates that both countries increased their economic importance for Republic of Moldova between 2001 and 2024. However, China achieved a much stronger expansion in terms of volume and market penetration, while France developed a comparatively smaller but more diversified trade relationship.

4. CHINA AND FRANCE ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S EXPORT BY CN COMMODITY GROUPS TO CHINA AND FRANCE DURING THE PERIODS 2001-2014 VS. 2015-2024.

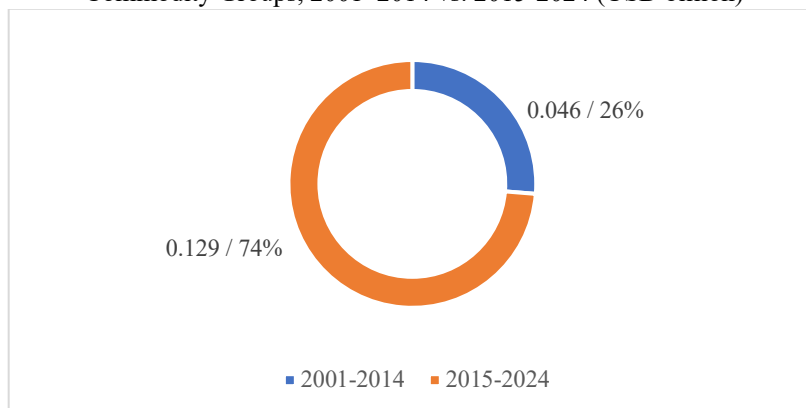
4.1. Exports to China by CN

The analysis of the statistical data presented in the export figures reveals a distinct trend compared to that observed in the Republic of Moldova's imports from China.

Whereas imports recorded sustained and accelerated growth throughout the entire period under review, Republic of Moldova exports to China followed a more heterogeneous trajectory, marked by a significant expansion up to 2017, followed by a downward trend in the final years of the analysed period.

Furthermore, the structure of exports demonstrates a considerably higher degree of concentration, being largely dominated by a limited number of commodity groups.

Figure 5. Republic of Moldova's exports to China, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD billion)



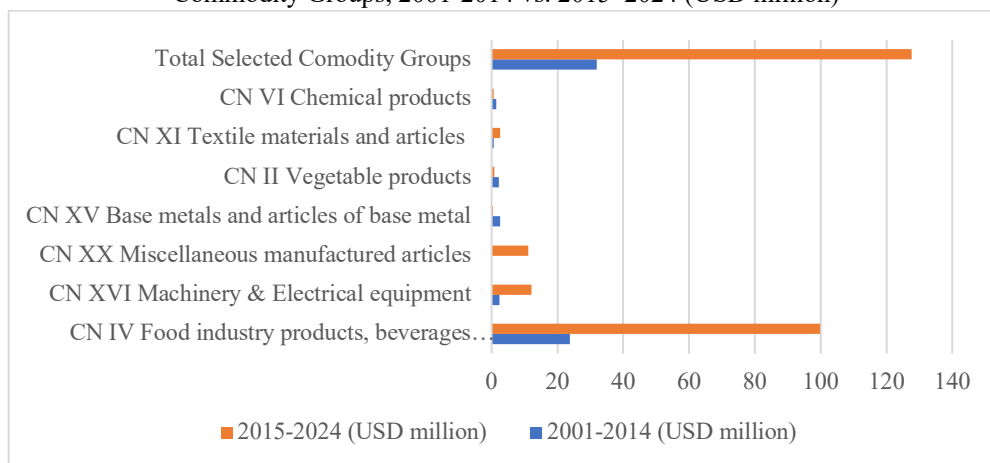
(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026b)

Exports to China exhibited a marked expansion over the analysed period, although the second period was characterized by substantially greater volatility. After reaching a pronounced peak in the second period, exports subsequently declined, indicating lower stability in export flows to the Chinese market.

The export structure was strongly concentrated in CN IV, which consistently represented the dominant category and accounted for a substantial share of the fluctuations in total exports. CN II, by contrast, gained importance temporarily during the first period but subsequently declined and became marginal in the export structure.

Overall, the evolution indicates a highly concentrated and volatile export relationship with China, dominated by products classified under CN IV and characterized by the declining relative importance of vegetable products.

Figure 6. Top 5 Republic of Moldova's exports to China, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD million)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026b)

Exports of CN XVI remained comparatively modest and fluctuating, contrasting with the stronger performance of this category on the import side. This pattern points to a

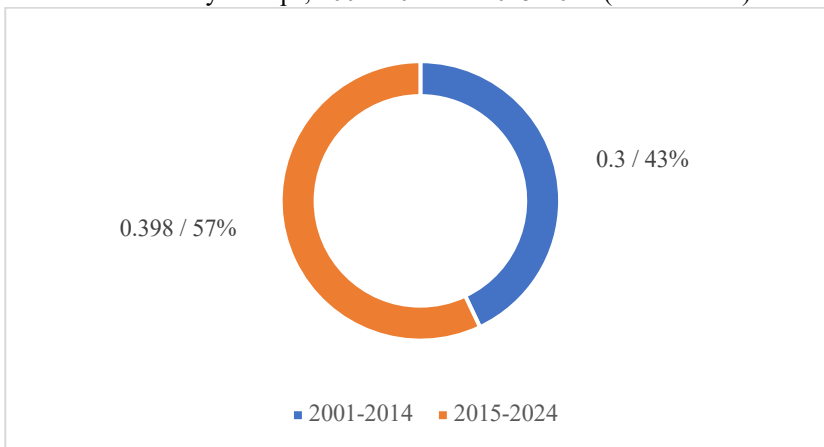
structural asymmetry in bilateral trade, with the Republic of Moldova remaining predominantly dependent on China for industrial and technological products. CN XX showed a more pronounced expansion during the second period, followed by a subsequent decline, indicating a degree of diversification in Republic of Moldova's exports to the Chinese market. CN XVIII also displayed considerable volatility, with a temporary increase during the second period but without establishing a sustained growth trajectory. Most other CN categories remained marginal throughout the analysed period, with chemical products, plastics, textiles, metals, wood, paper, footwear, and mineral products contributing only modestly to total exports. Overall, Republic of Moldova's exports to China remained highly concentrated, with limited and uneven diversification across other commodity groups.

From a structural perspective, the Republic of Moldova's exports to China are considerably less diversified than its imports from this country. While imports are distributed across numerous industrial categories, exports are concentrated in one or two main product groups, highlighting the limited specialization of Republic of Moldova supply on the Chinese market. After 2017, a decline in the total value of exports can be observed, without other product categories compensating for the reduction in food product exports. The structure of exports remains concentrated around agri-food products. Compared with the structure of imports from China, this reflects a structural imbalance in bilateral trade relations, characterized by imports dominated by industrial and technological products, while exports are concentrated in agri-food products and several categories with relatively low added value. This indicates the presence of a structural asymmetry. From the perspective of the statistics presented the data reveal a more pronounced consolidation of China's economic presence on the Republic of Moldova market than of the Republic of Moldova's economic presence on the Chinese market.

4.2. Exports to France by CN

Exports to France followed an overall upward trajectory, with substantially higher export volumes during the second period, despite increased year-to-year volatility and a decline after the mid-period peak.

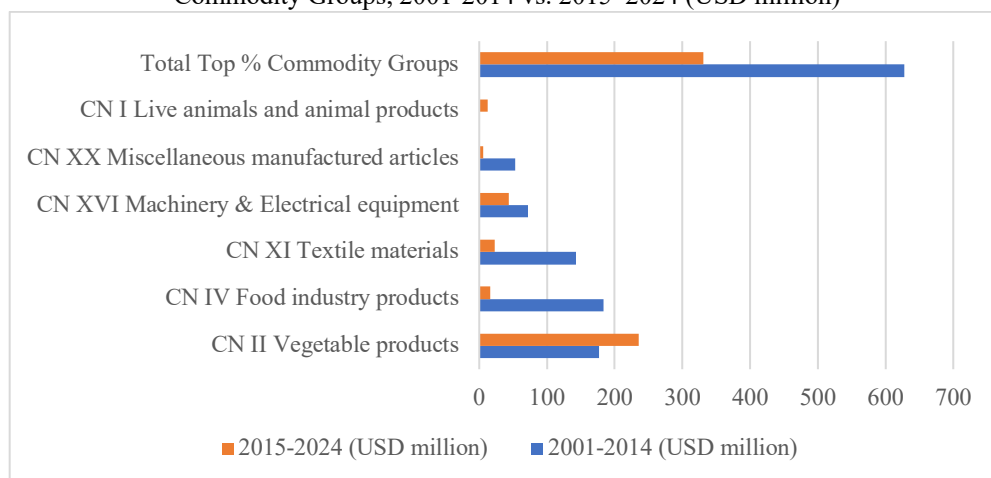
Figure 7. Republic of Moldova's exports to France, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD billion)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026a)

The export structure remained strongly dominated by CN II, although its relative contribution decreased towards the end of the analysed period, indicating gradual diversification. One of the most significant structural changes was observed in CN XVI, whose increasing importance during the second period reflects the growing participation of industrial and technological products in Republic of Moldova's exports to France.

Figure 8. Top 5 Republic of Moldova's exports to France, by Combined Nomenclature (CN) Commodity Groups, 2001–2014 vs. 2015–2024 (USD million)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by NBSRM, 2026a)

CN IV and CN XX also recorded positive developments, particularly during the second period, contributing to the diversification of manufactured exports. CN XI maintained a relatively important position and exhibited sustained growth, highlighting the continuing relevance of the textile sector in Republic of Moldova's exports to France.

Overall, the evolution of the export structure indicates a gradual diversification beyond traditional vegetable products, with increasing contributions from industrial, technological, textile, and manufactured goods. This pattern contrasts with Republic of Moldova's exports to China, which remained considerably more concentrated.

By contrast, the period 2015–2024 was characterized by a broader export structure. Consequently, exports became more diversified than during the first period. Compared with the structure of imports from France, however, bilateral trade still exhibits a certain degree of structural asymmetry. French exports to Republic of Moldova remain dominated by higher-value-added products.

From the perspective of the statistics presented, the data indicate a more balanced economic relationship between the Republic of Moldova and France than between the Republic of Moldova and China. Although France continues to maintain a positive trade position in several industrial sectors, Republic of Moldova has demonstrated a stronger capacity to diversify its exports and increase the share of higher-value-added products on the French market.

4.3. Comparative analysis of the Republic of Moldova's exports to France and China (2001-2014 vs. 2015-2024)

The Republic of Moldova's exports to France were more diversified and stable than exports to China. This reflects the stronger integration of Moldovan producers into European production and value chains.

Total exports increased from USD 8.37 million in 2001 to USD 37.60 million in 2014, peaked at USD 50.83 million in 2017, and amounted to USD 35.08 million in 2024. The export structure was dominated by vegetable products, while machinery and electrical equipment, textiles, processed food products, and miscellaneous manufactured articles gained importance during 2015–2024, indicating increasing diversification and higher value-added exports.

The Republic of Moldova's exports to China remained much lower and considerably more concentrated than exports to France. Total exports increased from USD 14.5 thousand in 2001 to USD 8.22 million in 2014, reached a peak of USD 19.00 million in 2017, and declined to USD 8.46 million in 2024, reflecting greater volatility during 2015–2024.

Exports were overwhelmingly dominated by food products, while miscellaneous manufactured articles, machinery and electrical equipment, optical instruments, and vegetable products played secondary and generally more volatile roles. Unlike France, the export structure to China remained highly concentrated and less diversified. The comparison reveals two markedly different export structures.

Exports to France are larger, more diversified, and increasingly oriented toward industrial products, combining strong agricultural exports with growing machinery, textile, and manufactured goods. By contrast, exports to China remain highly concentrated in food products, while the remaining categories account for relatively small and volatile shares.

The contrast between the two periods is also evident. For France, 2015–2024 was characterized by greater diversification and stronger growth in machinery, textiles, and manufactured products alongside traditional agricultural exports.

For China, the second period brought higher export values than 2001–2014 but also increased volatility and an even stronger dependence on food products, while most other categories either stagnated or declined. Overall, the data indicate that the French market offers a broader and more diversified export structure for the Republic of Moldova, whereas exports to China remain concentrated in a limited number of product groups.

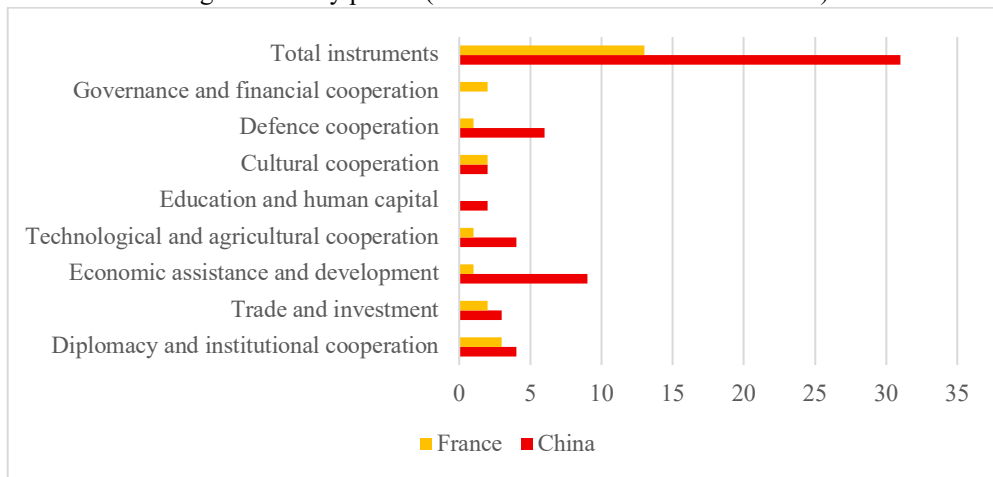
5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'S BILATERAL AGREEMENTS WITH FRANCE AND CHINA BEFORE 2001, 2001-2014 VS. 2015-2024.

The evolution of the Republic of Moldova's bilateral agreements with France and China demonstrates two distinct models of external cooperation. While both partnerships were established in the early 1990s after Republic of Moldova gained independence, their legal frameworks developed according to different strategic priorities.

France's cooperation has been primarily oriented toward institutional development, European integration, governance, cultural diplomacy, and sustainable development, whereas China's cooperation has focused more strongly on economic

assistance, technical cooperation, infrastructure-related support, and sectoral development projects.

Figure 9. Selected France-Republic of Moldova vs. China-Republic of Moldova Bilateral Agreements by period (<2001 vs. 2001-2014 vs. 2015-2024)



(Source: author's elaboration based on data provided by MAERM, 2026)

During the first period, both France and China focused on establishing diplomatic relations and the legal and institutional foundations for bilateral cooperation. However, their approaches differed in scope and priorities. France adopted a broader institutional framework from the outset, emphasizing political dialogue, cultural, scientific, and technical cooperation, as well as investment protection and agricultural development.

China, in contrast, placed greater emphasis on establishing mechanisms for trade, investment, technical cooperation, and economic assistance. While both countries developed frameworks for cultural and agricultural cooperation, France showed a stronger orientation toward institutional and knowledge-based cooperation, whereas China focused more strongly on economic and technical instruments. Defence cooperation was also established earlier within the French partnership.

During 2001–2014, the differences between the two cooperation models became more pronounced. China significantly expanded its engagement through financial assistance, technical cooperation, agriculture, education, and defence, reflecting a multidimensional and project-oriented approach to bilateral relations.

Financial support through grants and technical assistance became an important component of Chinese cooperation, complemented by sectoral initiatives in technology, agriculture, education, and defence. France, by comparison, maintained a more institutionally oriented approach, with particular emphasis on taxation, financial governance, administrative capacity, and institutional cooperation. Thus, while China's engagement became increasingly sectoral and assistance-oriented, France continued to emphasize governance and institutional development.

The third period reflects the consolidation and further specialization of bilateral cooperation. France strengthened its role in development assistance, governance, sustainable development, infrastructure, environmental protection, cultural heritage, and

institutional modernization, increasingly linking bilateral cooperation to broader development and reform objectives.

China continued its established approach based on technical and economic assistance, while maintaining cooperation in education and defence. Overall, the two partnerships became more differentiated: French cooperation increasingly emphasized development, governance, and institutional capacity-building, whereas Chinese cooperation remained focused on technical assistance, sectoral development, education, and defence.

Overall, the comparison indicates that France and China developed distinct models of engagement with the Republic of Moldova. French cooperation evolved from a broad institutional and cultural framework toward development-oriented and governance-focused cooperation, while Chinese engagement progressed from economic and diplomatic foundations toward a more multidimensional model combining financial assistance, technical cooperation, education, sectoral development, and defence. These differences highlight the complementary nature of the two bilateral partnerships and their distinct approaches to supporting Republic of Moldova's economic and institutional development.

6. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of bilateral trade reveals two distinct patterns of external economic engagement in the Republic of Moldova. Between 2001–2014 and 2015–2024, imports from both China and France expanded significantly, yet their structures evolved differently. China strengthened its position primarily as a supplier of industrial and technological goods, resulting in a highly concentrated import structure. In contrast, imports from France became more diversified, combining machinery, chemicals, transport equipment, agricultural products, and processed food, reflecting a broader commercial relationship.

On the export side, Republic of Moldova's trade with France proved to be more diversified and stable, with growing shares of machinery, textiles, manufactured goods, and processed food alongside traditional agricultural exports. This development indicates a gradual structural transformation of Republic of Moldova's export profile and a stronger integration into European trade networks. By contrast, exports to China, although increasing over time, remained concentrated mainly in agri-food products and displayed greater volatility, limiting the diversification of Republic of Moldova's export structure.

Overall, the findings suggest that France and China represent distinct models of economic engagement with the Republic of Moldova. While China's role is characterised by large-scale industrial exports to Republic of Moldova and a comparatively limited absorption of Republic of Moldova exports, France exhibits a more balanced trade relationship, supported by a broader exchange of commodity groups. These results highlight structural differences in bilateral trade and provide empirical evidence for identifying different patterns of external economic engagement.

The comparative analysis of Republic of Moldova's bilateral agreements with France and China shows two different models of cooperation that developed according to the strategic priorities of each partner. France's approach has focused mainly on institutional development, governance, cultural cooperation, investment protection, and sustainable development. Through legal frameworks and development institutions, France has supported Republic of Moldova's modernization, administrative capacity-building, and alignment with European standards.

China's cooperation model has been more oriented toward economic assistance, technical cooperation, financial support, and sectoral projects. Chinese agreements have provided Republic of Moldova with grants, technological cooperation, agricultural support, educational exchanges, and defence assistance, especially during the period 2001–2014.

After 2015, the differences between the two partnerships became clearer: France strengthened its role as a development and governance partner, while China continued to focus on technical assistance, economic cooperation, and specific bilateral projects. Overall, France and China have contributed to Republic of Moldova's development through complementary approaches. France has emphasized institutional strengthening and long-term reforms, while China has focused on practical assistance and economic cooperation. Together, these partnerships reflect Moldova's strategy of maintaining diversified external relations and using different forms of cooperation to support national development.

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