

Ministry of Economy announces death of “Negative List”

The Syria Report

05 May 2008

The Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade has announced that it had completed the liberalization of the country’s import trade.

For decades, the Ministry has held a list of all items that are banned from entry into Syria, the “Negative List”, which features all the items that cannot be imported into the country.

In the last few months, the Ministry removed gradually more and more items from the list. From a total of 75 A4 pages the list has now shrunk to 7 pages and includes only 174 customs items.

The fact that goods are removed from the list does not mean however that customs fees or other forms of obstacles to trade do not continue to apply.

Items that are still banned are so for specific purposes, either related to security, religious, health or reasons alike.

The Ministry made the announcement in a press conference held on April 30.

The practical discontinuation of the “negative list” marks the end of a symbolic tool, and era, of foreign trade restrictions. The entry of Syria into the Greater Arab Free Trade Area as well as the signing of a Free Trade Agreement with Turkey had anyhow made it largely obsolete.

Trade liberalization has impacted significantly on Syria’s foreign trade activity and balance in the last few years. According to Amer Lotfi, Minister of Economy, Syria’s total foreign trade stood at USD 29 billion in 2007, including USD 14 million in exports and USD 15 million in imports. Official trade statistics for 2007 have not been released yet.

Syria’s foreign trade (SYP, billion)

	2004	2005	2006	2007*
Exports	346	424	516	644
Imports	389	502	540	690
Balance	-43	-78	-24	-46

Sources: Central Bank of Syria, Mr Amer Lotfi

*Computed on the basis of USD1:SYP46 from Mr Lotfi’s statement