Saudi Arabia Trade

Q: How would you explain the difference in trade value for imports of oil for Netherlands from Saudi Arabia and the reported Exports of oil of Saudi Arabia to Netherlands?

A: There are many valid reasons why the reported exports of one country may not coincide with the reported imports of its partner country. This is especially true if one looks at the detailed commodity level. The data are reported independently by administrations of two different countries.

Reasons for the differences found to relate to the very nature of the trading process, such as:
• Imports are CIF and exports are FOB; Time lag between exports and imports, goods leaving country A in 2002 might only reach country B in 2003;
• Goods going via third countries;
• Goods entering Customs warehousing for several months;
• Goods being classified differently;
• Use of the country of consignment instead of the country of origin or final destination;
• Countries having different trade systems (General versus Special Trade System);
• Goods passing through industrial processing zones may or may not be recorded by the exporting country.

The international recommendations concerning Partner country attribution are: "Country of Origin" for imports and "Country of Final Destination" for exports. If all goes well, these should match. As mentioned before, there are many reasons why imports and exports end up being different. In general, one could state that import data are usually closer to the international recommendation (Country of Origin) than export data (Country of Final Destination) because (1) Final destination may not be known at the time of export, and (2) Country of Origin is more closely verified due to Tariff regulations.

Regarding the trade of Saudi Arabia, it should be noted that Saudi Arabia does not officially report a breakdown by the trading partner for its export data. You may notice that there have not been any exports reported for 2003, 2004 and 2005. For earlier years, we have tried to estimate data for trading partners, especially to oil. Currently, we are in the process of improving on our estimates for Saudi Arabia's exports and on making these estimates visible in our database. In general, we do not provide estimates of trade data in our database.
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