

THE RECONFIGURATION OF INTRA-REGIONAL TRADE IN THE EAEU UNDER SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA¹

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Abstract: The 2022 sanctions on Russia created a natural experiment testing the resilience of the Eurasian Economic Union. This paper investigates the transformative impact of these sanctions on the structure, volume, and logistics of intra-regional trade within the EAEU. It aims to identify the key adaptation mechanisms that ensured the bloc's resilience and to analyze the reconfiguration of its internal economic landscape. Using 2021–2024 trade and logistics data, we document a stark divergence: while Russia's and Belarus's 2024 exports contracted to 80.2% and 20.0% of their 2021 levels, respectively, Armenia's exports surged to 439.4%, with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan also more than doubling. A granular analysis reveals profound structural shifts beneath these aggregates: EAEU imports consolidated around critical machinery and consumer goods, while exports underwent a pronounced shift towards a commodity-based economy, with the share of mineral fuels soaring from 44% to 62% of the total. This reorientation was enabled by a logistical pivot to road transport, which saw a 28% increase in freight turnover, and the emergence of vital hubs like Armenia. We argue that the EAEU's pre-existing institutional architecture was critical for this adaptation, transforming into a vital buffer. While the sanctions were a primary catalyst, other global economic factors concurrently shaped these outcomes. The study offers global lessons on the diminishing returns of sanctions against integrated blocs and the newfound strategic agency of small economies in a fragmenting world.

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Introduction

The contemporary geo-economic reality is characterized by the increasing use of sanctions as a tool of foreign policy (Morgan et al., 2023). However, their effects often prove to be more complex and contradictory than intended (Felbermayr et al., 2025). The sanctions against Russia, being among the most extensive in recent history, have had not only direct but also profound indirect consequences, radically transforming the economic landscape of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Rather than triggering the anticipated disintegration, this external pressure has catalyzed a deep internal restructuring of the bloc, constituting the central paradox examined in this article.

Our analysis focuses on the transformative impact of sanctions on the EAEU's intra-regional trade. We argue that the sanctions shock served as a catalyst for reconfiguring trade and logistics flows within the Union; second, it exacerbated the bloc's internal asymmetries, leading to a sharp divergence in the economic trajectories of its member states; and third, it activated previously latent integrative potentials, transforming the EAEU from a largely declaratory project into a practical mechanism for collective adaptation. To verify these theses, the article employs a multi-level analysis, assessing the dynamics of mutual trade, examining profound shifts in the commodity structure of imports and exports, in the structure of freight transport, and synthesizing the adaptation strategies of individual member states. The empirical foundation of the research is comprised of official EAEU and national government statistics for the period 2021–2024.

Literature Review

A significant portion of the academic literature on the EAEU has traditionally focused on analyzing its institutional design, the political-economic motives of its member states, and assessing its effectiveness under "normal" conditions. Research by scholars such as Tarr (Tarr, 2016), Vinokurov (Vinokurov, 2017) has concentrated on the establishment of common markets, customs regulation, and potential effects of trade creation and diversion. While these works have laid a crucial foundation for understanding the Union's structure, they have typically treated it as a static model, paying insufficient attention to the bloc's potential and mechanisms for adapting to high-intensity exogenous shocks.

A separate strand of scholarship, actively developed after 2014 and especially after 2022, examines the economic consequences of sanctions for Russia. These works (Sedrakyan, 2022; Bali et al., 2024) provide detailed analyses of aspects such as import substitution, trade reorientation to the East, and the resilience of the macroeconomic system. However, this body of literature is predominantly confined to the national framework of the Russian Federation, treating it as an isolated object of pressure (Loginova et al., 2015; Belozyorov, Sokolovska, 2020). Consequently, the systemic impact of sanctions on the configuration of the entire regional integration bloc to which Russia belongs often remains on the periphery of scholarly attention.

In a broader context, there is a theory concerning the resilience of regional groupings to external shocks. Studies focused, for instance, on the European Union and its crises

(Sensier, 2016; Giannakis, Bruggeman, 2017; Di Pietro et al., 2020), emphasize the role of supranational institutions and solidarity in overcoming difficulties. Nevertheless, this theoretical framework has been applied only sparingly to the EAEU. A gap exists in empirical research that would demonstrate with concrete data how exactly the EAEU's pre-established rules (e.g., unified technical regulations, the free trade regime) were operationalized for adaptation, and how a shock targeted at one economy transformed the interactions between all members of the bloc.

Thus, at the intersection of these research fields, a clear scientific gap emerges. The following aspects remain understudied: 1) the differential impact of the sanctions shock on the economies of all EAEU member states and the consequent divergence of their roles within the Union; 2) the specific mechanisms of logistical and trade adaptation (such as the modal shift in freight transport and the emergence of new hubs) that enabled the redistribution of flows; and 3) the testing of the thesis on the paradoxical strengthening of an integration grouping under destabilizing external pressure. This article aims to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of the EAEU's intra-regional trade as a holistic system, demonstrating that the sanctions acted not as a factor of disintegration, but as a catalyst for its new, qualitatively deeper, yet more asymmetric configuration.

Methodology

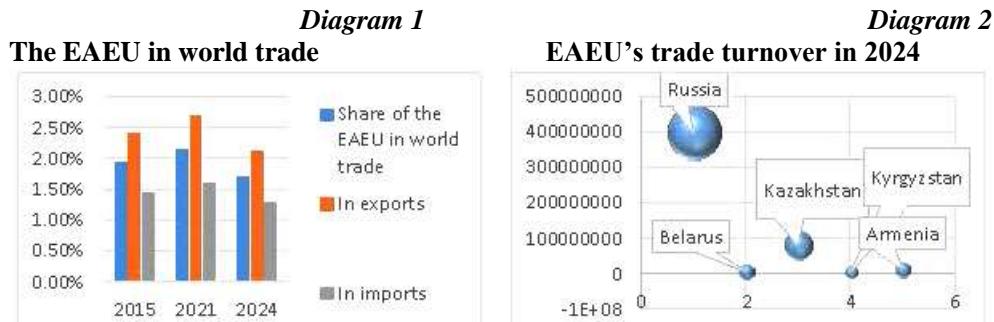
The research methodology is based on an integrated approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. The empirical foundation was comprised of official EAEU and national statistics for the period 2021–2024, supplemented by data from the international Trademap database (Trademap, 2025) for verifying trade flows and operational information from key logistics operators reflecting real-time dynamics in freight traffic and tariffs on specific corridors. Qualitative analysis involved a review of the Union's regulatory framework and case studies of member states' adaptation strategies. This comprehensive approach allowed not only for the identification of macroeconomic trends but also for the uncovering of the underlying microeconomic mechanisms and logistical practices of adaptation.

Results

The Sanctions Shock as a Catalyst for the Reconfiguration of Intra-Regional Trade

The unprecedented sanctions pressure served as a powerful stress test for the EAEU, creating a unique natural experiment for assessing the resilience of regional integration.

The EAEU's position in the global economy was characterized by a limited scale, accounting for only 1.7% of world trade (Diagrams 1, 2), which underscored its marginal influence and heightened susceptibility to external economic shocks.



Source: Developed by the authors based on Trademap's data (Trademap, 2025) URL: <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx> (accessed October 1, 2025)

Internally, the Union exhibited a pronounced asymmetry, with Russia's economy constituting the overwhelming share of the bloc's GDP and trade turnover. This fundamental imbalance meant that any major external shock targeting the Russian economy, such as the unprecedented sanctions pressure, would inevitably create systemic consequences and transmit vulnerabilities across all member states within the integrated bloc. However, contrary to expectations of disintegration, the EAEU's internal market demonstrated remarkable resilience, acting as a critical stabilizing mechanism.

Despite the initial shock in 2022, the level of mutual trade not only recovered but also showed significant growth. According to official data (Izvestiya, 2025), mutual trade within the EAEU grew by 6.8% in 2024, reaching 9 trillion rubles (approximately 113 billion US dollars). This overall growth, however, masks a profound internal transformation.

The most direct evidence of this is the stark divergence in trade performance across member states (Table 1).

Table 1
Changes in Exports and Imports by EAEU Country, 2024/2021, %

Country	Export			Import		
	2019/2015, %	2024, bn USD	2024/2021, %	2019/2015, %	2024, bn USD	2024/2021, %
World	114.3	23900.0	107.9	115.2	24090.4	107.3
Russia	127.2	398.1	80.2	128.9	206.0	77.3
Belarus	137.6	6.7	20.0	138.3	16.8	44.0
Kazakhstan	125.6	81.6	135.3	125.5	59.8	144.4
Kyrgyzstan	119.4	3.7	225.5	124.5	11.9	213.8
Armenia	176.6	13.0	439.4	155.4	16.8	315.7
EAEU	127.7	503.2	84.6	129.7	311.3	87.2

Source: Calculated by the authors based on Trademap's data (Trademap, 2025) URL: <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx> (accessed October 1, 2025)

As we can see, the Union effectively split into two groups. Russia and Belarus experienced a severe contraction, with their exports falling to 80.2% and a dramatic 20.0% of their 2021 levels, respectively. In stark contrast, the other three member states demonstrated remarkable resilience and explosive growth: Armenia's exports surged to

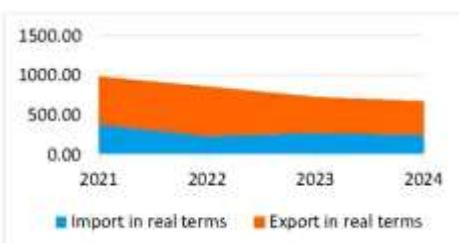
439.4% of the 2021 level, while Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan more than doubled their export volumes (to 255.4% and 210.3%, respectively). This divergence points to a key adaptation mechanism: the sanctions triggered a major reorientation of trade flows, with countries like Armenia and Kyrgyzstan amplifying their roles as vital trade and logistics hubs, facilitating both official and parallel imports into the larger EAEU market.

However, the nominal trade data presented in Table 1, while indicative of dramatic shifts, may be influenced by global inflationary pressures and currency fluctuations. To isolate the real changes in trade volumes and present a more objective picture, we adjusted the trade values using the global inflation rate from 2000 to 2024, with forecasts until 2030 (Statista, 2025) (Diagrams 3, 4). The data shows a dramatic contraction in real imports in 2022 (a drop of approximately 38%), reflecting the immediate disruptive impact of sanctions on supply chains and access to Western goods. Conversely, real exports surged in 2022, leading to a record trade surplus. This initial phase was likely driven by a combination of high global commodity prices and a rapid reorientation of Russian trade flows towards EAEU partners and other alternative markets. The subsequent sharp decline in both real exports and the trade surplus in 2023-2024 uncovers a more profound reality. The recovery in real imports suggests some success in establishing new supply routes and parallel imports. However, the simultaneous fall in real exports indicates the initial windfall was unsustainable and points to the mounting costs of adaptation. These costs include the higher expense of new logistics, the inefficiencies of reoriented supply chains, and a potential deterioration in the terms of trade for finished goods and technology.

Diagram 3
EAEU trade balance in real terms,
USD bln



Diagram 4
EAEU imports and exports in real
terms, USD bln



Source: Calculated by the authors based on Trademap's data (Trademap, 2025) URL: <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx> (accessed November 12, 2025)

This refined analysis demonstrates that while the EAEU demonstrated remarkable short-term resilience, the rapid erosion of the real trade balance highlights growing underlying vulnerabilities and signals that the long-term economic sustainability of the bloc has been significantly pressured.

Beyond the aggregate figures, a granular examination of shifts in the commodity structure of EAEU imports from 2021 to 2024 reveals the strategic reprioritization and specific vulnerabilities exposed by the sanctions.

The analysis of the EAEU's import structure (Table 2) reveals significant shifts in strategic priorities and adaptation patterns following the 2022 sanctions concerning the redistribution of import shares across commodity groups.

Table 2
Structural Shifts in EAEU Imports by Product Category
(2021-2024, Nominal US Dollar in thousands)

HS Code	Product Group	Total EAEU Imports, bn USD		Share in Structure, %	
		2021	2024	2021	2024
01-15	Foodstuffs and Agricultural Raw Materials (excluding textiles)	27.12	16.20	7.00	6.32
16-24	Prepared Foodstuffs, Beverages, and Tobacco	17.40	12.77	4.49	4.98
25-27	Mineral Products and Fuel	10.25	6.89	2.65	2.69
28-40	Chemicals, Fertilizers, and Rubber	65.59	46.03	16.92	17.95
41-43	Raw Hides, Raw Fur Skins, and Articles Thereof	1.50	1.28	0.39	0.50
44-49	Wood, Pulp, and Paper Articles	6.58	3.12	1.70	1.22
50-67	Textiles, Textile Articles, and Footwear	22.30	20.49	5.75	7.99
71	Precious Stones, Precious Metals, and Articles Thereof	1.87	7.30	0.48	2.85
72-83	Base Metals and Articles Thereof	30.22	16.77	7.80	6.54
84-90	Machinery, Equipment (including electrical), and Vehicles	160.72	114.18	41.46	44.52
68-70, 91-99	Other Goods	44.05	11.418	11.36	4.45
Total		387,62	256.46	100	100

Source: Calculated by the authors based on Trademap's data (Trademap, 2025) URL: <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx> (accessed November 12, 2025)

The most dramatic transformation occurred in several key categories. Machinery and equipment (HS 84-90) consolidated their position as the dominant import category, increasing its share from 41.46% to 44.52% of total imports despite a substantial absolute decline. This underscores the critical, inelastic demand for technological imports that could not be readily substituted domestically, likely reflecting both continued needs for industrial equipment and consumer demand for electronics rerouted through alternative channels. Simultaneously, textiles and footwear (HS 50-67) demonstrated remarkable resilience, with their share growing from 5.75% to 7.99% – the second-largest percentage point increase among all categories. This suggests successful logistical adaptation for consumer goods, potentially facilitated by parallel imports and new supply routes through EAEU hub countries. Similarly, precious metals and stones (HS 71) experienced a spectacular six-fold increase in their relative share (0.48% to 2.85%), possibly indicating their role as alternative value storage adapting to financial restrictions.

Conversely, several categories experienced notable relative declines. Metals and articles thereof (HS 72-83) and wood and pulp products (HS 44-49) also saw significant relative declines, potentially indicating reduced demand from construction and manufacturing activities affected by the new economic conditions.

The relative stability in shares of chemical products (16.92% to 17.95%) and prepared foodstuffs (4.49% to 4.98%) suggests these essential industrial and consumer categories maintained their strategic importance, with supply chains successfully reconfigured to maintain access despite external pressures. This structural analysis reveals that the EAEU's import adaptation has followed a clear pattern of prioritizing essential technological inputs and certain consumer goods while sacrificing less critical manufacturing components and miscellaneous goods – a rational crisis response that has fundamentally reshaped the union's economic relationship with the global market.

A symmetrical analysis of the EAEU's export structure (Table 3) reveals an even more pronounced consolidation around primary commodities, highlighting a critical vulnerability despite the bloc's overall trade resilience.

Table 3
Structural Shifts in EAEU Exports by Product Category
(2021-2024, Nominal US Dollar in thousands)

HS Code	Product Group	Total EAEU Exports, US Dollar Thousand		Share in Structure, %	
		2021	2024	2021	2024
01-15	Foodstuffs and Agricultural Raw Materials (excluding textiles)	33,80	28,54	5.66	6.85
16-24	Prepared Foodstuffs, Beverages, and Tobacco	10,55	8,15	1.77	1.96
25-27	Mineral Products and Fuel	262,18	257,83	43.91	61.93
28-40	Chemicals, Fertilizers, and Rubber	40,96	31,79	6.86	7.64
41-43	Raw Hides, Raw Fur Skins, and Articles Thereof	0,31	0,15	0.05	0.04
44-49	Wood, Pulp, and Paper Articles	19,67	8,92	3.29	2.14
50-67	Textiles, Textile Articles, and Footwear	3,93	2,28	0.66	0.55
71	Precious Stones, Precious Metals, and Articles Thereof	32,77	23,94	5.49	5.75
72-83	Base Metals and Articles Thereof	65,25	37,31	10.93	8.96
84-90	Machinery, Equipment (including electrical), and Vehicles	32,33	14,15	5.41	3.40
68-70, 91-99	Other Goods	95,38	3,22	15.97	0.77
Total		597,15	416,29	100.0	100.00

Source: Calculated by the authors based on Trademap's data (Trademap, 2025) URL: <https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx> (accessed November 12, 2025)

The most significant change is the overwhelming consolidation of Mineral products and fuel (HS 25-27), whose share of total exports surged from 43.91% to 61.93%. This indicates that the union's role as a global supplier of energy and raw materials has intensified, making it more, not less, dependent on this volatile sector.

Conversely, several value-added sectors experienced a severe contraction in their relative importance. The most dramatic decline occurred in the “Other goods” category (HS 68-70, 91-99), which collapsed from 15.97% to a mere 0.77% of exports. Similarly, exports of Machinery and equipment (HS 84-90) and Metals and articles thereof (HS 72-83) saw their shares significantly reduced. This suggests a severe setback in industrial and technological exports, likely due to sanctions restricting access to key technologies and markets. Modest bright spots include a slight increase in the share of Food and agricultural products (HS 01-15) and Chemical products (HS 28-40), pointing to potential areas of sustained competitiveness. However, these gains are far outweighed by the dominant narrative of a retreat to a primary commodity-based export model, underscoring a significant challenge for the bloc's long-term economic development and resilience.

The Logistical Pivot: Enabling Trade Redistribution through Modal and Corridor Shifts

The profound reconfiguration of intra-Union trade would have been unattainable without a parallel and equally dramatic transformation of its logistical underpinnings. While the aggregate freight turnover for the EAEU demonstrated notable resilience, declining by a modest 2.2% from its 2021 peak to 6181.9 billion ton-kilometers in 2024 (Table 4), this macro-level stability belied a fundamental internal restructuring of supply chains.

Table 4
Cargo Turnover of EAEU Countries by Mode of Transport

Mode of Transport	billion ton-km		Share, %		Change 2024 vs 2021, %
	2021	2024	2021	2024	
All modes of transport	6,322.76	6,181.86	100.00	100.00	
Pipeline	2,808.15	2,685.16	44.41	43.44	-0.977069
Railway	2,938.66	2,858.69	46.48	46.24	-0.234207
Road (Motor)	332.78	426.93	5.26	6.91	1.6429547
Air	9.29	2.24	0.15	0.04	-0.110704

Source: Calculated by the authors based on Eurasian Economic Commission's data URL: <https://eec.eaeunion.org/en/news/statistics/> (accessed September 15, 2025)

The sanctions precipitated a decisive modal shift, disrupting traditional transport hierarchies. Established, efficient modes were severely impacted: rail and pipeline transport, the historical backbone of Eurasian cargo, saw their shares erode, while the air freight segment, though small, collapsed by more than four times, becoming a direct casualty of the restrictions.

In this vacuum, road transport emerged as the paramount adaptation mechanism. It recorded a massive 28% increase in freight turnover, effectively becoming the primary artery for reconfigured import flows, particularly along nascent north-south and east-west corridors. This strategic pivot from globalized, speed-intensive supply chains (air) to flexible, regional, land-based alternatives (road) is starkly visible in the Russian data,

where road transport surged by over 30% even as air freight turnover contracted by almost 80% (Table 5). This shift underscores a market-driven reorientation towards flexibility and bypass routes, even at the cost of longer delivery times.

Table 5
Freight Turnover by Mode of Transport (billion ton-kilometers)

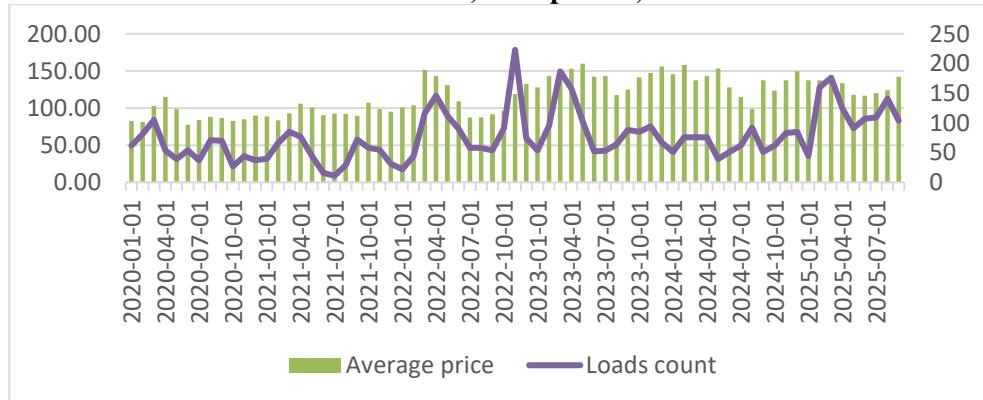
Country	Total Freight Turnover		Change, %	Road Transport		Railway Transport		Air Transport	
	2021	2024		2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
EAEU	6322.76	6181.86	-2.23	362.37	...	2983.14	...	9.387	...
Armenia*	5.09	4.75	-6.66	1.05	1.26	0.81	0.38	0.002	0.012
Belarus	118.78	74.04	-37.66	29.59	...	44.48	...	0.093	...
Kazakhstan	483.49	520.92	7.74	33.72	36.77	297.41	332.06	0.077	0.065
Kyrgyzstan	2.62	3.18	21.36	1.35	1.53	1.00	1.08	0.021	0.253
Russia	5712.79	5578.96	-2.34	296.66	387.36	2639.43	2525.17	9.195	1.912

* Data for Armenia includes air freight turnover of other countries

Source: Calculated by the authors based on Eurasian Economic Commission's data URL: <https://eec.eaeunion.org/en/news/statistics/> (accessed September 15, 2025)

The real-world manifestation of this logistical pivot is captured by the evolution of key corridors, such as Moscow-Yerevan. An analysis of this route reveals a classic market response to a supply shock: following an initial period of disruption, a sharp recovery ensued within two months, characterized by a steep surge in both the volume of loads and the average tariff, which peaked by March 2024 (Diagram 5).

Diagram 5
Moscow–Yerevan Rates, RUB per km, VAT included



Source: Developed by the authors based on ATI.SU Freight Exchange's data URL: <https://ati.su/> (accessed October 1, 2025)

This price spike signals the newfound strategic importance and initial congestion on this alternative pathway. The subsequent stabilization of rates indicates a market normalization as capacity adjusted, solidifying Armenia's role as a pivotal logistics hub. This "hub effect" is further corroborated by long-term data, which shows a sharp initial surge in Armenia's freight turnover in 2022 (109.6%), followed by a subsequent decline as markets optimized flows. Thus, the logistical landscape was not merely disrupted but

fundamentally reshaped, facilitating the trade redistribution by creating new, sanction-resistant supply chain pathways.

Divergent National Adaptation Strategies, Their Trade-Offs, and the Emerging Lessons

The dramatic reconfiguration of trade and logistics was facilitated by the distinct adaptation strategies employed by each EAEU member state. The sanctions shock forced a rapid re-evaluation of economic priorities, where each chosen path involved a calculated balance of short-term gains against long-term risks and vulnerabilities. The table (Table 6) below systematizes these divergent strategies and their inherent trade-offs.

Table 6
Key Adaptation Strategies of EAEU Countries (2021-2024)

Country	Armenia	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russia
Core Strategy	Leverage EAEU status for trade with Russia, attract relocated companies, IT development	Maintain access to the Russian market, find alternative partners	Diversification, multi-vector policy, East-West balance	Re-export, regional hub between China-EAEU-South/Central Asia	Import substitution and pivot to the East
Trade Diversification	Russia (main), EAEU, US, EU	Russia (main), China, CIS, Asia	China, Russia, EU, Central Asia, Turkey, Persian Gulf	Russia (main), China, EAEU, Central Asia	China, India, Turkey, Middle East, Africa, Latin America
Domestic Production Support	IT sector support, FDI attraction, tourism development, export promotion	State industrial support, import substitution, SME assistance, export promotion	SME support, FDI attraction, manufacturing development, agriculture, IT sector	Industrialization, export agriculture, tourism	Subsidies, preferential loans, deregulation, innovation support, SEZs
Financial Measures	Liberalization, FDI attraction, financial sector development, exporter support	Russian ruble in mutual trade, currency restrictions, exporter support, financial market stabilization	Floating exchange rate, financial sector strengthening, cashless payments promotion	Migrant remittances, Russian ruble in mutual settlements	National currencies in settlements, alternative payment systems (SPFS), capital controls
EAEU Cooperation	Participation in EAEU infrastructure/trade projects, leveraging membership benefits	Deeper integration with Russia, joint industrial/energy projects, economic policy coordination	Transport corridor development, EAEU diversification projects, transit cargo attraction	Participation in EAEU infrastructure/trade projects, investment attraction	Deepening EAEU integration, developing transport corridors (North-South, East-West), industrial policy coordination

Risks and Challenges	Geopolitical risks, secondary sanctions risk	Dependence on the Russian economy, limited financial resources, technological backwardness, political risks, secondary sanctions	Secondary sanctions risk, raw material export dependence, infrastructure modernization needs	Dependence on the Russian economy and remittances, political instability risks	Technological dependence, logistics issues, inflation, skilled labor shortage, supply chain restructuring challenges
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Source: Developed by the authors

This analysis of national strategies reveals that the process of choosing an adaptation path is inherently complex, involving significant trade-offs (the foregoing of one option to achieve the benefits of another) as well as synergies (the greater aggregate effect achieved by combining strategies). For instance, Russia's pivot and import substitution created synergies for the entire union by deepening industrial cooperation, but came with the trade-off of a persistent technological lag.

Furthermore, the EAEU's experience provides critical insights for understanding economic statecraft and regionalism in a fragmenting world. First, it underscores the immense value of pre-existing regional institutions, which do not merely facilitate trade during stable periods but can be activated as vital shock absorbers during crises. The EAEU's institutional framework, particularly its Common Economic Space with duty-free trade and unified regulations, provided a ready-made platform that allowed goods to be seamlessly rerouted between member states. This pre-established set of rules provided the necessary trust and operational mechanisms for a rapid, collective response, ultimately transforming the bloc from a trade agreement into a genuine economic buffer.

Second, the sanctions shock redefined the strategic role of smaller economies within the regional bloc. Countries such as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan were swiftly transformed from peripheral players into crucial logistical hubs and trade conduits. This demonstrates that in an era of reconfiguring supply chains, connectivity and strategic location can surpass raw economic mass in importance, granting smaller states significant leverage and newfound agency within their regional groups.

Finally, the case of the EAEU strongly suggests that comprehensive sanctions used as a blunt instrument of foreign policy can yield diminishing and even counterproductive returns. Instead of achieving the intended isolation of the target economy, the pressure stimulated the creation of alternative, sanction-resistant ecosystems within the union. This included the rapid development of alternative financial systems using national currencies and the forging of new internal trade routes. Consequently, such measures are less likely to cripple a target that is embedded in a cohesive regional group and are more likely to catalyze the very thing they aim to prevent: the formation of a more self-reliant, albeit reconfigured, economic space.

Discussion

Thus, the empirical analysis provides robust evidence that directly corresponds to the three central theses advanced in the introduction, demonstrating how the sanctions shock has fundamentally transformed the EAEU.

1. Confirmation of trade and logistics reconfiguration. The documented, stark divergence in trade performance – where Russia and Belarus contracted while Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan experienced explosive export growth – is the primary evidence supporting the first thesis. This was not a uniform decline but a fundamental reconfiguration of trade flows, with smaller member states becoming crucial conduits. This shift was physically enabled by a parallel logistical pivot, evidenced by the 28% surge in road freight turnover and the emergence of new strategic corridors like Moscow-Yerevan. The sanctions shock clearly served as the catalyst for this dual restructuring of commercial and supply chain pathways within the Union.

2. Validation of deepened internal asymmetries. The findings conclusively demonstrate that the reconfiguration process was inherently unequal, thereby confirming the second thesis on increased asymmetry. The EAEU effectively bifurcated into a core of directly sanctioned economies (Russia, Belarus) and a periphery of adaptive hubs (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan). This divergence in economic trajectories, quantified in Table 1, reveals how an external shock targeted at one member state systematically amplified pre-existing structural disparities, creating a new, more complex internal hierarchy within the bloc.

3. Demonstration of activated integrative potentials. Finally, the analysis confirms that the crisis activated latent integrative potentials, transforming the EAEU from a declaratory project into a practical buffer. The pre-existing institutional architecture – specifically the Common Economic Space with its duty-free trade and unified regulations – provided the essential platform for seamless trade rerouting. Furthermore, the operationalization of mechanisms for parallel imports and the accelerated shift to national currency settlements show how previously underutilized integrative tools were activated for collective adaptation. This demonstrates the Union's evolution into a functional mechanism for crisis management.

Thus, the cumulative evidence from trade, logistics, and institutional analysis consistently and powerfully affirms the article's three foundational arguments.

However, while this study establishes a strong associative relationship between the imposition of sanctions and the subsequent reconfiguration of EAEU trade and logistics, it is crucial to note that these observed changes cannot be attributed to sanctions as a sole cause. The period 2021-2024 was also marked by ongoing post-pandemic supply chain adjustments and global inflationary trends, which may have concurrently influenced economic outcomes within the bloc. The sanctions are thus best interpreted as a powerful catalyst that accelerated pre-existing trends and triggered specific adaptation mechanisms within the EAEU's institutional framework.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This study demonstrates that the unprecedented sanctions pressure on Russia, rather than triggering the disintegration of the Eurasian Economic Union, acted as a powerful catalyst for its profound and paradoxical transformation. The empirical evidence reveals a clear narrative: the initial shock was rapidly absorbed by the bloc's internal market, leading not to collapse but to a significant reconfiguration of intra-regional trade and logistics. The resilience of the EAEU was evidenced by the robust recovery and growth of mutual trade, which served as a critical stabilizing mechanism, offsetting the negative external shock.

However, this aggregate stability masked a fundamental internal shift, characterized by a stark divergence in the economic trajectories of member states and a strategic pivot in supply chains, primarily enabled by the flexibility of road transport and the emergence of new logistical hubs like Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Crucially, this adaptation had a profound structural dimension: the bloc's import basket consolidated around critical machinery and consumer goods, while its export profile underwent a marked shift towards a commodity-based economy, with mineral fuels expanding to over 60% of total exports, revealing a growing long-term vulnerability despite short-term resilience.

The capacity for such a rapid adaptation was not spontaneous but was fundamentally underpinned by the EAEU's pre-existing institutional architecture. The Common Economic Space, with its duty-free trade and unified regulations, provided a ready-made platform for the seamless rerouting of goods and intra-union import substitution. Furthermore, the institutional legitimization of parallel imports and the accelerated shift to alternative financial systems and national currencies formed a vital financial buffer. This experience underscores a critical lesson: regional institutions are not merely fair-weather frameworks but can become indispensable tools for crisis management, providing the trust, rules, and mechanisms for a collective response under extreme duress.

Ultimately, the EAEU's experience offers broader implications for the global community. It challenges the efficacy of comprehensive sanctions as a blunt instrument of foreign policy, demonstrating that their primary effect may be not to cripple but to stimulate the creation of alternative, more self-reliant economic ecosystems within regional blocs. Concurrently, it redefines the geopolitical agency of small economies, which can leverage their connectivity to become pivotal hubs in reconfigured supply chains. Looking forward, the Union's main challenge lies in navigating the vulnerabilities unveiled by this new phase of integration – such as technological lag, logistical bottlenecks, structural dependence on raw material exports, and collective dependence on China. The future stability of the EAEU will, therefore, hinge on its ability to transition from reactive adaptation to a proactive strategy for sustainable and balanced development.

Policy Implications

The EAEU's experience offers several critical lessons for policymakers. For regional blocs, the primary implication is the necessity of proactive institutional deepening; investing in robust common markets, unified technical regulations, and integrated payment systems before a crisis strikes transforms a trade agreement into a vital economic buffer, enhancing collective resilience. For smaller economies within such unions, the lesson is to strategically leverage connectivity by investing in logistics infrastructure and streamlining customs to position themselves as indispensable hubs, thereby converting geographic location into economic and political agency. Finally, for sanctioning bodies, the key takeaway is the law of diminishing returns; comprehensive sanctions against a large economy embedded in a regional bloc are more likely to catalyze the creation of alternative, sanction-resistant ecosystems within the bloc than to achieve strategic isolation, a calculation that must be factored into policy design.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has certain limitations, primarily the challenge of definitively isolating the impact of sanctions from other concurrent global factors, such as post-pandemic supply

chain adjustments and global inflationary trends, which also influenced trade patterns during the 2021-2024 period. Furthermore, the reliance on national and EAEU-level trade data, while official, may not fully capture the granularity of firm-level adaptation and shadow economic activities. These limitations point toward promising avenues for future research. Subsequent studies could employ firm-level surveys and customs record analysis to uncover the microeconomic mechanisms of supply chain reorientation. A comparative analysis with other regional organizations facing external shocks could help distinguish the EAEU's unique adaptive features from general patterns of integration resilience. Finally, longitudinal research is crucial to assess the long-term sustainability of the new trade patterns and the Union's ability to manage its growing collective dependencies, particularly on China.

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