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French exporters face uncertainty as United States threatens steep tariffs on wine

Rising trade tensions put billions in exports at risk as EU and US struggle to reach agreement before June deadline

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French exporters are facing growing uncertainty as the United States threatens to impose 50% tariffs on key sectors such as wine, cosmetics, and aerospace. The warning comes after former President Donald Trump announced that, without progress in trade

negotiations with the European Union, these tariffs could take effect as soon as June 1. Laurent Saint-Martin, France's Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade, expressed deep concern in an interview published by La Tribune over the weekend. He said that for major export industries like wines and spirits, cosmetics, and aerospace, such tariffs would create an "untenable" situation in the long term.

The United States is a major market for French exports. In 2024, French exports to the U.S. were led by aerospace products at 9.1 billion euros (18.8% of total exports), beverages including wine at 4.1 billion euros (8.4%), and pharmaceuticals at 3.8 billion euros (7.9%), according to data from the French Ministry of Economy. The threat of new tariffs has raised alarms among French producers who rely heavily on American consumers.

Trade tensions between the U.S. and the EU have escalated in recent months. Since mid-March, the U.S. administration has imposed a series of tariffs: 25% on steel and aluminum, another 25% on automobiles, and 20% on other European products announced in April. While this last round of tariffs was suspended until July to allow for negotiations, a 10% tariff remains in place on most goods exported from the EU to the U.S.

The European Union is seeking a resolution through dialogue rather than confrontation. Maros Sefcovic, the European Commissioner for Trade who leads negotiations for the EU, stated on Friday that Europe is working "in good faith" toward a trade agreement based on "respect" rather than "threats." However, he acknowledged that all options remain open if talks fail.

Saint-Martin emphasized that retaliatory measures are under consideration within the EU but noted differences among member states regarding how to respond. He pointed out that each country's position depends on its own economic vulnerabilities and sensitivities related to specific export sectors.

The United States exports mainly software and communication services to Europe, while European exports to America are dominated by automobiles, machine tools, and transportation equipment. Saint-Martin warned that escalating tariffs would be damaging not only for Europe but also for the American economy.

As negotiations continue, French exporters are bracing for possible disruptions in their access to one of their largest markets. The outcome of these talks will have significant implications for transatlantic trade and could reshape economic relations between Europe and the United States in the coming months.