

Export barriers Perceived By the Entrepreneurs of a Country in Transition: The Case Of Tunisian SMEs

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Abstract: *The Perception Of Export Barriers Is Particularly Important And Was Identified By Several Studies As Essential Factor Of The Export Success Of The SME. An Exploratory Survey With Tunisian Exporters SME Allowed To Identify Which Barriers Exports Are Perceived By The Entrepreneurs.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurs, Export Barriers, SME, Country In Transition.*

I. Introduction

During The Last Three Decades And After The Remarkable Increase Of International Transactions, A Considerable Number Of Researchers In Marketing Has particularly Studied The Concept Of The Export Performance Of The Company. This Concept Was Defined By Cavusgil And Zou (1994) As The Degree To Which Are Achieved The Objectives Of The Company In The Export. In This Perspective, The Authors Consider That The Export Is A Very Advantageous Activity. In Fact, This Can Be Advantageous For The Financial Situation Of The Company, Its Competitive Position And Its Growth (Kuppusamy And Anantharaman, 2008). But Despite These Advantages, A Significant Number Of Small And Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME) Cannot Venturing Easily In The Overseas Markets And Prefers To Minimize The Risk Of Failure And Only Operate In The Internal Market (Leonidas And Al ., 2007). It Is In Fact The Case Of The SME in Countries In Transition Phase.

According To The Researchers In International Marketing, The Export Performance Of SMES Is Determined By Several Factors. Through These Factors, Appears The Importance Of The Role Played By The Entrepreneur. For That Purpose, The Perception Of The Entrepreneur Of The International Markets Is Identified As A Critical Success Factor For The Export Of SMEs According To Several Studies (Aaby And Slater, 1989; Walters and samiee,1990;Cavusgil and zou,1994;boyer,1994;Zou and stan,1998). Most of The Previous Researches Were However Realized In The Developed Countries. The Objective Of Our Research Is To Identify The Brakes Encountered By The Exporting Companies In Order To Reflect the Means To Remedy Them In A Particular Context, That Of The Country In Transition. Also, It Allows Us To Analyze The Links Which Exist Between The Perception of Different Barriers In The Export.

To Achieve These Objectives, We Retain The Example Of Tunisian Industrial Companies. In Fact, In The Past Researches, We Notice That The Number Of The Works Realized In Developed Countries Is Strongly Significant. Our Study Was Driven In A Very Distinctive Frame: Tunisia, An Emerging Country In A Phase Of Transition. Being The First One To Sign A free Trade Agreement With The European Union (EU) In 1995 And Being A Pioneer In The Adoption Of Policies Which Favor Its Progressive Integration In The Global Economy, Tunisia has a strategic geographical position in the Mediterranean, Enjoy support of the EU and the international community which encourage companies to export. In The Framework Of This Study, We Are Going To Present In A First Part The Conceptual Framework Of The Research. In A Second Part, We Will Present And Discuss The Results Of Our Empirical Study To Finally Conclude The Managerial Implications Arising Therefrom.

II. Barriers Determining The Decision To Export

In this part, it is advisable to present the research works which have been conducted on the perception of barriers to export. On the international Market, A Number Of Factors prevent The Companies To Export. These Factors are Called Barriers To Export. Leonidou (1995a, 2004) Defined Export Barriers "As Structural, Operational, Attitudinal Constraints Or Other Which Put Obstacle To The Capacity Of The Company To Begin, Develop Or Support The Exports". A Number Of Export Barriers Was Identified By Bilkey And Tesar (1977) By Building Their Theory Of The Process Of Internationalization. These Barriers Are: The Difficulty To Understand The Commercial Practices, The Differences Of Consumer Habits, Norms And Standards Of Quality, The Difficulty Of finding good representatives On The Overseas Market And The Difficulty of the cashing foreign payments. In The Australian Context, Barrett And Wilkinson (1985) Find Nineteen export Barriers For SMES. These Authors Identify That The Most Important Both Brakes Are The Offer Of A

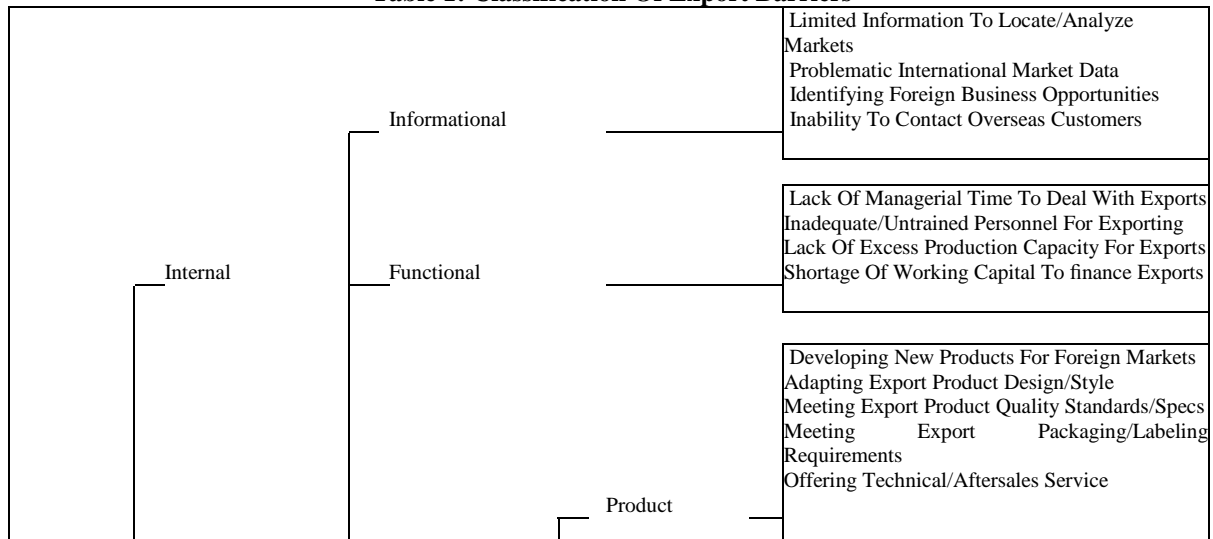
Competitive Price And The Cost Of Transport. This Is Explained By The Geographical Position Of Australia. These Two Barriers Are Followed By The Lack Of Information On The Overseas Markets And The Lack Of Continuity Of The Foreign Commands.

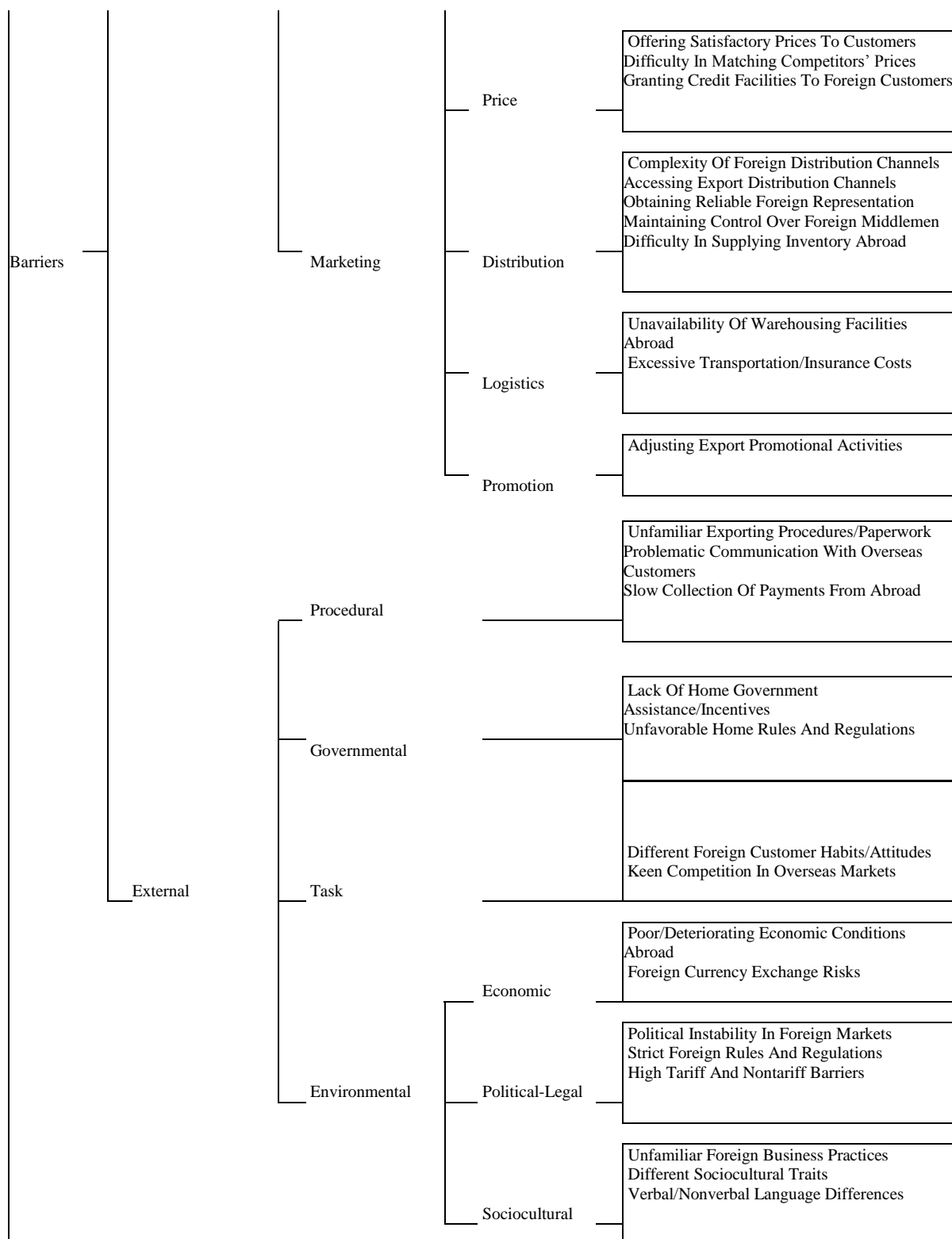
Two Other Studies Conducted By Leonidou (1995b, 2000) On Export Barriers Of The SMEs in Cyprus. This Author Identified In The First Study That The Most Important Reason For Which The SME Does Not Want To Export Is The Strong Competition On The Overseas Markets Followed By The Difficulty To Provide A Competitive Price On The Overseas Markets, The Lack Of Information Concerning The Overseas Market, The Lack Of Personnel For The Specific Management Of Export And The High Risks/Costs Were Involved By The Sale Abroad. In The Second Study, The Author Noticed That The Same Difficulties Were Evoked in the first one: Strong competition and price. Crick (2004) Realized A Survey With British SMEs And Identified That Five Brakes In The Export Perceived By The Leaders Of Companies And Who Come At The Top Of The Answers Of Managers Are The High Risks/Costs Bound to The Export, The Incapacity To Offer A Competitive Price, The Absence Of The Governmental Support, Difficulties Or Slowness In The Collection Of Claims abroad and the difficulties to implant adequate representations there. In France, The First Brake Evoked By The Managers Of The SMEs Is The Risk Perceived abroad. The French Companies Hesitate To Start Because They Know Badly The Market, The Consumers, The Culture, The Mass Distribution Of Other Foreign Markets. The Language Barrier Seems Resolute, This Obstacle Is Barely Mentioned.

Another Brake Identified By French Companies Is The Lack Of Human Resources. Thus, A Large Number Of Researchers Confirmed The Importance Of The Staff Dedicated To Export To Consolidate And Develop An Activity Export. Also, The Lack Of Financial Resources Prevents Companies To Export Due To The Important Investments Necessary To Start A Business To Export.

There Is No Agreement On A Standard Classification Of Barriers. Furthermore, If Certain Barriers Seem Important For The View Of Certain Studies, They Fall In The Middle Or Even At The Lowest Level On Other Fields. This Disagreement Can Be Explained By The Importance Of The Context And The Environment In which operate the SME exporters. To Classify The Export Barriers, Leonidou (1995a And B, 2004) Based Himself On Their Origins And Grouped Them In Four Categories. Indeed, These Authors Raise The Existence Of The Internal And External Barriers (Table 1).The Company's Resources Are Considered As Internal/Domestic Barriers While His Difficulties In Mastering The Change Of Environment Related Export Are Classified As Internal/Foreign Barriers. On The Other Hand The External Barriers Escape The Control Of The Company. However, Leonidou (1995b) Was Not Able To Observe The Difference Between These Groups To Confirm Which Would Have A More Important Impact On The Behavior In The Export. The Classification Proposed By This Author "Reduced The Role Of The Environment Of The Country Of Origin To The Only Government Assistance Policy" (Le, Q. And Luong, Mr. H., 2009). Thus, Several Other Barriers Depend Widely On The Environment Of The Country Of Origin Such As The Difficulties Related To Access To International Information, Transport Infrastructures, Financing Of The Export, Guarantee Of The Claims, Recruitment of staff trained in the export procedures, Etc. The Weight Of This Environment Must Be Particularly Sensitive For SMEs Of Countries In Transition And The internal barriers are also very important for it. Arteaga-Ortiz And Fernandez-Ortiz (2008) Proposed Another Typology Of Export Barriers After A Survey realized With Spanish SME. They Grouped them In Four Categories: Barriers Relating to Means, Barriers Relating To Knowledge, Barriers Relating To The Process And Exogenous Barriers. These Two Authors Were Able To Confirm This Measurement Scale of Barriers.

Table 1: Classification Of Export Barriers





Source: Leonidas C. Leonidou (2004), P283.

III. Context Of Countries In Transition

The Researches Dedicated To The Export Performance Of The SME are Today Abundant. They Are Generally Realized In The Context Of Developed Countries (Cook, 2001; Luong, 2010) Much More Rarely In The Case Of Emerging Or transition Countries. These Countries Present A Specific Context As Compared With Developed Countries. Fourcade And Michkevitch (2004) Defined The Country In Transition "As Those Who Are Transforming Their Mode Of Economic Organization, Which Is Previously Centralised, Based on Planning, On Large Companies And State Conglomerates, Turns Gradually To A More Open And Competitive Market

Economy". Private Enterprises And SMEs, In Particular, Must In Future Play An Essential Role. According To Avilova (1992), The Weight Of The SMEs In Production Or Employment In These Countries Is Characterized By Its Weakness. This Is Due To The Development Of The Planned Economies For Years Of Forced Industrialization And In A Context Where The State Property Was Dominant. Also, The Economic System Of These Countries Is Characterized By The Dominance Of Monopolies And Over-Concentration Of The Market. In Spite Of The Current economic Evolution In These Countries, We Cannot Assert Of The Importance Of The Role That SMEs Can Play To Transmit The Country To The Market Economy. The Present Survey is Interested In A Particular Context Of An Emerging Country In Transition: Tunisia. Indeed, Several Reasons Justify The Choice Of Tunisia As A Country Of Study. Indeed, The Export Is One Of The Pillars Of The Tunisian Economy. It Contributes To 46,4% Of The GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Every Year, The Country Knows An Average Evolution Of Exports Of 13,1% (CEPEX, 2010). Consequently, 130 New Exporting Companies Appeared In The Industrial Sector (CEPEX, 2010). So, SME Are More And More Numerous And Represent Today Approximately 95 % Of The Tunisian Companies. These Are Found More In The Sectors Of Light Industry (Textiles, Clothing, Etc.) And Crafts that Use Many Workforce.

IV. Research Methodology

4.1 Procedure of Data Collection

The Collection Of Particular Information Requires An Exploratory Investigation To Specify How The Leaders Of Tunisian exporting SME Perceive The Export Barriers. The Survey took Place For Two Months, From April 20th To June 20th, 2013. The Criterion Of SME which Was Retained Is That Defined By The Tunisian Government, That Is, Less Than 200 Permanent Employees. A Tunisian SME Is Defined By The Agency Of Promotion Of Industry (2012) As A Business Employing Between 10 And 200 Employees. The Portal of The Tunisian Industry (<http://www.tunisieindustrie.nat.tn>) Was Used To Establish The List Of Companies to be questioned. Our Survey Was Realized In The Form Of A Questionnaire Sent By Mail To The Leaders Of SMEs Who Agreed To Offer Their Help To The Realization Of This Study. The Questionnaire Was Sent To Approximately 250 Tunisian Exporting Companies And 92 Answers Were Obtained. The Answer rate (37%) Is Completely Satisfactory And Much Upper To The Average Rate (29%) Of The Studies Conducted On This Subject (Leonidou, 2004). Incomplete Questionnaires And Having More Than 200 Employees (Which Are In Number Of 6) Are Eliminated. The Studied Field Thus Concerns 85 Complete Answers.

4.2 Variable Measurement

From The Literature Review, We Established a List Of 20 Export Barriers. The Used Importance Scale Is 4 Points (1 = Unimportant, 2 = Little Important, 3 = Important And 4 = Very Important) To Measure The Perception of Each Factor. The Results concerning The Perception of Export Barriers Identified By The Tunisian Exporters are presented in the following paragraph.

V. Results And Analyses

5.1 Description Of The Sample

To Better Interpret The Statistical Results, It Is Advisable To Describe The Characteristics Of Companies Interviewed (See Table 2).

Table 2: Characteristics Of The Sample

Characteristics	Percentage
Business Sector	18% Mechanics And Electronics (IME)
	58% Textile And Clothing (ITC)
	24% Agri-Food (AF)
Export Experience	32 % Exporting To More Than 5 Countries
	54% Have More Than 10 Years Export Experience

The IME Companies Constitute 18% Of Our Sample. The Companies Of The ITC Sector Constitute 58% And The Rest Contains Companies Of The IAA. Concerning The Export Experience, 32% Of The Interviewed Companies Export To More Than Five Countries. However, 54% Of Companies Who Have More Than 10 Years export experience.

5.2 Analysis Of Export Barriers

By Making Reference To The Classification Of Leonidou (2000), We Presented Twenty Barriers In The Order Of Importance. Tunisian Exporters SME Perceive that The Lack Of Information Concerning The Overseas Markets As The Most Important Barrier (Table 3). The Results Of The Study Carried Out By Leonidou (2000) With Cypriot SMEs Show That This Barrier Is Classified In 5th Place. This Barrier Is Perceived by The Smallest SME And Can Be Explained By The Insufficiency Of The Environment Of The Country Of Origin Because The Access To This Information Is Facilitated By The Presence Of Specialist Suppliers. The Second Barrier Is The Level Of Competition In Overseas Markets. This Barrier Is Perceived As

Higher On The Overseas Market Than On The Local Market And This Is Explained By The Effect Of The Globalization Which Increases Competition On International Markets. The Tunisians SMEs Perceive This Competition as A Threat Because They Are Just Beginning To Get Used To The Market Economy And The International Market Remains For Them New And Unknown. Later These Two Barriers Come Successively, Lack Of Specialized Personnel (3rd Place) And Lack Of Working Capital For Export (4th Place) Which Becomes More Sensitive In Cases Where The Duration Of The International Business cycle Will Be Longer. In The Same Context, The Banking System Of The Country Of Origin Must Create Specific Banking Products To Satisfy The Need For Financing Of SME exporters. The Lack Of Specialist Personnel Shows That The Tunisian SMEs lack Skilled Export Officers. Therefore, The System Of Training as The Banking System In The Transition Economies must Meet The Needs Of Exporting SMES In The Private Sector. Two Other Barriers Considered Important By Most Of The Leaders And Who Come From The Specific Context Of Countries Foreigners-Customers: The Difficulty Of Finding Adequate Partners In The Customer Market And The Customs Barriers Which Handicap The Tunisian SMEs in Certain Markets. The First Step For These Companies Is To Enter These Markets; This Is Why They Attach A Big Importance To These Barriers.

Table 3: Rank Order Of Export Barriers

Rank	Export Barriers	Average	Proportion Of Answers "Important" Or "Very Important"	Rank By Leonidou (2000)
1	Lack Of Information On Foreign Markets	3,98	93,4%	5
2	Strong Competition On Foreign Markets	3,87	93,1%	1
3	Lack Of Personnel Specialized In Export	3,83	87%	16
4	Lack Of Capital To Finance The Export	3,78	86,2%	8
5	Difficulty In Finding A Good Representatives Abroad	3,71	85,9%	13
6	Customs Or Non-Tariff Barriers	3,67	85,4%	9
7	Difficulty Understanding The Business Practices	3,64	85,1%	17
8	Lack Support Of The Government	3,61	84,8%	4
9	Difficulty Facing The Export Documents/Procedures	3,57	84,3%	19
10	Problems Of Transport/Infrastructures	3,53	83,6%	10
11	Difference In Norms And Standards Of The Product Abroad	2,77	83,2%	15
12	Difference Of Foreign Consumer Habits	2,72	82,7%	12
13	Restrictive Foreign regulations	2,68	73,5%	11
14	Risk/Cost High For Sale Abroad	2,66	72,9%	7
15	Difficult To Be Competitive (Price) Abroad	2,66	72,6%	2
16	Difficulty Of International Communication	1,93	57,2%	18
17	Difficult To Assure A ASS (After-Sales Service) Abroad	1,87	48,9%	20
18	Risk Of Political Instability Abroad	1,76	41,7%	6
19	Unstable economic Situation Abroad	1,68	36,3%	3
20	Unfavorable Exchange Rate	1,43	24,6%	14

Three Other Barriers (7th, 8th And 9th Class) Was Perceived As Important By Many Leaders Of SMEs: The Difficulty To Understand The Foreign Commercial Practices, The Weakness Of Governmental Assistance And The Difficulties Facing Treatment Of Documents And Procedures For Export. Indeed, The Difficulty To Understand Foreign Business Practices Is The Cause Of A Deficit Of Information On This Point. Also, The Tunisian Exporters Consider That The Weakness Of The Assistance Of The State Is A Major Handicap Against Their Activities Abroad. Finally, These Exporters Declared Having Had Difficulties In The Treatment Of Documents And Procedures Related To The Export Of Their Products And This Reflects The Weight Of Bureaucracy that remains a reality in Tunisia. Other Barriers Are Little Important According To The Tunisian SMEs. These Results Oppose Those Found By Leonidou (2000) In The Context Of The SMEs Of Cyprus. This Means That The Context Has An Impact On Search Results.

By Studying The Determinant Of The Perception Of Export Barriers Of SMEs, We Notice That The Size Of The Company Does Not Have A Significant Effect On This Perception. On The Other Hand, The Business sector plays a key role in the perception of export barriers of SMEs. Small Companies Specialized In International Trade Are More Sensitive To The Problems Encountered In Foreign Markets As The Difficulties In ASS (After-Sales Service) (F=29,23; P=0,000), The Political Risk (F=34,58; P=0,000), The Restrictive Foreign Regulations (F=35,25; P=0,000), The Difficulties In International Communication (F=9,18; P=0,006),

The Worrying Economic Situation Of Foreign Countries (F=22,14; P=0,000) And The Necessity Of Adapting Products to the norms and foreign standards (F=9,85;P=0,004). The Seniority In Export Influence The Lack Of Information Perceived By The Managers On The Overseas Markets (F=6,22; P=0,008). Indeed, The Start-Up Exporting Companies (With An Experience In The Export From 1 To 2 Years) Encounter More Difficulties Than The More Experienced Exporters (5 Years Or More). Thus, The Number Of Countries-Markets Influences On The Perception Of Five Barriers In The Export. For This Purpose, SMEs, Whose Export Markets Are More Varied, Are More Sensitive To The Five Following Barriers: Difficulties To Know The Habits Of Foreign Consumers (F=24,66; P=0,000), Restrictive Foreign Regulations (F=6,51; P=0,007), Unfavorable Exchange Rate (F=6,45; P=0,004), Lack Of Bearing Bottom (F=6,52; P=0,005) And Difficulties To Assuring The ASS (After-Sales service) (F=24,65;P=0,000). SME who Export Via An Intermediary (F=11,34; P=0,002) And Who do Not Make Market Study For The Export (F=21,42; P=0,000) Is More Sensitive than The Other Companies To The Lack Of Competent Personnel For Export. This Lack Of Means And Skills Brings SMEs to Go Through An Intermediary And That They Feel As brake. SME Who Make Market Studies For The Export Observe Barriers Which Are More Specific To Them. Indeed, They Are More Conscious Of Economic Risks Of The Overseas Market (F=11,14; P=0,002) And Risks Of Political Instability (F=8,27; P=0,006). On The Contrary, They Master Better The Used Commercial Practices Abroad (F=7,58; P=0,008) As Well As The Communication With Foreign Partners (F=8,28; P=0,006).

VI. Conclusion

The Export Development Represents A Significant Investment Which Became More And More Essential To The Sustainability Of Companies. Numerous Searches In International Marketing Focused A Growing Interest About The Exporting Companies During These Last Years. In This Context, This Present Work Has For Main Objective To Identify Brakes Encountered By The Exporting Companies To Explore Ways To Address Them In a particular context, That of the country in transition. Most Previous Researches Handled A Single Business Sector. In This Research, The Empirical Study Concerns Three Industrial Sectors And Allows To Study The Specificities of the country in transition, Namely the Tunisia. This Exploratory Investigation Allows To Show That The Export Barriers Classification Depends On The Investigated Field And The Characteristics Appropriate To Countries In Transition. She Offered Us An Overview Of The Barriers Perceived By Tunisian Exporters SME. In The First Place, The Lack Of Information On The Overseas Markets Is A Difficulty Encountered By These Companies. This Difficulty Is Rarely Mentioned Previously By SMEs Investigated In Diverse Country. This Problem Is Caused By The Unfinished Transition Of Tunisia Towards The Market Economy Which Is In Progress There.

This Survey Reveals The Importance Of The Expectation Of SMEs Towards The Government Regarding Direct And Indirect Assistants. Government Export Support Programs Can Create Solutions To The Met Problems And Contribute To Minimize Export Barriers For Tunisians SME. Supports For The Daily Management Of The Export Would Be Very Useful For Them, As A Legal Support For The Implementation Of Contracts, An Assistance to Mutualize Logistic Circuits, Assistants For The Translation Of Technical Documents, Etc. Concerning The Nature And The Quality Of The Services Supplied By Various Participants in Support Organizations Abroad, Companies Expect Greater Specialization Of Experts In Term Of Products And Country, Because too general advice are not recoverable. This Survey Shows Finally That The Environment Of Companies Can Play A Role Determining In Their Development. The Environment Can Prevent The Development Of Companies But It Can Also Help Their Progress In The International Market. Finally, As Any Research Work, This Study Presents Some Limits. Indeed, Number Of The Interviewed Companies Is Relatively Reduced Which Prevents Us To Generalize The Results. Another Limitation That Should Be Mentioned Is Relative Among Countries In Transition Targeted In This Research. Due To Several Constraints (Financial, Stress Time, Etc.), We Focused On Only One Country In Transition Which Is Tunisia. We Therefore Propose In Future Research To Carry Out A Comparative Study Between Different Countries In Transition In Order To Highlight The Effects Of The Variables Of Macro-Environment On The Export Performance.

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