Until 1973, export restrictions did not pose a serious problem for international trade policy, which in the immediate post-World War II period was aimed almost exclusively at achieving free access to markets for the sale of finished goods. Then in 1973 several events occurred to change this situation. On 27 June 1973, the United States Administration decreed an export ban of limited duration on soybeans; and on 17 October of the same year several Arab States imposed an oil embargo on the United States. Following on from these two events, several other countries— for diverse reasons— imposed restrictions on the export of various raw materials and semi-manufactured goods (1), with the overall result that international trade policy became increasingly concerned with ensuring assured access to raw-material markets (2).

Success in adopting adequate measures for maintaining or regaining free access to supplies depends on having knowledge of which countries restrict exports of what goods, by means of what measures and with what goals in mind. It was for this reason that soon after the above-mentioned events of 1973, the Trade Committee of the Organisation of Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1974a), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (1976) and the United States Administration (1976) drew up lists of existing export restrictions. These surveys, not widely known because they have never been published, show that export restrictions are widely disseminated and extremely varied. In terms of the goals to which they aspire, the restrictions can be divided into three main groups:

(A) Export restrictions aimed at avoiding a temporary 'critical shortage'

(a) because of the associated actual or alleged danger to employment;
(b) because of the associated actual or alleged deterioration in personal income distribution.

(B) Export restrictions in pursuit of long-term economic policy goals with a view to:

(a) a lasting improvement in the terms of trade;
(b) ensuring the resource base for future generations in the country concerned,
(c) accelerating economic development through the promotion of processing industries.

(C) Export restrictions for the achievement of defence and foreign policy goals.

As a consequence of the policy of the Members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the most widely debated export restrictions have been those of the group B type. Following the measures adopted by the United States Administration after the outbreak of the Afghanistan crisis and the American boycott of Iran in retaliation against holding the members of the American Embassy in Teheran as hostage, export restrictions under category C have also received closer attention in recent times. Export restrictions falling under group A, on the other hand, have been the subject of very little debate, even though, as shown later, these restrictions are associated with dangers as regards 'Ordnungspolitik' which are not to be overlooked. Three aspects are at issue in the following discussion. Section A. deals with the dissemination of this type of export restriction and the justification by the individual governments. In Section B. it will be shown how such export restrictions violate an important - although in foreign trade textbooks often ignored - principle of the international trade order. According to this principle, international trade takes on the function of a risk-pool among states. Export restrictions mean that international trade cannot, or at least not fully, assume the function assigned to it. This violation of the risk-pool function and of the solidarity principle that had grown to be a part of the post-war international trade order is obviously not associated by the countries which control their exports with any disadvantage to themselves. Under certain circumstances, however, such disadvantages may arise. This aspect is dealt with in Section C.