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The Mineral Industry of Latvia

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Note: In this chapter, information for 2017 is followed by information for 2018.

In 2017, Latvia ranked fifth in global peat production, accounting for an estimated 6% of the world's production and 1.3% of the world's peat reserves (Brioche, 2019). Latvia produced mainly industrial minerals and mineral products, including cement, dolomite, gravel, sand, and crushed stone. Latvia was not a notable producer or consumer of energy. The country had no domestic petroleum or gas production and was entirely dependent on imported petroleum products.

Minerals in the National Economy

In 2017, Latvia's real gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 4.5%, which was the highest growth rate during the past 6 years. In 2017, the quantity of production in the mining and quarrying sector increased by 18%. Peat extraction increased by 16%, and quarrying of crushed stone increased by 33%. The nominal GDP was $29.0 billion[1] (EUR 26.8 billion) in 2017. The gross value added by the mining and quarrying sector in 2017 was $128 million (EUR 118 million), accounting for 0.5% of the total gross value added. In 2017, an average of 2,533 people—a decrease of 3% compared with that of 2016—were employed in the mining and quarrying sector (table 1; Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2018a; 2018b, p. 30; 2019b, c; 2020b).

Government Policies and Programs

Mineral and peat extraction in Latvia are regulated by the Law on Subterranean Depths, which was effective as of June 1996 and was amended as the Law on the Subsoil in 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2013. That implementation is under the jurisdiction of the State Environmental Service of the Republic of Latvia, which is a state institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia. The role of the State Environmental Service is to implement the legal framework for environmental and natural resources protection and for the control of radiation and nuclear safety and to ensure compliance with the pertinent laws and regulations (Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2013; Gāga, 2017).

In January 2015, pursuant to Section 13, paragraphs three and four of the Law on Environmental Impact Assessment (Cabinet Regulation No. 30) and amendments of December 2015 (Regulation No. 786) and December 2016 (Regulation No. 857), the Cabinet of the Republic of Latvia issued a new regulation titled Procedures by Which the State Environmental Service Shall Issue Technical Regulations for the Intended Activity. This regulation sets forth the requirements and procedures for amending technical regulations that determine the environmental protection requirements for mining activity (Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2015). Table 2 is a list of major mineral facilities in Latvia.

Production

In 2017, production of sand increased by 48%; stone, unspecified, by 34%; dolomite, by 33%; gravel, pebbles, shingle and flint, by 21%; and peat for horticultural and fuel uses, by 16%. Production of rolled steel decreased by 83%. Data on mineral production are in table 1.

Mineral Trade

Total exports were valued at $12.3 billion (EUR 11.4 billion), which was an increase of 10% compared with that of 2016. In 2017, exports to European Union (EU) countries increased by 6.9% to $8.8 billion (EUR 8.14 billion), which accounted for 71% of total exports. Exports to Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries increased by 25% to $1.6 billion (EUR 1.48 billion), or 13% of total exports. Latvia's top five export partners were Lithuania (which received 17% of Latvia's exports, by value), Estonia (12%), Russia (9.1%), Germany (7.3%), and Sweden (6.2%). Exports of base metals and articles of base metals increased by 22% to $1.11 billion (EUR 1.02 billion), or 8.9% of total exports in 2017 and included iron and steel ($462 million), articles of iron or steel ($399 million), and aluminum and aluminum articles ($104 million). Exports of mineral fuels increased by 2.0% to $668 million (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde 2018b, p. 37–39; 2020a).

Latvia's total imports in 2017 were valued at $15.2 billion (EUR 14.0 billion), which was an increase of 15% compared with that of 2016. In 2017, imports from EU countries increased by 11.6% to $11.8 billion (EUR 10.9 billion), or 77.9% of total imports; and those from CIS countries increased by 14.3% to $1.58 billion (EUR 1.46 billion), or 10.4% of total imports. Latvia's top five import partners were Lithuania (which provided 18.5% of Latvia's imports, by value), Germany (11.3%), Poland (9.1%), Estonia (7.7%), and Russia (7.4%). Imports of base metals and articles of base metals increased by 21% to $1.23 billion (EUR 1.13 billion), or 8.1% of total imports and included iron and steel ($549 million), articles of iron or steel ($353 million), and aluminum and aluminum articles ($97 million). Imports of mineral fuels increased by 15% to $1.53 billion, and that of fertilizer increased by 18% to $169 million (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde 2018b, p. 37–39; 2020a).

[1]Where necessary, values have been converted from euro area euros (EUR) to U.S. dollars (US$) at an annual average exchange rate of EUR0.923=US$1.00 for 2017.

Commodity Review

Metals

Iron and Steel.—KVV Liepajas Metalurgs, which was headquartered in the port city of Liepaja, was the only steel mill in the Baltic States that manufactured steel products; the mill produced 814,000 metric tons of steel products in 2013. KVV Liepajas Metalurgs announced that it had had financial difficulties, had halted production, and had declared insolvency in 2016 owing to high electricity prices and unfavorable market conditions. The company was to be sold at auction, but by yearend 2017, no official bids had been received (Eurofound, 2017; Baltic Course, The, 2018a).

Industrial Minerals

Cement.—CEMEX SIA, which was a wholly owned subsidiary of Mexican CEMEX S.A.B. de C.V., was the only cement producer in Latvia. The company operated the following facilities in Latvia: one cement plant with an installed capacity of 1.6 million metric tons per year; seven ready-mix concrete plants, two of which were temporarily inactive in 2017; and four aggregate quarries. The cement plant supplied cement for domestic consumption and also exported its products mainly to Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, and Sweden (CEMEX S.A.B. de C.V., 2018, p. 85).

Mineral Fuels and Related Materials

Peat.—Latvia has major peat deposits near Riga. The country's total peat resources were estimated to be 1.5 billion metric tons, of which 230 million metric tons (Mt) was suitable for fuel use. In 2001, the country stopped producing peat briquets. In 2016, more than 2,000 workers were thought to be employed in the peat extraction industry for most of the year, and up to 3,000 were employed during the peat harvesting season. In 2017, approximately 2 Mt of peat was produced (table 1; World Energy Council, 2013, p. 6.21; Krigere, 2017, p. 2).

MINERAL INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS IN 2018

In 2018, Latvia's real GDP growth increased by 4.8%; the nominal GDP was $34.4 billion[2] (EUR 29.2 billion). The gross value added by the mining and quarrying sector in 2018 was $147 million (EUR 125 million) and accounted for 0.5% of the total gross value added. In 2018, 2,788 people were employed in the mining and quarrying sector, which was an increase of 10% compared with that of 2017 (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2019a, b, c; 2020b).

Additional amendments to the Law on the Subsoil were made in April 2018 regarding the time limits for hydrocarbon study periods (up to 10 years), exploration for mineral resources (up to 5 years), extraction of mineral resources (up to 25 years), and extraction of peat (up to 75 years) (Latvijas Vēstnesis, 2018).

In 2018, Latvia's total exports were valued at $14.6 billion (EUR 12.3 billion), which was an increase of 7.2% compared with the value in 2017. Exports of base metals and articles of base metals increased in value by 14% to $1.36 billion (EUR1.15 billion) and included iron and steel ($600 million), articles of iron or steel ($478 million), and aluminum and aluminum articles ($138 million). Exports of mineral fuels increased by 11% to $806 million (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde 2019d, p. 51, 53; 2020a).

Latvia's total imports in 2018 were valued at $18.2 billion (EUR 15.5 billion), which was an increase of 10% compared with the value in 2017. The value of imports of base metals and articles of base metals in 2018 increased by 19% to $1.58 billion (EUR 1.34 billion) and included iron and steel ($784 million), articles of iron or steel ($436 million), and aluminum and aluminum articles ($118 million). Imports of mineral fuels increased by 17% to $1.95 billion, and those of fertilizer decreased by 5.6% to $173 million (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde 2019d, p. 51, 53, 2020a).

In 2018, production of construction sand increased by 57%. Production of dolomite decreased by 63% (table 1).

Because the Government's negotiation with the potential investors in the ailing steel firm KVV Liepajas Metalurgs failed, the Government split the company's assets to auction them off. Smart Stahl GmbH of Austria, which was fully owned by Cyprus-registered Segoa Venture Ltd., won the auction of the rolling mill in March 2018. A consortium including the United Kingdom's British Steel Corp. and Greybull Capital LLC and Estonia's Baltic Metal Holdings OU had repeatedly offered to purchase all assets of KVV Liepajas Metalurgs, but the offer which included a request that the Government rescind the results of previous auctions and cancel all future auctions, did not meet the Government of Latvia's requirements (Baltic Course, The, 2018a, b; Baltic Times, The, 2018; Xinhuanet, 2018).

In 2018, CEMEX's revenue in Latvia was $102 million (EUR 86.9 million), which was an 11.3% increase from that of 2017, and profit was $7.0 million (EUR 5.9 million), recovering from a loss in 2017. CEMEX sold more than 1 Mt of cement in 2018, and its export sales increased to 70% of revenue (Baltic Course, The, 2019).

In 2018, 1,700 workers were employed in peat extraction during most of the year; in all, about 2,200 were employed during the peat harvesting season. The number of workers employed during the peat harvesting season accounted for 61% of the total employees in the country's mining and quarrying sector (Krigere, 2018, p. 2).

Outlook

In 2019, the GDP growth rate is expected to slow to 3.1% as investment growth decreases from the exceptionally high growth rate of the previous 2 years. Latvia is likely to continue to be a leading producer of peat. If the United Kingdom and Estonia consortium moves forward with the purchase of KVV Liepajas Metalurgs steelworks as a whole, steel production in Latvia could resume (Baltic Times, The, 2018; International Monetary Fund, 2018; European Commission, 2019, p. 114–115).

[2]Where necessary, values have been converted from euro area euros (EUR) to U.S. dollars (US$) at an annual average exchange rate of EUR0.848=US$1.00 for 2018.

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TABLE 1
LATVIA: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES[1]

(Metric tons, gross weight, unless otherwise specified)

Commodity[2]	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
METALS					
Iron and steel, steel, products, rolled, bars	150,000	200,000	30,000 r, e	5,000 e	5,000 e
INDUSTRIAL MINERALS					
Cement, hydraulic[e]	1,100,000	1,100,000	1,000,000 r	1,000,000	1,000,000
Stone, sand, and gravel, construction:					
Sand and gravel:					
Gravel, pebbles, shingle, and flint	9,333,252	5,430,937	6,931,910	8,403,954	7,565,407
Sand	3,158,325	2,796,780	2,192,135	3,251,217	5,115,874
Stone, crushed:					
Dolomite, excluding calcined	800,785	1,000,000 e	615,761	821,787	305,341
Unspecified	1,393,464	1,461,820	1,547,520	2,069,297	2,065,048
MINERAL FUELS AND RELATED MATERIALS					
Peat, horticultural and fuel uses	1,688,681	1,804,522	1,762,454 r	2,040,330	2,218,284

[e]Estimated. [r]Revised.

[1]Table includes data available through October 23, 2019. All data are reported unless otherwise noted. Estimated data are rounded to no more than three significant digits.

[2]In addition to the commodities listed, clay, gypsum, industrial sand, and limestone may have been produced, but available information was inadequate to make reliable estimates of output.

TABLE 2
LATVIA: STRUCTURE OF THE MINERAL INDUSTRY IN 2018

(Thousand metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	Major operating companies and major equity owners	Location of main facility	Annual capacity
Cement	CEMEX SIA (CEMEX S.A.B. de C.V., 100%)	Plant in Broceni	1,600
Peat	Compaqpeat SIA	Balvi, Latgale region	240 [1]
Do.	Hawita Baltic, SIA	Production facilities in Balozi, Cevaine, and Emstek	400
Do.	Klasmann-Deilmann Latvia SIA	SIA LV-Zilaiskalns	600
Do.	Laflora, SIA	Nicgale and Drabini peat bogs	280
Do.	Zibu Ventspils, SIA	Krastkalni, Piesaule, and Purvaji peat bogs	80
Sand	Jēkabpils Dolomīts Ltd.	Saulejas, between Rezekne and Daugavplis; Peleci, Preili and Viski; Draudavas, Koknese and Madona	NA
Do.	Saulkalne S Ltd.	Grīnvaldi, Malpils District	NA
Steel, rolled products	Intersteel Latvija SIA	Rebar plant, Liepaja	NA
Do.	KVV Liepājas Metalurgs (KVV Group, 100%)	Mill plant, Liepaja[2]	850
Stone:			
Dolomite	DSG Karjeri Ltd.	Ape, Birzi, Levaca, Ropazi, and Saikava, Riga District	NA
Do.	Jēkabpils Dolomīts Ltd.	Birzi, Salas Novads	NA
Do.	do.	Leimani, Zasa; and Osukalni-Cekules, Kraslava	NA
Do.	Salenieku Dolomits Ltd.	Ritupes, Malnavas District	NA
Do.	Saulkalne S Ltd.	Kranciems, Tinuzi, Ikske District	NA
Other[3]	Salenieku Dolomits Ltd.	Kalngals, Ciblas District; and Cirma, Cirmas District	NA

Do., do. Ditto. NA Not available.

[1]Reported annual production capacity of 600,000 cubic meters was converted to metric tons of dry peat using a factor of 0.4 metric ton per cubic meter.

[2]Closed in 2018.

[3]Stone includes flint, gravel, pebbles, and shingle.