

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF

LATVIA

By Richard M. Levine

Latvia has a small mineral industry engaged primarily in mining peat and industrial minerals, including clays, dolomite, gypsum, limestone, sand for glass and brick production, and sand and gravel for construction uses. The country had a steel mill in Liepaja that had an estimated capacity to produce 550,000 metric tons per year (t/yr) of crude steel and almost 900,000 t/yr of rolled products. Owing to its ports on the Baltic Sea, Latvia's major role in the mineral sector has been that of a mineral transporter and, in particular, as a vital transport route for the export of Russian products, particularly oil, fertilizers, and other mineral products.

Latvia supplied about 85% of the raw materials for its cement industry. Raw material resources for cement production occur at fairly shallow depths, and the overburden is primarily glaciated material. In the case of dolomite, gypsum, and sand, surpluses potentially could be produced. All mining was from surface mines. Inadequate reclamation work at surface operations has created severe environmental problems.

In the mid-1980's, there were 3 clay mines producing clay

suitable for light concrete aggregates, 14 enterprises producing bricks and drainage pipes, 85 peat deposits under exploitation producing peat for fuel and agricultural uses, a gypsum mining and processing complex, a number of dolomite mines, and 22 sand and gravel pits. No new mineral production facilities appear to have been built since then, and a number of existing facilities may have been shut down.

Except for the output from these mineral industries, Latvia was dependent on imported fuels and other minerals for practically its entire mineral supply. Its open-hearth steel mill at Liepaja used imported metallic raw materials.

Latvia's location on the Baltic Sea enables the country to be of strategic importance in international trade across northern Europe. Latvia plans to increase its significance in the next century as a transport corridor to the states of the former Soviet Union.

For more extensive coverage of the mineral industry of Latvia, see the 1997 Minerals Yearbook, Volume III, Mineral Industries of Europe and Central Eurasia.

TABLE 1
LATVIA: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Cement	244,416	203,786	325,008	246,377	365,629
Gypsum	61,026	80,163	63,888	116,916	119,000 e/
Limestone	392,500	324,000	357,000	372,660	365,000 e/
Peat	646,500	454,700	552,100	554,700	171,700
Sand and gravel	75,553	151,073	324,567	90,551	135,000 e/
Steel, crude	332,000	279,000	293,000	464,529	470,764

e/ Estimated.

1/ Table includes estimates and data based on information available through October 30, 1999.