

BELGIUM

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The mineral processing industry continued in 2000 to be a significant contributor to the Belgian economy. The refining of copper, zinc, lead and minor metals as well as the production of steel, all from imported raw material and/or from the recycling of products, were the largest mineral industries in the country. Production of mineral commodities increased considerably in 2000.

Non-ferrous raw metal production in Belgium was significantly up compared with 1999. In 2000, Belgium produced considerably more copper (+11%), zinc (+21.9%) and lead (+7.2%) compared with 1999. Only the production of precious metals was down (-16.7%) due to adverse markets. Semi-fabricated metal production was equally higher as compared with 1999: +11.1% for aluminium, +23.5% for zinc and +6.1% for lead products.

Union Minière SA (UM), a world leader in the nonferrous metal sector, achieved an outstanding financial performance in 2000. The group generated a turnover of €3.8 billion, 21% up from €3.18 billion in 1999. Volume growth and increased market shares in most business areas, together with a more favourable US\$/euro exchange rate and strong platinum group metal prices led to UM's operating profit more than doubling, from €72.6 million to €150.0 million. The group's share of net consolidated profit increased by 96% from €69.3 million to €136.1 million.

UM's activities are centred on three main business groups: zinc, copper/precious metals and advanced materials. All business groups showed significantly improved results, and UM stepped up its growth efforts in 2000. Its international presence in zinc was reinforced through new acquisitions. UM acquired a 44.8% shareholding in Padaeng Industry in Thailand, southeast Asia's sole zinc producer, increased its shareholding in Unimet in Mexico to 100% and acquired the activities of Larvik Pigment. UM has now become the second largest zinc producer in the world, and the largest in terms of both value-added (zinc) products and zinc recycling. Further growth in advanced materials was secured through the acquisition of V&S Scientific (UK) and Tayside (UK). New investment programmes were launched world-wide and in all business areas. UM currently employs some 7,900 people.

The Belgian steel sector realised a total turnover of about €6.0 billion, an increase of not less than 19% as compared with 1999. The sector produced 11.6 Mt of crude steel in 2000, up from 10.9 Mt in 1999. The sector imported in 2000 some 12.6 Mt of iron ore

Belgian Metal Production ('000 t, except where stated)				
Metal	1998	1999	2000	2000-1999
Copper (refined and alloys)	483.0	518.5	575.3	+11.0%
Zinc	177.7	201.5	245.7	+21.9%
Zinc dust	39.5	41.8	46.3	+10.8%
Lead	113.6	135.6	145.4	+7.2%
Precious metals (t)	1.4	1.8	1.5	-16.7%
Others	17.1	17.2	17.8	+3.5%
Crude steel production	11,404	10,910	11,615	+6.5%
Semi-Fabricated Metal Production				
Aluminium	381.2	368.8	409.9	+11.1%
Copper	352.4	353.5	346.8	-1.9%
Zinc	19.4	18.7	23.1	+23.5%
Lead	43.0	39.4	41.8	+6.1%
Others	1.3	1.7	1.4	-17.6%

and 5.1 Mt of coal. It used 4.1 Mt of scrap. The sector employs some 21,000 people, about 1,000 more than in 1999. The main producers are Cockerill Sambre and Sidmar.

Belgium, specifically Antwerp, retained its position as world's largest diamond centre with a turnover in diamonds valued at about US\$25.6 billion.

Mining and quarrying is confined in Belgium to the extraction of industrial minerals and building materials. The sector is reported to extract annually some 60 Mt of raw mineral material, respectively more than 40 Mt of aggregates, 14 Mt of limestone and dolomite, 1.2 Mt of sandstone and 4.2 Mt of (crushed) rock. The sector continued in 2000 to provide direct employment to more than 3,500 people and to generate a turnover of over €550 million.