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2007 Minerals Yearbook

MALTA [ADVANCE RELEASE]

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The Mineral Industry of Malta

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In 2007, Malta remained an important transshipment center in the Mediterranean area. Its political and strategic importance has traditionally been linked to its geographic position in the center of the Mediterranean Sea and its natural deepwater harbor. The mineral-related economy of the country depended mainly on trade and the storage of crude oil in the Malta Freeport. The Malta Freeport offers modern transshipment facilities, which include storage, assembly, and processing operations, and an oil terminal with bunkering facilities. The transshipment and reexport of goods continued to be significant to the country's economy.

The Maltese Islands are composed of Tertiary limestone with some clays and small areas of surface Pleistocene deposits. The limestone is similar to the carbonates of the Ragusa region of Sicily and those of the Sirte Basin in Libya. The oldest formation is the Lower Coalline limestone, which is massive and consists of yellow biomicrites rich in benthonic foraminifera. It is overlain by the Lower, Middle, and Upper Globigerina formation of Miocene age, which is a pale-yellow limestone composed almost entirely of planktonic foramininifera. The Middle Globigerina formation provides the Maltese building stone (Sammut, 2003).

Production

The mineral industry, which consisted mainly of the quarrying of golden limestone (globigerina) and solar salt production, all for domestic consumption, was small (table 1). Malta depended almost completely on imports of raw materials and fuels.

Structure of the Mineral Industry

Numerous stone quarries operated on the islands of Gozo and Malta. Detailed information about these quarries was not available.

Commodity Review

In 2007, Mediterranean Oil and Gas plc of the United Kingdom announced that the seismic surveying vessel *MV Geomariner* of Seabird Exploration Inc. had begun about 1,000 kilometers of two-dimensional seismic work in Area 4, which is located offshore between Libya and Malta in an underexplored petroleum province. Area 4 covers an area of more than 5,000 square kilometers (km^2) with water depths of about 400 meters. The identified prospects were Hagar Qim, Luzzu, Skorba, and Tarxien. Although the area was considered to be an extension of the Libyan and Tunisian offshore hydrocarbon provinces, petroleum exploration efforts, so far, were unsuccessful. The survey was paid for by Leni Gas and Oil plc of the United Kingdom as part of a $5 million farm-in agreement that would earn Leni a 20% interest in Area 4 (Offshore Engineer, 2007).

The Government awarded Heritage Oil Corp. of Canada a license for natural gas and petroleum exploration in two offshore areas located south and southeast of Malta with a total area of 18,000 km^2. These areas were previously held by Nopec TGS of Norway. Heritage planned to spend about $22 million in the next 3 years with a focus on detailed seismic work and the drilling of one exploration well. If gas or oil is found, production would be shared between the Government and Heritage (Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections, 2008).

References Cited

Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections, 2008, Malta grants license to Heritage for oil exploration, Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections, January 7. (Accessed February 4, 2008, at http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/company/cne800373.htm.)

Sammut, C.I., 2003, Natural History of the Maltese Islands: Geocities.com. (Accessed October 2, 2008, at http://www.geocities.com/maltashells/NatHist.html.)

Offshore Engineer, 2007, Mediterranean exploration: Offshore Engineer, v. 67, no. 7, July, p. 10.

TABLE 1
MALTA: ESTIMATED PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES[1, 2]

(Cubic meters)

Commodity[3]	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Limestone	1,200,000	1,200,000	1,200,000	1,200,000	1,200,000
Salt	13,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000

[1]Estimated data are rounded to no more than three significant digits.

[2]Table includes data available through April 2008.

[3]In addition to the commodities listed, small amounts of cement, fertilizer, lime, and plaster are produced, but available information is inadequate to make reliable estimates of output.