Analysis of the 2009 figures

In 2009, the full impact of the economic crisis was felt. The total number of orders plummeted, the production capacity was revised downwards and a lot of companies decided to lay off employees. As Belgium is highly dependent on foreign markets, it was severely affected by the collapse of foreign demand. There was a serious decrease in exports, but imports tumbled even more and the trade balance remained positive.

Belgian exports went down significantly (-17.3%) in 2009, from EUR 320,806.0 million in 2008 to EUR 265,320.7 million in 2009.

Belgian imports also fell considerably. From 2008 to 2009, Belgian purchases abroad shrank by 20.4%, from EUR 317,044.0 million to EUR 252,357.1 million.

Belgium’s trade balance remained positive and even quadrupled in comparison to 2008. The trade surplus grew from EUR 3,762.0 million to EUR 12,963.6 million.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In million €</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Cover ratio (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>320,806.0</td>
<td>317,044.0</td>
<td>3,762.0</td>
<td>101.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>265,320.7</td>
<td>252,357.1</td>
<td>12,963.6</td>
<td>105.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%VAR 2009/2008</td>
<td>-17.3</td>
<td>-20.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2009, imports dropped at a faster pace than exports.

* Community concept/National concept

The results are presented according to the community concept that, contrary to the national concept, takes into consideration e.g. the import and export transactions carried out by VAT registered non-residents without the intervention of residents. Returned goods are also taken into account.

(Source: National Bank of Belgium*)
1. Exports

1.1. Geographical developments

1.1.1. Europe

When analyzing Belgian exports to the other European countries, a distinction is made between exports to the member countries of the European Union on the one hand and exports to the other European countries on the other hand.

The European Union is further subdivided in:

- Euro zone countries
- other EU member countries.

Belgian sales to the other countries of the European Union fell abruptly, from +3.6% in 2008 to -18.4% in 2009.

The growth rate of deliveries to the Euro zone countries as well as to the other EU member countries dropped significantly:

from +3.8% to -18.1% for the first group and
from +2.5% to -20.0% for the second group of countries.

*Euro zone countries*

Belgian sales to all countries of the Euro zone went down. This deterioration was significant and varied from -5.1% for Belgian exports to Cyprus to -33.2% for sales to Slovakia.

*Other EU member countries*

Negative rates were recorded on all markets. Exports to Latvia tumbled by no less than 37.3%. Deliveries to Romania and Bulgaria dropped by 32.1% and 34.1% respectively.
Variation in exports to the EU (in %)
Belgian exports to the other European countries outside the EU also contracted, from +0.9% in 2008 to -24.9% in 2009. Belgian exports slipped back on all markets.

1.1.2. Overseas exports

The figures for overseas exports were hardly better. Belgian exports to America and Asia kept dropping, while deliveries to the other two continents shrank and became negative:

- **Africa**: -8.2% in 2009 compared to +13.6% in 2008
- **America**: -11.3% in 2009 compared to -7.7% in 2008
- **Asia**: -4.5% in 2009 compared to -3.0% in 2008
- **Oceania**: -23.1% in 2009 compared to +25.6% in 2008
As regards Belgian deliveries to **Africa**, the only positive results were recorded in Libya (+33.9%), Algeria (+7.1%) and Cameroon (+0.8%). Exports to all other countries plunged, most notably to Senegal (-42.1%), Kenya (-23.1%) and Ivory Coast (-22.2%).

In **America**, Belgian exports scored negative results in all countries: Cuba (-45.6%), Argentina (-31.6%), Chile (-30.3%), Venezuela (-30.0%), Peru (-27.7%), Brazil (-20.9%), Colombia, (-18.4%), Mexico (-17.5%), the United States (-9.1%) and Canada (-4.7%).

Belgian sales to **Asia** increased in the following countries: China (+26.5%), Taiwan (+22.4%), Singapore (+10.7%), Japan (+5.5%), Hong Kong (+5.2%) and Pakistan (+2.6%). Exports to the other countries in Asia plunged. The most important collapses were recorded in Israel (-36.7%), in the UAE (-22.9%), in Thailand (-21.5%) and in South Korea (-18.4%).

As for Oceania, Belgian sales to Australia decreased by 3.0%, while deliveries to New-Zealand dropped by 20.5%.

### 1.1.3. Market shares

With more than three quarters of total Belgian exports, the European Union accounts for the bulk of Belgian exports. The share of the EU in Belgian exports dropped to 75.8% in 2009 (down from 77.1% in 2008).

The **Euro zone countries** (including Malta and Cyprus since January 1st, 2008) take 62.9% compared to 63.4% in 2008. As for the other countries of the EU, a small cutback has been recorded in the market share: 13.0% in 2009 compared to 13.7% in 2008.

As regards Belgium’s top four customers, slight variations are noted:

- exports to Germany fell slightly from 19.9% (2008) to 19.6% in 2009;
- France has seen its share rise from 17.4% in 2008 to 17.7% in 2009;
- the Netherlands showed a slight decrease, their share going down to 11.8% (from 12.3% in 2008);
- the share of exports to the United Kingdom stagnated (7.2%).

The share of the European countries outside the EU decreased: from 4.7% in 2008 to 4.2% in 2009.

In 2009 the share of the different continents in Belgium’s total exports evolved as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continent</th>
<th>2009 Share</th>
<th>2008 Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Belgium’s top 20 customers were the following countries in 2009:

Belgium’s top 20 customers (in million EUR)

- Germany
- France
- Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- USA
- Italy
- Spain
- Luxembourg
- India
- China
- Poland
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- Austria
- Czech Rep.
- Russian Fed.
- Japan
- Denmark
- Canada
With EUR 51,908.8 million, **Germany** remains Belgium’s main client, despite a plunge in exports of 18.1%. In 2008, sales had risen by 4.4% to EUR 63,370.0 million.

**France** was second in 2009 with sales of EUR 47,032.0 million, a 16.0% drop compared to 2008.

Last but not least, Belgian exports to the **Netherlands** also tumbled from EUR 39,223.4 million in 2008 to EUR 31,393.9 million, a cutback of 20.0%.

### 1.2. Sectoral developments

**Chemical products**, which account for more than a quarter of our exports (27.0%), increase their lead as the main export section, despite a slight decrease (-0.6%) in sales.

With an 11.5% share (12.1% in 2008), **machinery and equipment** ranked second. However, exports of this group of products dropped by 21.4%, after growing by 2.7% in 2008.

**Transport equipment** took the third place with 10.1% (11.1% in 2008), despite a plunge in sales of 24.9%.

**Plastics** ranked fourth with a share of 7.9% and a cutback in exports of 18.3%.
2. Imports

2.1. Geographical developments

Belgian imports from the European Union tumbled by 19.1% in 2009, compared to a jump of 4.9% in 2008. Purchases from countries of the Euro zone dropped dramatically in comparison to 2008, from +5.7% to -17.9%. Imports from EU countries not belonging to the Euro zone also collapsed (-25.6%).

In the Euro zone, Belgian purchases have increased in Malta (+54.8%) and in Ireland (+26.1%). Imports from all the other Euro zone countries fell.

Growth of imports was registered in some other EU member countries. This was the case in Latvia (+69.8%), in Estonia (+17.6%) and, to a lesser extent, in Romania (+2.0%). Imports from the other countries fell, as indicated in the following graph:
Purchases from other European countries outside the EU dropped by 27.6%, with a notable decrease in Belgian imports from Norway (-42.1%), the Russian Federation (-27.8%), and Turkey (-21.9%). Purchases from Ukraine (-14.7%) and Switzerland (-6.4%) went down as well, albeit to a lesser extent. Only imports from Iceland increased (+9.0%).

Imports from the rest of the world also evolved in a negative way:

- **Africa**: -27.7% in 2009 compared to +7.1% in 2008
- **America**: -20.1% in 2009 compared to +8.2% in 2008
- **Asia**: -22.8% in 2009 compared to +5.6% in 2008
- **Oceania**: -34.8% in 2009 compared to +12.7% in 2008
All continents taken together,

**Belgium’s top 20 suppliers in 2009 were the following countries:**

![Bar chart showing Belgium's top 20 suppliers in 2009](image)

### 2.2. Sectoral developments

As it was the case with exports, **chemical products** remained by far the largest import section with nearly a quarter of Belgium’s total imports (23.7%), despite a cutback of 4.1%.

The other three main import sections were **machinery and equipment**, **mineral products** and **transport equipment**, accounting respectively for 13.3%, 12.6% and 11.1% of total purchases. Imports of these three product groups shrank by 22.0%, 39.0% and 22.7% respectively.

Next in line were the **base metals**, down by 37.4% and accounting for 6.9% of total Belgian imports.
3. Geographical trade balances

The bilateral trade balance with the European Union, still showing a surplus, narrowed in 2009 compared to 2008. The surplus dropped from EUR 25.0 billion to EUR 21.9 billion.

**Euro zone countries**

Belgium's surplus with France decreased from EUR 21.3 billion to EUR 17.6 billion in 2009. Positive trade balances were also recorded with Germany (EUR 8.7 billion), Italy (EUR 4.3 billion), Spain (EUR 3.5 billion) and Luxembourg (EUR 2.6 billion).

Belgium's trade deficit with the Netherlands shrank considerably, from EUR -22.0 billion to EUR -13.8 billion. With Ireland, Belgium's trade balance remained negative (EUR -14.4 billion).

**Other EU countries**

The trade balance of Belgium with the other EU member countries remained positive (EUR 9.2 billion).
Belgium’s trade balance with the other European countries outside the EU improved. The trade deficit decreased from EUR -1,347.7 million to EUR -582.8 million. Belgium’s negative balance with Norway and the Russian Federation improved somewhat, to EUR -1,230.4 million and EUR -1,728.6 million respectively.

Belgium’s trade balance with both America and Asia was still in the red. The negative balance with Asia, which amounted to EUR 9,870.3 million, was reduced by almost half. The deficit with America shrank to EUR -2,231.3 million in 2009, compared to EUR -5,252.3 million in 2008.

In 2009, Belgium recorded a surplus of EUR 1,480.3 million with Africa (EUR 9.8 million in 2008).

Last but not least, Belgium’s trade balance with Oceania showed a surplus of EUR 324.2 million as compared with EUR 171.3 million in 2008.