Production

Austrian wood industry sales totalled EUR 5.96 billion in 2004 , which represents an increase by 10% in terms of value over the previous year. The total value of sales by the sector, currently at its all-time high, has grown by a sensational 41% over the past seven years (see diagrams on p. 6 of the German version).

Enterprises, Labour Force

The Austrian wood industry comprises 1,744 enterprises, 1,400 of which are sawmills. The majority of wood-industry enterprises are medium-sized businesses, almost all of them privately owned.

As an employer, the wood industry is appreciated for the security of the jobs offered. In the course of 2004, the number of wood-industry employees declined slightly, now standing at 29,420. The wood industry is one of the few sectors of industry in which the level of employment has remained stable in recent years.

Foreign Trade

The wood industry is a strongly export-oriented sector. Its export ratio has been rising continuously and is now approaching 70%. The most important exports are sawn softwood, wood-based panels and skis. The total volume of exports in 2004 amounted to EUR 4.48 billion, up by 4.3% from the year before. 76.3% of Austrian wood-industry exports went to the European Union (EU 24), above all to Germany and Italy. The remaining 23.7% were exported to Eastern Europe (3.2%), the developing countries (1.5%), and other countries, such as the US and Japan (19%) (see Tables on p. 7/8).

The traditional foreign trade surplus grew by 0.8% to EUR 1.94 billion in 2004. Compared with EUR 1 billion in 2000, it has almost doubled in recent years.

Lines of Business

The wood industry is an extremely varied sector. In terms of production volumes, its most important lines of business are saw milling, the construction elements industry, the furniture industry, the manufacture of wood-based panels, and the ski industry.

Construction Elements Industry

Total sales of the construction elements industry in 2004 amounted to EUR 1.83 billion, up by 9.6% from the year before. Within the construction-related sector, most of the individual lines of business have been performing well.

The production of windows, the most important line of business, declined slightly in 2004 to EUR 323.7 million, i.e. down by 3.6%. At the same time, the production of prefabricated wooden houses increased strongly, its total value now standing at EUR 388.8 million, i.e. up by 16.4%. Production of doors grew by 4.8% to EUR 207.83 million. Demand for wood floorings (parquet and plank floorings) continued to increase in 2004, the total production value amounting to EUR 182.54, i.e. up by 4.4%. Glued laminated timber elements continued their positive performance, growing by 21.4% to EUR 217.1 million in the year under review.

Foreign Trade

Exports of **windows** remained unsatisfactory also in 2004, declining by 15.3% in terms of volume. The total value of exports dropped by 0.1% to EUR 34.33 million. At the same time, imports rose by 7.9% in terms of volume and by 11.8% in terms of value, reaching a total of EUR 21.33 million (see Table on p. 16).

Imports and exports of **doors** increased in the year under review. Imports grew by 12.9% in volume and by 1.3% in value. Overall, doors worth EUR 27.62 million were imported. Exports grew by 16.8% in terms of volume and by 18.2% in terms of value. The total value of exports reached almost EUR 25 million (see Table on p. 16).

Exports of **wood floorings** continued to take a highly positive development. Parquet flooring exports reached a value of EUR 169.26 million (+17.5%), with the volume of exports exceeding the previous year's level by 18.7%. Imports also rose by 6.9% in terms of value, now standing at EUR 80.89 million, and by 27.5% in terms of volume (see Table on p. 16).

Laminated timber exports increased by 11.7% in volume and by 14.6% in value to EUR 178.3 million in 2004. Imports also grew by 27.9% in volume and by 15.5% in value. Laminated timber worth almost EUR 19 million was imported in the year under review (see Table on p. 17).

Furniture Industry

In 2004 Austrian furniture production reached a total value of EUR 2.4 billion (up by 11% from the year before, see Table on p. 19). Except for kitchen furniture production, which declined slightly by 1.3% to EUR 268 million, growing volumes were reported for all types of furniture, i.e. sitting furniture, office and shop furniture, as well as other furniture. The positive development in the field of sitting furniture, its total volume now standing at EUR 576 million (up by 40% from the year before), is particularly noteworthy. A 1.4% increase to a total volume of EUR 403 million was reported for office and shop furniture. As regards other furniture, the positive trend continued with a 6.8% rate of growth.

Foreign Trade

Compared with 2003, exports by the Austrian furniture industry grew by 2.9% (EUR 1.3 billion). Goods worth more than EUR 1 billion were sold to other countries of the European Union. Germany and Italy continue to be the most important markets for Austrian exporters, with the volume of exports to Italy growing by 14.3% over the full year.

Imports of furniture to Austria rose by 7.7%, their total value standing at EUR 1.2 billion (see diagrams on p. 21).

Wood-Based Panel Industry

2004 was a relatively successful year for Austrian manufacturers of wood-based panels. Even though the general economic environment was less than optimal, products from Austria proved to be quite competitive. Structural changes in the particle-board market – especially in Germany – had a favourable impact on the 2004 results.

The enterprises of the particle-board, MDF and fibre-board industries were able to further increase their sales volume by 5% to approx. EUR 856 million. The share of processed products and, thus, the value added, have gone up further. This applies to both coated panels and laminated floorings. Particle board – above all coated products – accounts for the major part of sales, followed by MDF (two manufacturers) and fibre board (one manufacturer).

Foreign Trade

As in previous years, the enterprises of the Austrian wood-based panel industry generated a substantial foreign-trade surplus of approx. EUR 520 million (see Table on p. 24). While sales increased slightly or remained stable in the „classic" export markets, such as Germany, Italy and the EU-15, satisfactory growth rates were achieved in the markets of the new EU member states. The significant growth achieved in the overseas markets was primarily due to exports of laminated floorings.

International

Most of the enterprises of the Austrian particle-board, MDF and fibre-board industries are family-owned. More than 40 production sites abroad are controlled by Austrian companies.

Solid-Wood Panels

Three- and multi-layer solid-wood panels worth EUR 36 million were produced in the year under review. The value of single-layer solid-wood panels is not disclosed in the annual survey. Compared with 2003, exports of solid-wood panels increased by 2.2% in 2004 to approx. EUR 257.7 million. The countries of the European Union account for two thirds of Austrian exports. Imports declined by 10,7% to approx. EUR 88,6 million (see Table on p. 26).

Saw Milling Industry

In the year under review, sales by the Austrian saw milling industry exceeded the EUR 2 billion mark (EUR 2.1 billion), which represents an increase by about 9% over 2003. Sawn wood production rose to 11.18 million m^3 (see Table on p. 28). Over the past decade, the production of sawn wood in Austria has grown by more than 40%. The annual volume of timber delivered to Austrian sawmills totalled 16.8 million m^3 of round wood, including 6.77 million m^3 of imported timber. The 40 biggest sawmills account for approx. 90% of the total production. 65% of the total amount of sawn wood is produced by the 10 largest mills.

Foreign Trade

Sawn softwood exports reached a record level of approx. 7.3 million m^3 in 2004, up by 10.2% from the year before (6.63 million m^3). In terms of value, exports amounted to approx. EUR 1.2 billion (see Tables on p. 28/29). The most important market is Italy, accounting for about two thirds of Austrian exports. In the year under review, exports to Italy grew by 4.4% to 4.52 million m^3, compared with 4.33 million m^3 the year before. 649,412 m^3 of sawn softwood were exported to Germany (up by 27.2% from the year before). Exports of sawn hardwood also increased to a total of 144,348 m^3 in 2004, which represents a 2% rise from the 2003 level.

Imports increased substantially in 2004. Total imports of sawn softwood amounted to approx. 1.27 million m^3, up by 3.4% from the year before (2003: 1.23 million m^3). In terms of value, imports totalled EUR 196 million. Imports of sawn hardwood declined by 4% to 199,368 m^3 (2003: 208,123 m^3).

PEFC

The Austrian saw milling industry is committed to implementing the PEFC system of forest certification. A total of 122 million hectares of forests have already been certified according to PEFC, the world's leading forest certification system, in Europe and other parts of the world. Since 2002, all Austrian forests have been certified according to PEFC. Thus, a continuous supply of certified raw material is guaranteed. The number of certified enterprises increased from 40 in 2001 to 292 (including 160 sawmills) in the year under review. On a world-wide basis, the total number of certified enterprises is close to 2,200.

Ski Industry

During the past marketing season, markets in Europe, the US and Canada were stable or growing, while the Japanese market did not show any signs of improvement. Although Austrian exporters were able to maintain their market shares in Japan, downhill ski sales declined noticeably. Austrian manufacturers and their competitors therefore had to cope with double-digit sales drops. Given the abundance of snow both in Europe and North America, ski sales remained at a satisfactory level well beyond the peak season in these markets. Rising sales in individual markets, such as Italy, Switzerland and France – with individual exporters reporting an increase by as much as 10% – contributed to the overall success in this line of business.

Foreign Trade

The Austrian ski industry exports over 85% of its production. Given this extraordinarily high export ratio, Austrian ski brands are represented in all world markets. This is all the more remarkable, as only a few branded articles from Austria have succeeded in establishing a strong presence at the international level.

Besides its macro-economic impact, the ski industry has been making a positive contribution to the Austrian foreign trade balance for many years. A substantial surplus of EUR 225 million was generated during the past marketing season (2003). All product groups, i.e. downhill, mono and cross-country skis, contributed to this surplus. Overall, exports increased by 3% in terms of volume and by 2% in terms of value. While total sales of downhill skis declined slightly as a result of the sluggish Japanese market, double-digit growth rates were reported for cross-country skis. Snowboard sales grew by 5%.

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