



Linde plc (LIN)

Updated February 20th, 2023 by Jonathan Weber

Key Metrics

Current Price:	\$334	5 Year CAGR Estimate:	3.9%	Market Cap:	\$165B
Fair Value Price:	\$280	5 Year Growth Estimate:	6.0%	Ex-Dividend Date:	03/10/23 ¹
% Fair Value:	119%	5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:	-3.4%	Dividend Payment Date:	03/25/23 ²
Dividend Yield:	1.4%	5 Year Price Target	\$375	Years Of Dividend Growth:	29
Dividend Risk Score:	A	Retirement Suitability Score:	C	Rating:	Hold

Overview & Current Events

Linde plc, which was created through the merger of Germany-based industrial gases company Linde AG and US-based industrial gases company Praxair, is the world's largest industrial gas corporation. The company produces, sells, and distributes atmospheric, process, and specialty gases, along with high-performance surface coatings. The company is headquartered in Guildford, United Kingdom. Linde plc is, by both market capitalization as well as by sales generation, the number one in its industry by a wide margin.

Linde plc released its fourth quarter earnings results on February 7. The company announced that its revenues totaled \$7.9 billion during the quarter, which was down 5% from the prior year's quarter. This was weaker than the previous quarters, during which Linde reported positive revenue growth. Linde was able to grow its margins meaningfully, as its operating margin, for example, expanded 310 basis points year-over-year.

Linde's earnings-per-share during the fourth quarter totaled \$3.16, which means that the company's earnings-per-share growth came in at 14% versus the previous year's quarter. Linde's management also has a quite positive view regarding the foreseeable future, as Linde is forecasting earnings-per-share in a range of \$13.15 to \$13.55 for fiscal 2023, which represents a very solid growth rate of close to 10% compared to 2022, which was also a record year.

Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028
EPS	\$5.87	\$5.73	\$5.35	\$5.21	\$5.68	\$6.19	\$7.34	\$8.23	\$10.69	\$12.29	\$13.35	\$17.87
DPS	\$2.40	\$2.60	\$2.86	\$3.00	\$3.15	\$3.30	\$3.50	\$3.85	\$4.24	\$4.68	\$4.68	\$6.56
Shares³	296	294	289	288	289	334	541	531	517	511	505	480

The numbers in the above table, through 2017, are for Praxair as a standalone company, as Linde plc was only created in 2018. Praxair, as a stand-alone company, delivered unspectacular earnings growth rates through the last decade. Its earnings-per-share rose from \$4.19 during 2008 to \$5.68 during 2017, which equates to an earnings-per-share growth rate of 3.5%. 2018 was the first year for which Linde plc reported net profits as a combined company.

The merger between Praxair and Linde AG, which led to the creation of Linde plc, has impacted the combined company's results massively. Higher net profits were partially offset by an increase in the company's share count, however. Asset sales, which were necessary for the regulators' okay for the merger, also had an impact.

Linde plc is able to generate substantial cost-savings through synergies between the two companies. Executives have touted synergies and potential cost-savings of more than \$1 billion annually. It seems likely that Linde plc will grow its earnings-per-share at a mid-single-digit rate in the long run, slightly faster than Praxair's earnings-per-share growth rate through the last decade, due to the positive impact of synergies. Linde plc recently upped its stock buyback program to \$10 billion, which should drive further share count declines. We believe that Linde will be able to reduce its share count meaningfully in the future, resulting in a tailwind for its earnings-per-share.

¹ Estimated date

² Estimated date

³ In Millions

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Valuation Analysis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Now	2028
Avg. P/E	20.0	22.6	21.7	21.8	23.2	25.4	29.0	31.5	32.2	26.5	25.0	21.0
Avg. Yld.	2.0%	2.0%	2.5%	2.6%	2.4%	2.2%	1.6%	1.5%	1.2%	1.4%	1.4%	1.7%

Based on forecasted earnings-per-share of around \$13.35 for fiscal 2023, Linde plc trades at 25 times this year's earnings right now. Shares of Praxair (our proxy for Linde plc for gauging the historic valuation) were never especially cheap, and due to the solid growth outlook and Linde plc's leadership in its industry, we believe that an above-average multiple of 21 times earnings is justified. Shares trade well above that level right now, which is why we believe that Linde's shares are overvalued. Shares have gotten less expensive compared to 2019-2021 but are still pricey.

Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028
Payout	40.9%	45.4%	53.5%	57.6%	55.5%	53.3%	47.7%	46.7%	39.7%	38.1%	35.1%	36.7%

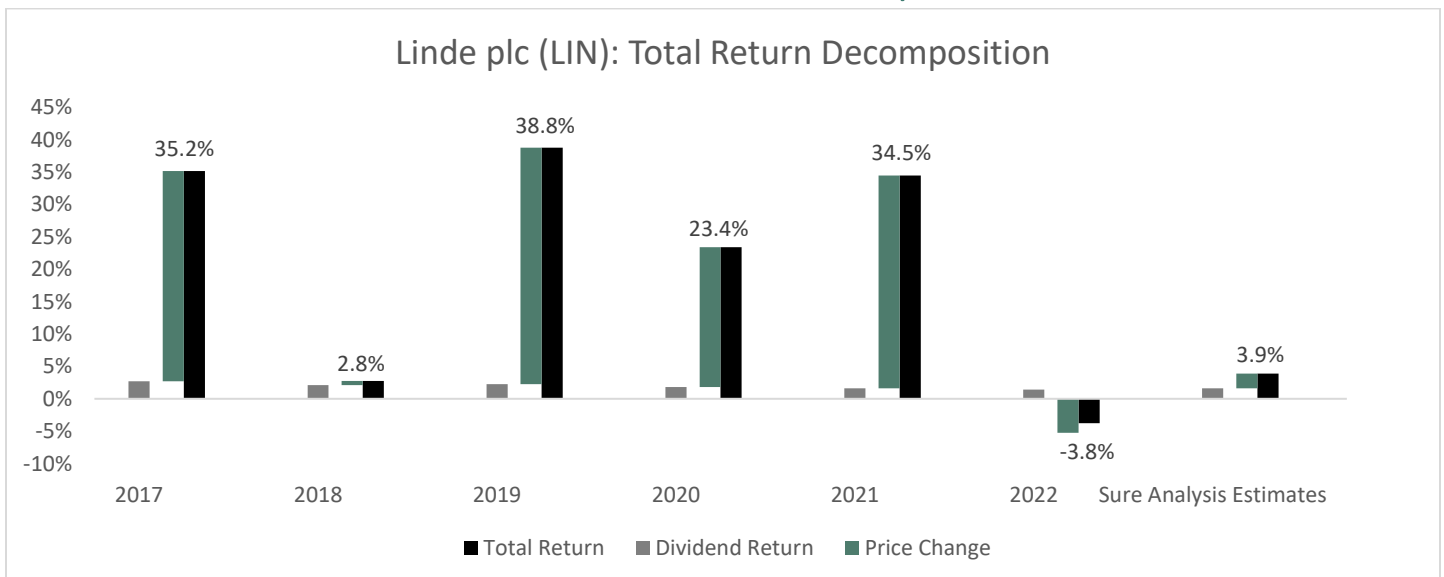
Praxair's (our Linde plc proxy) dividend payout ratio was never especially high during the last decade. Based on forecasted earnings, Linde plc's forward dividend payout ratio will be very reasonable as well, at around 50%. We believe that the dividend is thus relatively safe, especially as Linde's business is not very cyclical.

Linde plc is the clear leader in the industrial gases market, and thus has large competitive advantages in terms of size and scale. Synergies that will be captured throughout the next couple of years will increase its competitiveness further. Linde plc is active in an industry that is quite stable, as its gases are sold to non-cyclical industries such as healthcare.

Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Linde plc is the clear leader in its industry. Despite the pandemic, Linde generated new record profits in 2020 to 2022, and it looks like the company will do even better during the current year. We believe that Linde will be able to grow its earnings-per-share meaningfully in the long run. Unfortunately, Linde's shares trade at a relatively high valuation. Total returns are forecasted to be not very attractive over the coming years, which is why we rate Linde a hold at the current price, even though Linde looks like a fundamentally strong company.

Total Return Breakdown by Year



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Income Statement Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Revenue	11,925	12,273	10,776	10,534	11,358	14,836	28,228	27,243	30,793	33,364
Gross Profit	5,181	5,311	4,816	4,679	4,976	5,816	11,584	11,860	13,250	13,914
Gross Margin	43.4%	43.3%	44.7%	44.4%	43.8%	39.2%	41.0%	43.5%	43.0%	41.7%
SG&A Exp.	1,349	1,308	1,152	1,145	1,207	1,629	3,457	3,193	3,189	3,107
D&A Exp.	1,109	1,170	1,106	1,122	1,184	1,830	4,675	4,626	4,635	4,204
Operating Profit	2,625	2,737	2,465	2,320	2,492	2,244	3,268	3,889	5,283	6,460
Op. Margin	22.0%	22.3%	22.9%	22.0%	21.9%	15.1%	11.6%	14.3%	17.2%	19.4%
Net Profit	1,755	1,694	1,547	1,500	1,247	4,381	2,285	2,501	3,826	4,147
Net Margin	14.7%	13.8%	14.4%	14.2%	11.0%	29.5%	8.1%	9.2%	12.4%	12.4%
Free Cash Flow	897	1,198	1,154	1,324	1,730	1,819	2,506	4,029	6,639	5,691
Income Tax	649	691	612	551	1,026	817	769	847	1,262	1,434

Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Assets	20,255	19,769	18,319	19,332	20,436	93,386	86,612	88,229	81,605	79,658
Cash & Equivalents	138	126	147	524	617	4,466	2,700	3,754	2,823	5,436
Acc. Receivable	1,815	1,746	1,601	1,640	1,814	4,410	4,322	4,167	4,499	4,559
Inventories	506	551	531	550	614	1,651	1,697	1,729	1,733	1,978
Goodwill & Int.	3,790	3,724	3,554	3,700	4,018	43,097	43,156	44,385	40,840	38,237
Total Liabilities	13,252	13,759	13,526	13,891	13,925	36,306	35,090	38,660	36,177	38,271
Accounts Payable	921	864	791	906	922	3,219	3,266	3,095	3,503	2,995
Long-Term Debt	8,811	9,225	9,231	9,515	9,000	15,296	13,956	16,154	14,207	17,914
Total Equity	6,609	5,623	4,389	5,021	6,018	51,596	49,074	47,317	44,035	40,028
LTD/E Ratio	1.33	1.64	2.10	1.90	1.50	0.30	0.28	0.34	0.32	0.45

Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Return on Assets	9.2%	8.5%	8.1%	8.0%	6.3%	7.7%	2.5%	2.9%	4.5%	5.1%
Return on Equity	27.7%	27.7%	30.9%	31.9%	22.6%	15.2%	4.5%	5.2%	8.4%	9.9%
ROIC	11.9%	10.9%	10.6%	10.4%	8.2%	10.0%	3.3%	3.8%	6.1%	7.0%
Shares Out.	296	294	289	288	289	334	541	531	517	511
Revenue/Share	39.89	41.52	37.28	36.61	39.29	44.40	51.78	51.29	59.00	66.19
FCF/Share	3.00	4.05	3.99	4.60	5.98	5.44	4.60	7.59	12.72	11.29

Note: All figures in millions of U.S. Dollars unless per share or indicated otherwise.

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