

NEWS SUMMARY AUGUST 10 – AUGUST 16

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ECONOMY & FINANCE

CTK BISNODE: NO. OF NEW SOLE TRADERS 1.5% HIGHER IN H1 Y-O-Y – 10.8.

As many as 34,607 new self-employed persons were registered in the country in the Jan-June period, displaying a rise of 1.5% from the same year-ago period, and two-fifths of them were women, Bisnode consulting company told CTK. New sole traders launched their business activities chiefly in Prague, and in trade.

The total number of sole traders exceeded 2.1mn, with 45% of them doing business actively, Bisnode said.

A total of 26,742 sole traders ceased to exist in H1.

Self-employed numbers are growing slowly in the country but entrepreneurs are highly interested in setting up new companies, which is related to the booming economy although it is already showing signs of overheating, said Bisnode analyst Petra Stepanova.

Czechs have preferred creating of limited-liability companies in the past few years because of lower risks and higher prestige of these companies on the market.

In terms of new sole trader numbers, Prague was first, with 19.5% share, followed by the Central Bohemia Region (12.3%), the South Moravia Region (10.5%) and the Moravia-Silesia Region (9.8%).

The South Bohemia and Liberec regions recorded the highest share of new female sole traders (42% each).

Self-employed numbers in 2008 to H1 2017

Year	New sole traders	Sole traders - total
H1 2017	34,607	2,107,137
2016	62,410	2,099,272
H1 2016	34,094	2,062,539
2015	63,839	2,053,377
H1 2015	35,454	2,049,981
2014	62,332	2,049,376
2013	68,674	2,039,613
2012	78,813	2,112,849
2011	90,978	2,081,314
2010	90,553	2,042,786
2009	88,383	2,009,513
2008	85,606	2,012,529

CTK EVERY SECOND PERSON WITH BUSINESS LICENCE IS NOT ACTIVE – 13.8.

More than a half of self-employed with business licence for natural person are not active and entrepreneurs from the area of trade and mediation do not exercise the business activity the most often, according to an analysis of consulting company Bisnode.

On the other hand, farmers and doctors interrupt their activities only rarely.

The share of inactive self-employed is some 8 percentage points higher among women.

Over 2.1 mn business licences for natural persons have been granted in the CR and, according to Bisnode estimates, some 956,000 of them are doing business. This represents 45.4% of registered self-employed.

"Women interrupt their business activities more often than men. The share of inactive self-employed stands at 59.8% among women," said Bisnode analyst Petra Stepanova.

The share of inactive self-employed exceeds 80% in some sectors. As for mediation and trade, these are sectors with low barriers to starting a business. At the same time, business risks are higher here.

"These are frequently business licences people take 'to try' or as an addition to other activities," Stepanova remarked.

"On the other hand, farmers and doctors interrupt their business activities very scarcely. Education and experience is necessary here and when a business licence is granted to them, it is usually on the basis of a long-term business plan," she added.

CTK CZECH ECONOMY ACCELERATES Y-O-Y GROWTH TO 4.5% IN Q2 – 16.8.

Czech economy grew by 4.5% year on year in the second quarter of this year after a 3% rise seen in the first quarter and against the first quarter, GDP grew by 2.3%, according to CSO¹ preliminary GDP estimate released today.

The results are better than analysts' estimates. Analysts expected y-o-y GDP growth around 3%.

The growth was pulled mainly by domestic demand backed by growing household consumption and investment activity of companies.

"Performance of most industries of the national economy was growing, i.e. not only that of manufacturing, but also performance of majority of economic activities of services," the statisticians said.

"The preliminary estimate of Czech economic performance in the second quarter of this year has brought a pleasant shock," company ACZKenta analyst Miroslav Novak told CTK. The reasons can be only guessed for now because GDP structure will be made public only after the updated estimate from September 1, he noted.

"A surprise may be hidden on the side of investments and, apart from the traditionally strong contribution of the manufacturing industry, services probably also made an important contribution," Novak said, adding that the CSO mentions these factors as well.

Further acceleration of GDP growth raises the probability that the growth of the Czech economy in the whole of last year will climb quite a bit above 3%.

The flash GDP development estimate indicates probable growth pace of the economy. The more precise estimate will be more reliable.

¹ CSO: Czech Statistical Office, is the main organization which collects, analyses and disseminates statistical information for the benefit of the various parts of the local and

national governments of the CR. It accomplishes this goal through the management of the Czech Statistical Service.

AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

CZECH CONSUMPTION OF NON-ALCOHOLIC DRINKS UP 2% IN

2016 – 11.8.

Czech consumption of non-alcoholic beverages increased by nearly 2% last year, with per capita consumption rising to 215l on average from 2015's 212l, the Non-alcoholic Drink Producers Association told CTK today.

The weather, improved business sentiment and appetite for spending are the factors behind the growth, the association said.

Soft drinks prevailed, their share at 57%, with bottled water constituting nearly a quarter of the total figure. Syrups made up 15% and juices 5% of the total.

Out of 2.3bn l of non-alcoholic drinks that were consumed last year, every Czech drank 124l of carbonated drinks and 50l of bottled water.

People prefer water in hot summer and sweetened beverages in colder months. The Czechs like to experiment, president of the association Jiri Prazan said, adding "consumer demand has shifted towards drinks with a lower energy content in line with a healthy lifestyle this year."

Compared to other European countries, the Czechs are average consumers of non-alcoholic drinks. Germany ranked first last year, with per capita consumption of nearly 347l of non-alcoholic beverages, while Lithuania occupied the last place, with 118l of non-alcoholic beverages consumed their per person.

CZECH HARVEST OF BASIC CEREALS TO BE 13% LOWER THIS

YEAR – CSO – 11.8.

The CR's harvest of basic cereals will drop by 13.2% y-o-y to 6.709 mn tonnes this year, the CSO said today based on the second estimate of the harvest as of July 15.

The previous estimate was more optimistic, predicting a 10.1% drop in this year's production of basic cereals. Last year saw an above-average grain production.

The production of rape is foreseen to go down by 11.8% to 1.199 mn tonnes, while the first estimate predicted a 7.7% decrease.

The poppy seed production which is estimated at 23,000 tonnes will be 19.8% lower compared to last year.

The lower production of cereals is due to a 13.1% drop in the per hectare yield, the CSO said.

However, the sowing area remained almost the same as last year.

The estimated grain production is 6.5 and 4.2% below the average for the last five and ten years, respectively, the CSO said.

An annual decrease in the per hectare yield is predicted for all types of basic cereals, except for spring wheat and oats thanks to a marked rise of the sowing area.

The production of triticale (hybrid of wheat and rye) is expected to fall by 12.8% to 168,000 tonnes.

The rape production will go down because of a 12.1% decrease in the per hectare yield, though the sowing area slightly increased to 394,000 hectares, the third highest reading on record, statisticians said.

When compared to the five-year average, the estimated rape production is 10.6% lower, being comparable to the average for the past ten years.

The lower poppy seed production is due to a 12.5% decline in the per hectare yield, with the sowing area falling by 8.3% to 33,000 hectares, the CSO said.

Czech harvest estimate as of July 15 (thousands of tonnes) and sowing areas (thousands of hectares)

	Harvest	Y-o-y change (%)	Sown area	Y-o-y change (%)
Basic cereals	6,709	-13.2	1,262	-0.1
Wheat total	4,665	-14.5	832	-0.9
Winter wheat	4,461	-16.1	785	-2.9
Spring wheat	204	46.6	47	52.2
Rye	105	0.3	22	6.1
Barley total	1,619	-12.3	328	0.6
Winter barley	528	-17.1	97	-6.6
Spring barley	1,090	-9.7	231	4.0
Oats	152	15.1	44	17.3
Triticale	168	-12.8	36	-8.4
Colza	1,199	-11.8	394	0.3
Poppy seed	23	-19.8	33	-8.3

LABOUR & SOCIAL & HEALTH

GIA ČNB: TENSION ON THE LABOR MARKET IS LEADING TO MORE RAPID INCREASE IN SALARIES CZECHS BUY INCREASINGLY MORE OFTEN REAL PROPERTIES ABROAD – 14.8.

Czechs have been buying increasingly more often real properties abroad in the past years and the highest interest was in properties in Austria, Croatia, Italy and Spain, according to a study of Rellox company which focuses on sale of foreign real properties.

Suites are more popular than houses and villas.

Statistics on the number of Czechs who bought real property abroad last year and in the past years do not exist, Rellox noted.

"According to qualified estimates, the number is in the order of several hundreds of people annually with a growing curve," the company said.

Rellox has registered an 11% y-o-y rise between last year and 2015.

Last year, the highest number of Czechs were interested in real estate in Austria (47%) and Croatia (20%). Among further popular destinations are Spain (17%) and Italy (9%). Interest in Austria increased by almost a third in the last two years.

The highest number of clients (65%) look for real property abroad for their own use and for leasing it out when they do not use it.

More than a quarter want to buy the property solely for themselves, while 8% are looking for a property exclusively as an investment.

More than a half of the clients wanted properties with price between EUR251,000 and EUR500,000 (CZK6.5mn to CZK13mn).

Almost 90% of the clients are entrepreneurs and just 8% are employees, according to the study.

"The interesting fact is that our clients are relatively young, 54% of them are aged between 30 and 50. Despite that, they are using own resources for buying the properties," said Rellox director Jan Rejcha.

The company signed 41 contracts for CZK471mn in total for real properties abroad last year and the average price was around CZK11.5mn.

Prices of flats and houses in the CR went up by 12.8% y-o-y in the first quarter of this year, the highest growth among EU countries where the prices rose by 4.5% on average.

Rellox, involved in selling foreign real properties, is active in Central and Eastern Europe.

ANTI-SMOKING LAW MAY BE AMENDED – 14.8.

The new anti-smoking law will likely be weakened, as some shortcomings (e.g. in a restaurant with an outdoor garden with solid pergola, smoking is banned due to the technical aspect) have been found, according to some politicians. On the contrary, some politicians would like to see the law tougher (e.g. to make it illegal to smoke in a car with children inside). The law has been in effect for almost 3 months.

CZECH PM TO CALL ON FRENCH, AUSTRIANS TO RAISE WAGES IN CZECHREP – 15.8.

Czech Prime Minister Sobotka wants to call on French President Emmanuel Macron and Austrian PM Christian Kern to see to it that their firms in the CR substantially raise salaries, at their meeting in Salzburg on August 23, he told reporters today.

He said he would like to discuss the removal of wage dumping with them.

The Salzburg meeting will also be attended by Slovak PM Robert Fico.

Representatives of two new and two old EU member states will meet, Sobotka (Social Democrats, CSSD) added.

France and Austria have criticised lower salaries of Czech drivers. They demand that they receive the same pay level as domestic drivers in their territory.

Sobotka said the Czech Government Office had calculated how much the equalisation of wages in the CR and France would last.

"If it proceeded at this pace, it would last some 222 years for Czech wages to catch up with the French level. We consider this completely unacceptable and impossible," he said.

Representatives of Western countries, including Macron recently, have criticised wage dumping. They say Eastern countries profit from lower labour costs of their workers.

Josef Stredula, chairman of the CMKOS umbrella trade union organisation, called Macron's criticism "a boomerang."

"I am clearly returning this. There are more than 450 French firms with 63,000 employees. The right message is that they

should not export dumping," Stredula said after the talks with Sobotka.

No one prevents a French car maker in the CR from raising wages, Stredula said, adding that he hoped an agreement on posting employees abroad would also be concluded.

State Secretary for European Affairs Ales Chmelar says Western and Eastern EU countries have joint interests.

"If the old countries have problems with our low wages, we have this problem, too... All countries must draw from the internal market in a similar way. We cannot agree on having two Europes forever," he said.

Czech wages amount to one-third of the German ones and one-quarter of what Danes earn, Chmelar said.

The setting of investment incentives in the CR may help bring the salaries closer, he added.

CZECH ELDERLY, CHILDREN TO PAY LESS FOR MEDICINES – 16.8.

Czech pensioners and children will have lower limits for additional payment for drugs under the amendment to the public health insurance law passed by the Senate today.

As of January, the annual limit for children under 18 and elderly over 65 will be reduced from CZK2,500 to 1,000 and for pensioners over CZK70 to 500.

If the limit is crossed, health insurance companies return the money to the patients who paid more for the drugs.

The legislation, yet to be signed by President Milos Zeman, is to reduce the financial participation of socially marginalised groups, Health Minister Miloslav Ludvik (Social Democrats, CSSD) said.

It will cost the state budget some CZK440mn a year.

The Health Ministry reckons with this in the preparation of the relevant regulations, Ludvik said.

The Senate also approved the legislation under which Czechs will be able to have up to a 3-month paid leave to care for their seriously ill relatives.

Between 2019 and 2020, the state will be paying some 3.5bn crowns more to the health insurance system under the amendment to the public insurance law also passed by the Senate.

This year, the state pays CZK920 a month for its policyholders (children, pensioners, students and the unemployed) to health insurance companies.

Next year, the sum will increase by CZK49 by a government decree.

This amendment will ensure another rise in the years in question. In 2019, the contribution will amount to 1018 crowns and one year later, to CZK1,067 a month.

In all, health insurance companies are to receive CZK69.3bn from the state for its policyholders next year. The sum is to rise to CZK72.8bn and CZK76.4bn in 2019 and 2020.

It is presumed that the state will pay the health insurance for 5.96mn inhabitants, roughly the same number as now.

The total revenues of the public health insurance system are to reach 276.6bn crowns this year. The expenditures are to be CZK23.5mn lower.

INDUSTRY & TRADE & TRANSPORTATION

SKODA AUTO CAR SUPPLIES UP 4% TO 87,000 UNITS IN JULY Y-O-Y – 10.8.

Skoda Auto's car supplies rose by 4% or 3,300 cars y-o-y to 87,000 units in July, the car maker said in a press release today.

Domestic sales were in decline, Skoda said.

Octavia remains the best-selling model in spite of its fall. Skoda sold 29,600 Octavias, 8.1% fewer in annual terms, followed by 14,700 Rapids, a drop of 8.3% y-o-y.

Citigo recorded an annual decrease of 40.4% to 2,000 units in July.

Conversely, Superb saw a rise of 18.2% to 11,200 units. SUV Kodiaq supplies reached 10,000 units in July, with a total of 37,100 cars sold since February.

Skoda surpassed again the good sales figures from last July, which proves the car maker's model palette remains attractive, said Werner Eichhorn, Skoda Auto board member in charge of sales and marketing.

Western European sales were 6% higher at 34,700 units. In Germany, number one market in Europe, Skoda sold 11,000 cars, 5.6% more y-o-y.

Sales in Great Britain posted an annual growth of 16.9%, sales in Italy saw a rise of 13.6%, Austrian sales rose by 18.8%, Greek sales by 32% and sales in Portugal added 32.4%.

Central Europe's sales were 6% higher from July last year at 14,700 units.

Domestic sales declined by an annual rate of 2.5% or 200 cars to 6,900 units.

Polish, Hungarian and Slovak sales grew by 24.7, 4.6 and 6%, respectively.

Sales in Eastern Europe excluding Russia were 3.1% higher at 3,200 cars. Ukraine's market recorded an annual increase of 65%, and sales in Russia saw a hike of 13.6% to 5,300 units.

Sales in China, Skoda's largest export market, reached 22,000 units in July, 3% more in annual terms.

Skoda Auto said today it terminated talks with India's Tata on joint car production within a strategic partnership.

The firms agreed they failed to find the jointly required technical and economic synergies but did not rule out possible cooperation in the future.

Skoda entered into talks with Tata Motors in March this year, representing the entire group Volkswagen.

A cheap Fabia-size car, dubbed as A0 Entry, was to be the result of their cooperation. The model should have been sold on the Indian market and other fast-growing markets.

Skoda Auto, a part of German group Volkswagen, runs three plants in the CR, employing around 30,000 people. It also produces cars in China, Russia, Slovakia and India, mostly through partnerships, and in Ukraine and Kazakhstan in cooperation with local partners.

Skoda Auto's global sales reached 1,127,700 units last year, crossing the level of 1mn cars for the third time in a row. The company plans to double its output by 2025.

CZECH FUEL PRICES RISE AFTER FOUR MONTHS IN PAST WEEK – CCS – 10.8.

Czech fuel prices started growing in the past week after about four months of falling or stagnating, with prices of top-

selling petrol Natural 95 adding 11 hellers to CZK29.66 per litre on average, and diesel oil selling for CZK28.56/l, a rise of 16 hellers, CCS data have shown.

With minor swings, prices of motor fuels had been decreasing in the CR since the end of April.

Analysts addressed by CTK are not united in their opinions on whether Czech fuel prices will continue to grow.

Finlord analyst Boris Tomciak said fuel prices will add another ten to 20 hellers in the coming week. "The reason is a marked growth in oil prices on global markets. The crude oil Brent price jumped above \$52 per barrel. However, the crown's firming to the dollar is good for motorists as it makes imported commodities cheaper," Tomciak said.

Average prices of motor fuels in CR as of August 9 (CZK/l)

Region	Natural 95	Diesel oil
Czech average	29.66	28.56
Prague	30.47	29.45
South Bohemia	29.42	28.26
South Moravia	30.09	29.04
Karlovy Vary	29.39	28.26
Hradec Kralove	29.32	27.86
Liberec	29.28	28.26
Moravia-Silesia	29.57	28.34
Olomouc	29.89	28.82
Pardubice	29.35	28.03
Plzen	29.83	29.08
Central Bohemia	29.95	28.87
Usti	29.34	28.16
Vysocina	29.92	29.16
Zlin	29.36	28.28

MINISTRY POSTPONES DEADLINE FOR TOLL TENDER BIDS TILL AUG 24 – 11.8.

The Transport Ministry has postponed the deadline for submitting bids in a tender for electronic toll system operation after 2019 by ten days until August 24, ministry spokesman Tomas Nerold told CTK.

The reason is to gain time for providing more precise information to questions of the applicants and formal adjustments, he explained.

Postponements are nothing unusual in important tenders, Nerold remarked. "This is a shift in the order of days so it will not endanger the tender's timetable," he added.

In the first qualifying round of the tender, the bidders will be asked to prove their experience in operating the toll technology. The short-listed investors will enter in talks with the ministry that will then pick five bidders for the last round of the tender process.

"We will then invite these 5 bidders to file preliminary offers and when all questions are clarified, they will submit final bids from which we will pick the winner," Nerold added.

According to earlier information, the decision could be made by the middle of next year.

The Transport Ministry declared the tender for a new operator of the toll collection system in the middle of June. It plans to spend CZK29bn at most on the system's operation within 10 years.

The price reflects the government's requirement for a technically neutral solution. Bidders can use the existing network of toll gates or may come up with a completely new system.

Extension of the network of first-class roads where toll is paid from the current 230km to 1,140km is another tender condition.

The electronic toll collection system, using the microwave technology, was introduced in the CR in 2007. During the system's operation, the toll income totalled CZK77.5bn, with last year's revenue at CZK9.89bn. The operation costs reach some CZK1.5bn a year.

NO. OF PUBLIC PETROL STATIONS IN CR GROWS TO 3,931 IN H1 – 11.8.

The number of public petrol stations in the CR grew by 25 since the end of last year to 3931 in the first half of this year and the total number of petrol stations increased by 12 to 7,004, according to a report from the Industry and Trade Ministry.

The number of non-public petrol stations fell by 20 to 2,408. The drop was caused mainly by a change in their classification to service fuel tanks, the ministry said.

The number of petrol stations with access limited to specific clients increased by seven to 665.

It needs to be taken into consideration that the registration is made according to the petrol stations' owner, the ministry noted.

"For this reason, in many cases, in particular as regards public LPG filling stations on the premises of standard petrol stations of other owners, two petrol stations can be registered in one locality even when there is only one service for them," says the report.

The number of these cases will grow with further development of LPG and CNG filling stations, it adds.

The number of filling stations offering only LPG went up by seven to 508 and the number of filling stations solely for CNG rose by 19 to 116.

The register of filling stations also includes 156 stations whose operation has been suspended, the ministry noted.

Compared with the neighbouring countries, the CR looks like a filling station power. It leads as regards the number of inhabitants per one public petrol station and in the number of petrol stations on motorways.

Ivan Indracek, chairman of the board of directors at the Union of Czech Petroleum Independents, earlier told CTK that the domestic market is fully saturated when it comes to standard petrol stations and LPG stations.

Natural gas and electromobility are the segments with growth potential in the future, Indracek told CTK.

Petrol stations in the CR

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*
Total	6,591	6,690	6,790	6,918	7,013	7,010	6,992	7,004
Of this:								
Non-public	2,626	2,567	2,590	2,600	2,607	2,529	2,428	2,408
With limited access	293	397	472	573	614	637	658	665
Public	3,672	3,717	3,728	3,745	3,792	3,844	3,906	3,931

* - data for H1

No. of petrol stations in individual Czech regions in H1 2017

Region	No. of stations	Of this public
Central Bohemia	1,084	581
South Moravia	752	419
South Bohemia	649	300
Moravia-Silesia	591	387
Usti	550	320
Vysocina	537	240
Plzen	487	248
Olomouc	436	252
Hradec Kralove	415	234
Pardubice	401	215
Zlin	384	220
Prague	286	221
Liberec	251	172
Karlovy Vary	181	122
TOTAL	7,004	3,931

2 DIVISIONS OF VITKOVICE POWER ENGINEERING WILL BE PUT UP FOR SALE – 14.8.

Insolvency administrator has called on parties potentially interested in purchasing part of the VITKOVICE POWER ENGINEERING plant to send in an expression of interest. The bridges and steel structures division and the energy engineering division may be sold outside of auctions. Offers will be accepted until August 21, 2017. Given the economic situation of the debtor the transaction will have to be completed by September 2017. This means that a swift negotiation of a possible sale is expected. The completion of the transaction will be subject to the approval of the creditor committee and the insolvency court.

CR'S INDUSTRIAL PRODUCER PRICES SLOW GROWTH TO 1.1% IN JULY – 16.8.

Industrial producer prices in the CR slowed their annual growth to 1.1% in July from June's 1.3%, with prices in agriculture, construction and services rising as well, the CSO said today.

The annual growth of industrial prices was influenced by a 5.4% price rise of metals. Food producers raised prices by 4%, with prices of dairy products rising by 15.8%. Prices of mining and quarrying grew by 2.9%.

On the other hand, prices of transport equipment and electricity and gas prices decreased y-o-y.

M-o-m, industrial producer prices fell by 0.2%.

Prices in agriculture kept their two-digit annual growth, as they rose by 13% in July, a similar rate as in June and May. The growth was driven mainly by animal production where prices rose by 18.7%, with prices of milk up by 37%. Prices of crop products rose by 8.4%.

M-o-m, agriculture producer prices decreased by 0.7%.

According to analysts, with regard to the prices of crude oil and trends in agriculture, July's development of producer prices was not surprising.

Construction prices increased by 1.6% y-o-y, the same rate as in June.

Prices of market services in the business sector accelerated growth by 1.4% from June's 1.1%.

M-o-m, prices of construction work increased by 0.1%, while prices of market services fell by 0.8%.

The CSO also released data on the development of foreign trade in June. Export prices fell by 0.4% y-o-y, mainly due to the strengthening of the Czech crown against the euro and the US dollar, compared to a 1-percent rise in May.

Import prices, on the other hand, rose by 0.5% in June, growing for the seventh month in a row.

M-o-m, export prices decreased by 1.3% and import prices fell by 1.9%.

ENERGY

CTK CZECH GAS CONSUMPTION 9.3% HIGHER IN H1 Y-O-Y – 14.8.

The CR's consumption of natural gas increased by 9.3% y-o-y to 4.71bn cubic metres at the end of June, according to the latest data from the Energy Regulatory Office (ERU).

A higher number of freezing days in January and the operation of the gas power plant in Pocerady are behind the growth in the consumption, said Czech Gas Association executive director Jan Ruml.

"January saw the highest consumption in the past five years," Ruml told CTK.

"January 19 was the coldest day and at the same time a day with the highest consumption of 41.8mn cubic metres of natural gas," said Ruml.

The total consumption reached 1.46bn cubic metres of natural gas in January, displaying an annual rise of 22.6%, the ERU data have shown.

Meteorologists said January 2017 was the seventh coldest start of the year since since 1961. Its average temperature of minus 5.6 degrees Celsius was nearly three degrees below the long-term average.

January 2006 was colder than the first month of this year, its average temperature at minus six degrees.

The CR has some 2.84mn gas customers, of whom 92.6% are households and 7.4% are small, mid-sized and large customers. Large customers usually have the highest share of consumption. They consumed 1.96bn cubic metres of natural gas in the Jan-June period, 7.3% more in annual terms, according to the regulator's data.

Household consumption was 6.5% higher at 1.42bn cubic metres.

The CR imports a major portion of gas from Russia via Ukraine and Slovakia. However, the country also has alternative routes, namely the Gazela gas pipeline that connects the CR to a network supplying Russian gas to Europe via Nord Stream across the Baltic Sea, and the Yamal gas pipeline via Belarus and Poland.

CIA EC HAS APPROVED CR'S PLAN TO EXPAND ALTERNATIVE FUELS – 14.8.

The CR's plans to support the construction of filling and charging stations for vehicles with low emissions are in line with EU rules for state support.

This was decided by the European Commission (EC), according to which the measure contributes to reducing CO2 emissions without interfering with competition on the single market.

Support totaling EUR 44.5mn will be provided from the regime over six years for the construction of publicly

accessible charging stations and filling stations for vehicles with alternative fuel.

Companies already active in the sector will be able to apply for support in four independent tenders.

MISCELLANEOUS

CTK POLL: CZECHS PREFER RIGHT TO LEFT – 11.8.

Over one-third of Czech say they prefer the right part of the political spectrum, while preference for the left was only expressed by 27% in a poll conducted by the CVVM polling institute in June and released today.

The representation of the left has been falling since the end of 2015, the poll has found.

The proportion of the people preferring the centre is on the rise.

In June, the right was claimed by 35.4%, while the left by 26.9% and the centre by 27.4%.

Communist voters are clearly leftist, predominantly followed by the voters of the Social Democrats.

The voters of Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and TOP 09 are identified with the right.

"Those preferring ANO and Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) also tend to claim the right-wing political orientation," the CVVM said.

The left is popular with the elderly and respondents with secondary education.

People who consider their living standards good tend to identify with the right.

"Those with the bad living standards tend to prefer the left," the sociologists found.

In the long run, Czechs preferred the right between 2004 and 2007 and again between 2010 and 2011.

However, the left was gaining the upper hand between 2012 and 2013.

The poll was conducted on a sample of 983 Czechs over 15 between June 5 and 18.

Press Out Monitor POLL: CZECHS SUPPORT LEAST EU, POLES MOST OUT OF VISEGRAD FOUR – 15.8.

Less than three-fifths of Czechs support the CR's EU membership, which is the smallest proportion in the Visegrad Four (the CR, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary), according to a poll conducted by the CVVM polling institute and released on Monday.

The membership of the EU is supported the strongest, by four-fifths of Poles.

Compared with Poles and Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks prefer more often national sovereignty to the EU efficiency enhanced at its expense.

In Poland, EU membership is backed by 88%, followed by Hungary with 82%, Slovakia with 74% and the CR with 56%.

The polls only found minimum differences among the people in the V4 countries as to whether their countries have an influence on the decisions in the EU.

Some 25% of Poles and Slovaks and 22% of Hungarians consider the influence of their country on the EU decisions sufficient, while some two-thirds believe it is insufficient.

In the CR, it is considered sufficient by 15% and insufficient by 76%.

The polls also examined whether people in V4 countries prefer the EU ability to act coherently even at the expense of the independence of EU members or the independence at the cost of the EU ability to act.

The former idea is preferred by one-third of Poles and Hungarians, the latter by 43% and 55% of them, respectively. When it comes to Slovaks, 22% of them support EU efficiency at the cost of national sovereignty and 67% prefer independence.

In the CR, it was 16% as against 66%.

The poll was conducted on a sample of about 1,000 people over 18 in each of the countries in June and July.

PRAGUE EXTENDS BAN ON SEGWAY TRANSPORTERS – 15.8.

The Prague councillors approved the extension of the ban on the Segway two-wheel electric personal transporters, used mainly by foreign tourists, to apply in other districts and not only in the historical centre today.

People on these transporters will newly not be allowed to enter the whole Prague 2 and parts of the Prague 10 neighbourhood.

The amendment to the municipal directive is to take effect this year.

Prague approved the ban on the Segway transporters last May and they disappeared from the centre last December after the respective traffic signs were installed.

The Segway CR association of the personal transporter (PT) operators, which defends the interests of about 20 firms, demanded that the measure be lifted, but in vain. A Prague court definitively rejected its complaint in April.

The ban is now valid in the historical centre (Prague 1) and a part of the broader centre.

The extended ban is to be published in August 18. Subsequently, the Road Technical Authority will have to install the respective traffic signs on all access roads to the zones where these personal transporters must not be used.

The police can impose an up to 2000-crown fine for violating the ban.

District town halls and people in the centre of Prague complained about the disturbing operation of the Segway PTs that were mainly used by tourists. Their ban was enabled by an amendment to the road traffic law that newly described them as vehicles instead of pedestrians.

After the ban on the Segway transporters took effect, their operators used them for advertising in the centre. However, they thereby violated the market regulations. Some of them bought and started operating electric scooters, to which the ban does not apply yet, in the centre.

RECORD 31 PARTIES APPLY FOR RUNNING IN CZECH GENERAL ELECTION – 16.8.

31 election entities have applied for running in the October 20-21 Czech election to the Chamber of Deputies, which is the highest number in the history of the CR, CTK found out at regional offices where parties could submit their lists of candidates by 16:00 yesterday.

24 parties ran in the previous early general election in 2013. Like in the past, some entities plan to run in selected regions only.

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