

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STŘEDOČESKÝ REGION

The Středočeský Region lies in the centre of Bohemia. Its area, number of municipalities and population ranks it among the biggest regions of the Czech Republic. The Region's area (11,015 km²) covers almost 14 % of the CR's area and is about 1.9 times larger than the average area of a region in the CR. The Středočeský Region is surrounding the Capital City of Prague from all sides and borders almost all the regions of Bohemia except for the Karlovarský Region and new "Moravian" regions. Its territory belongs to the Český masiv (the Bohemian Massif), which is one of the oldest parts of the European continent. The landscape relief passes from the flat north near the Labe River to the highlands in the southern and southwestern part of the Region. The highest point of the territory is the peak called Tok (864 m above sea level) in the Brdy Mountains in the Příbram District; the lowest is the surface of the Labe River (153 m above sea level) in the Mělník District.

The Region divides into 12 districts with 10 district authority municipalities. By area, the largest is the Příbram District (15 % of the Region's area); the smallest is the Praha-východ District (5 % share). In 2005, there were 1,146 municipalities in the Region. The highest number of municipalities is concentrated in the Mladá Boleslav District (123), while the lowest is in the Mělník District (70).

As at 1 January 2003, when the state administration reform came into force, district authorities were cancelled; however, districts as territorial units did not cease to exist. At the same time, administrative districts of municipalities with authorized municipal office of the 2nd level and administrative districts of municipalities with extended powers of the 3rd level were established. In the Středočeský Region, there are 26 administrative districts of the municipalities with extended powers, which differ a lot as for their size. The biggest administrative district of the municipality with extended powers is the Mladá Boleslav administrative district, which comprises 98 municipalities; on the contrary, the Lysá nad Labem administrative district consists only of 9 municipalities.

There lived 1,158,108 inhabitants in the Region as at 31 December 2005. The most populated district is the Kladno District with already more than 150,000 inhabitants, followed by the Mladá Boleslav District, the Praha-východ District and the Příbram District with more than 100,000 inhabitants each. On the other hand, the least populated is the Rakovník District with almost 55,000 inhabitants. The population density is highest in the Kladno District, the Praha-východ District, the Praha-západ District, and the Mělník District (over 130 inhabitants per km²). All these districts have strong socio-economic ties with Prague and they constitute to some extent the metropolitan background of the Capital City. The lowest density of population is reported in the Rakovník District, the Benešov District, and the Příbram District where it does not exceed 70 inhabitants per km².

Demographic development of the Region started to change markedly in the second half of 1990's mainly thanks to construction of satellite residential units in Prague's surroundings. The reason is a constant growth by migration (in 2000 it was 5.9 per mille, in 2005 it was 12.8 per mille), which positively affects the natural population change. Thanks to the structure of the moved in inhabitants, which are usually younger and start their families in the Region, the fall of the natural population change decreases (from 2.6 per mille in 2000 to 0.6 per mille in 2005). The result is more than a triple increase of the total population growth.

What significantly influences its economic characteristic is the Region's position. Close ties with the Capital City and dense transportation network make the position of the Region very favourable. On the other hand, obvious imbalance between the relationship of Prague (as a metropolis of the national importance) and the Central Bohemia (as a periphery of Prague) is a disadvantage for the Region. That, together with the absence of a regional town as an administrative centre of the Region, to a certain extent limits the development of the Region. The Region is an important source of labour force for Prague; it supplements the Prague's industry, supplies Prague with food, and provides to Prague its recreation potential.

The Středočeský Region has the second densest (after Prague), but also the most overloaded transport network in the CR. Main railway and road transit networks lead in a historical radial arrangement over the territory of the Region to the Capital City. Water transport is also present in the Region. The only waterway in the Czech Republic for internal and international transport is the Labsko-vltavská (Labe-Vltava) waterway with about 75% passing through the Region's area.

Developed agricultural and industrial production is characteristic for the Středočeský Region. Agricultural production profits from excellent natural conditions in the northeastern part of the Region. The Region is great at crop production, growing of wheat, barley, beet, and in parts close to towns also in growing of fruits, vegetables and flowers.

The following belong to the key industries in the Region: engineering, chemical industry and food industry. ŠKODA AUTO a.s. Mladá Boleslav (automobile factory) is an enterprise of a national importance, manufacture of small cars in TPCA Czech, s.r.o Kolín has been started. There are also several important enterprises from the following industries: glass industry, ceramics manufacture and printing industry. Traditional industrial branches undergo a recession – it applies to coal mining, steel industry and leather manufacture.

In comparison with the branch structure of employment in the CR, the number of employees in manufacturing rises well above the average, along with agriculture, while the number of employees in construction and services is rather low. Services, however, have been reporting a progressive increase during the last years.

With the 2005 average gross wage of CZK 19,182, the Středočeský Region was second to the Capital City of Prague in the nation-wide comparison. Compared to 2004, the average gross wage increased in the Region by 5.3%. Drawing an inter-district comparison, the highest wage was reported for the Mladá Boleslav District (CZK 21,561) and the Praha-východ District (CZK 20,625); the lowest was measured in the Příbram District (CZK 16,528).

The unemployment rate is lower than the national average for a long-term. There are distinctive differences in unemployment within the Region, again because of the influence of the short distance from Prague. As at 31 December 2005, the registered unemployment rate in the Region was according to the new methodology 6.25%. The highest rate was reported for the Kutná Hora District (9.41%) and the lowest for the Praha-východ District (2.55%).

Gross domestic product per capita in the Středočeský Region in 2005 was 92,9% of the average level of GDP per capita of the Czech Republic, which ranked the Region 3rd within all the regions of the CR. It is – besides the results of car industry - markedly influenced by the strategically favourable position of the Region, i.e. the fact that it is surrounding the CR's capital.

On the territory of the Středočeský Region, there are many important and historically valuable sights and several Protected Landscape Regions. The biggest concentration of historical buildings and monuments is in the town of Kutná Hora, (Cathedral of St Barbara, Italian Court, Hrádek Museum of Silver & Medieval Mining, Ossuary), which was added to Unesco's World Heritage List. On the Czech list of urban conservation areas of Central Bohemia there is (besides Kutná Hora) only Kolín. The most famous castles are Karlštejn and Točnick in Beroun area, Křivoklát in Rakovník area, Český Šternberk in Benešov area, and Kokořín in Mělník area. The most important chateaux are Konopiště in Benešov area, Žleby and Kačina in Kutná Hora area, Láňy in Rakovník area, Nelahozeves or Mělník's castle. The most interesting castle ruins are Žebrák in Beroun area and Okoř in the Praha-západ District.

The most valuable natural area of the Region is the Křivoklát Protected Landscape Region, which is a UNESCO "biosphere preservation" area; among other important areas are the Kokořín Protected Landscape Region, Český kras (the Bohemian Karst), Český ráj (the Bohemian Paradise) and Blaník.