

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MORAVSKOSLEZSKÝ REGION

The Moravskoslezský Region is very diverse from geographical point of view. From the west it is bound by the massif of the Hrubý Jeseník Mountain Range with the highest peak of the Region and the entire Moravia, the Praděd (1 491 m). The mountains gradually pass to the Nízký Jeseník rolling foothills and the Odra Hills (Oderské vrchy). Central part of the Region is characteristic by densely populated lowland territory of the Opava lowlands (Opavská nížina), the Ostrava basin (Ostravská pánev) and the Moravian gateway (Moravská brána). Towards the southeast, the landscape again gains a mountainous character and culminates by the Beskydy Mountains – that are called the Moravian-Silesian Beskydy Mountains (Moravskoslezské Beskydy) at the border with Slovakia – topping out at Lysá hora (1 323 m) and the Silesian Beskydy Mountains (Slezské Beskydy) on the border with Poland.

The Region lies in the northeast of the Czech Republic being one of its most marginal parts. In the north and in the east it borders with Polish voivodeships (the Silesian and Opole voivodeships), in the southeast with the Žilina Region of Slovakia. Within the regional arrangement of the CR it is lined by the Olomoucký Region and in the south it touches the Zlínský Region. Since the Region creates the state borders, it can effectively co-operate in the area of output, development of infrastructure, protection of the environment, cultural and education activity and, most of all, in tourism. For this purpose, 4 euroregions exist on the territory of the Region now: Beskydy, Praděd, Silesia and Těšínské Slezsko.

The Moravskoslezský Region is determined by the following districts: the Bruntál, Frýdek-Místek, Karviná, Nový Jičín, Opava and Ostrava-město Districts; it is divided to 22 administrative districts of the municipalities with extended powers, in which there are 299 municipalities in total, of which 41 are towns. With its area of 5 427 sq km it occupies 6.9% of the territory of the Czech Republic and thus it ranks sixth among all the regions. More than a half of the Region's territory is agricultural land; over 35% are forest lands (especially in the mountain areas of Jeseníky and Beskydy). Besides the beauties of nature, there are also rich mineral resources in the Region: primarily decisive domestic black coal deposits, also natural gas reserves, a rich deposit of calcite, granite, marble, slate, gypsum, gravel sand, sand and brick-clays.

Surface water of the Moravskoslezský Region mostly drains into the Baltic Sea; only that of part of the Nízký Jeseník (Rýmařov area) and small territories of the Nový Jičín District belongs to the Morava river basin and drains into the Black Sea. The most important is the Odra River that springs in the Odra Hills. On the territory of the town of Ostrava the Odra River receives its biggest supplies – the Opava River that drains water from the Jeseníky Mountains and the area of the town of Opava and the Ostravice River that drains water from the Moravskoslezské Beskydy. In the north of Bohumín, the Olše River flows into the Odra River – it creates the border with Poland and drains water from the area of the town of Těšín. At the place where the Odra and Olše Rivers meet, the territory of the Region reaches its minimum (195 m). The main sources of drinking water are the Šance dam and Morávka dam in the Moravskoslezské Beskydy and the Kružberk dam in the Nízký Jeseník.

From the 19th century the Region ranks among the most important industrial areas of Central Europe. However, the Region's structure of economy is currently causing many problems that relate to its restructuring as well as social issues arisen from the increase in unemployment.

Since 1990, a substantial environmental improvement has been observed as a result of the reduction of manufacturing, utilisation of more environmental-friendly technologies and significant investments into environmental measures. Despite the mentioned improvements, the Region still belongs to the areas with the biggest environmental burden in the Czech Republic, because in the past all components of the environment have been polluted. Currently, the most problematic issues are contamination of soil and subterranean waters due to industrial activity, the sinking land caused by the coal-mining activity, pollution of surface waters and air pollution.

The character of the nature and different economic development cause differences in the quality of the environment in individual parts of the Region. The most serious impacts on the environment concentrate in central and northeastern part of the Region (the area of Ostrava, Karviná and Třinec towns). On the other hand, there are also places with important and valuable beauties of nature that are protected within 3 protected landscape areas – Beskydy (with the size of 1 160 sq km including the Zlín part of the biggest protected landscape area in the CR), Jeseníky and Poodří (an area around the Odra River) – and 148 small protected areas.

The Moravskoslezský Region is the 3rd most populated Region in the CR (over 1 247 000 inhabitants), but the number of municipalities (299) places the Region among those with fewest settlements. This fact corresponds to the density of population 230 inhabitants per square km, while the national figure is 133 inhabitants per sq km. The average cadastral area of municipality is 18.1 sq km, being thus the second largest in the CR and by 50% larger than the cadastral area of the average municipality in the CR (12.6 sq km). Only less than 2% of the Region's population live in municipalities of 499 inhabitants and under; 24% live in municipalities of 500 – 4 999 inhabitants, and over 13% live in municipalities of 5 000 – 19 999 inhabitants. Most of the population (nearly 61%) live in towns of 20 000 inhabitants and over – such percentage is an exception in the CR. There were more than 306 000 inhabitants living in the Region's capital Ostrava, i.e. about a quarter of the Region's population. Other big cities – with the number of inhabitants over 50 000 – are Havířov, Karviná, Frýdek-Místek and Opava.

Regarding population, the basic characteristic of the current situation not only in the Moravskoslezský Region, but also in the whole CR is a very low birth rate. Therefore there is a gradual ageing of the population. Although the last strong population age-group from the second half of the 20th century are in their child-bearing age and birth rate has slightly increased, there was again a natural decrease of population. Moreover, unlike the rest of the Republic, since 1993 there has been continued decrease of population in the Region by migration.

During the times of Austria-Hungary, the larger part of the Moravskoslezský Region became one of the most important industrial areas. The core of this area is the Ostrava-Karviná industrial and mining basin that was industrialised in close relation with the exploitation of its raw materials, particularly quality bituminous coking coal, and subsequent

development of heavy industry and metallurgy. The Region is the nation-wide centre of metallurgy. Moreover, almost the entire output of bituminous coal comes from this area, although the volume of coal brought out on the surface is diminishing. Besides these traditional branches, also generation and distribution of electricity, gas and water, production of transport vehicles and manufacture of chemicals, chemical products and man-made fibres are putting through in the Region.

Despite the current slow-down of heavy industry and raw materials mining, the above mentioned branches of industry employ nearly one third of the total number of 557.5 thous. persons, who are employed in national economy, another 12.3% work at trade and repairs of goods, according to sample surveys. The 2008 average gross wage in the Moravskoslezský Region (workplace method, incl. enterprises with less than 20 employees; preliminary) was by more than 1 200 CZK under the national average, amounting to the fifth highest average in the CR (after the Capital City of Prague, the Středočeský Region, the Plzeňský Region and the Jihomoravský Region). It was 20 730 CZK per employee. The distribution of wages among industries is similar to that in the other regions of the CR, the highest wages being paid in Information and communication, Mining and quarrying and Financial and insurance activities, while the lowest in Accommodation and food service activities.

The industrial structure of the Region is currently causing many problems that are related especially to the higher unemployment rate. The best situation, relatively, is in the Frýdek-Místek District, while on the opposite side of the scale (in comparison both within the Region and the entire Czech Republic) are the Bruntál and Karviná Districts, which take one of the latest places among all the districts of the CR. What is a really hot problem is the share of the long-term unemployed (for over 12 months) in the total number of the unemployed, which is in the Region distinctively higher than the national average.

When Czechoslovakia divided into two independent countries, the Moravskoslezský Region found itself on the periphery of the CR's northeast border with Poland and the Slovak Republic, far away from direct contacts with the Capital City of Prague and with the economic development of the EU advanced countries. The highway D1 between Lipník nad Bečvou and Bohumín nearly 80 km long solves transport issues and economic revival. The next fundamental routes of the current road network are the following: the international road I/11 (E 75) leading from Opava via Ostrava, Český Těšín to Mosty u Jablunkova, and the international road I/48 (E 462) leading from Nový Jičín via Frýdek-Místek to Český Těšín. Both roads go through the eastern part of the Region. The Moravskoslezský Region has two railway lines of European importance: electrified lines No. 270 and No. 320. The line No. 270 is an important part of the main railway route of the CR leading from Prague to Bohumín. The air transport is ensured by the international airport in Mošnov, which is the second busiest airport in the CR. Its landing runway is 3 500 m long, which enables landing of aeroplanes of all categories without limitation.

A schooling system of good quality can be found in the Moravskoslezský Region. At its 455 basic schools, 98 835 pupils are fulfilling their compulsory education. There are 153 secondary schools (of which 46 teaching in programmes of grammar schools), 2 conservatoires and 11 higher professional schools along with 5 universities – VŠB – Technical University of Ostrava, University of Ostrava, Silesian University in Opava, Business School Ostrava and College of Social and Administration Affairs, Institute of Lifelong Learning Havířov. The universities comprise 16 faculties and provide study programmes for more than 45 000 students.

There are 264 inhabitants per physician in the Region, with the number varying within the range of 189 (Ostrava-město District) to 329 (Karviná District). The Region has over 6 666 beds available in 18 hospitals and other 2 921 beds in establishments for long-term patients and specialised therapeutic institutions. Establishments of social service dispose of more than 8 800 beds, especially for the elderly.

Traditional cultural centres of the Region are Ostrava, Opava and for the territory with important Polish minority Český Těšín. The Region has many theatres, museums, galleries and cinemas. In Ostrava there is also the Janáček Philharmonic (Janáčková filharmonie). Lovers of literature can visit over 400 libraries. Towns and municipalities offer wide range of sports via stadiums, multipurpose halls and hundreds of playgrounds, gymnasiums, open-air pools and swimming pools. Besides cultural and sports activities in towns and municipalities, the diverse and eye-pleasing scenery of northern Moravia and Silesia offers also many possibilities for recreation, tourism, sightseeing and therapeutic programmes. In summer period, the Region offers thanks to its network of cycle and tourism paths conditions for hiking and cycling; in winter, mountain ranges of the Hrubý Jeseník and Beskydy are centres of cross-country and downhill skiing. The Moravskoslezský Region has many cultural monuments. On its territory are several urban conservation areas (centres of Příbor, Nový Jičín and Štramberk). Beautiful chateaux (mansions) are in Hradec nad Moravicí, Raduň, Kravaře near the town of Opava and at Fulnek. Most important castles are Sovinec near Rýmařov, Starý Jičín and Hukvaldy near Beskydy. What is specific to the Region is a rich background for industrial tourism (e.g. the Automobile Technical Museum in Kopřivnice, the Railway Coach Museum in Studénka, the Museum of Mining in Ostrava-Petřkovice, the area of Dolní Vítkovice ironworks, the Michal Mine, etc.). Water sports fans like to go down the Moravice River and the Odra River; those, who prefer recreation at expanses of water, visit the Žermanice and Těrlicko dams and fewer of them also the Slezská Harta. The balneological industry is based on the curative effect of iodine-bromine water springs in Spa Darkov with the Institute of Physiotherapy located there too. Since the 1990's there has been a new spa sanatorium in operation in Klimkovice situated in architecturally interesting buildings.