

CZECH CITIES TO RECEIVE EUR 850 MILLION TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY



Problems related to traffic congestion, noise and emissions affect most European cities, including those in the Czech Republic. At a recent debate co-organised by CEBRE called "Sustainable urban mobility: how to do it?", the topic was discussed not only by representatives of the European Commission, municipalities and smart technology experts, but also by representatives of the commercial sector. The debate focused not only on European and Czech strategic frameworks to support urban mobility and the experience of certain municipalities, but also on the impact of addressing these issues on governmental organisations, business and municipalities. The European framework sets out guidelines on how cities can reduce emissions and improve mobility, including through Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans. The main focus is on public transport, walking and cycling. The framework also gives priority to zero-emission solutions for urban fleets, the construction and modernisation of multimodal hubs and new digital solutions and services. These activities are supported by the possibility of drawing European funds from the Operational Programme Transport and the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) on the basis of the preparation of urban mobility improvement plans, while cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants are obliged to prepare a plan and the Czech Republic will have to respond to this fact. According to the Commission

representative, the Operational Programme Transport could be approved by summer 2022. The OP Transport for sustainable urban transport currently has a financial envelope of EUR 850 million for the period 2021-2027, covering rail transport (trolleys and tram lines) for 13 urban agglomerations, including Prague and Brno. Investments in telematics are also foreseen. Further funding is possible, e.g. through the national recovery plans. The Commission is helping to develop national plans to help cities create their mobility plans through recommendations. When discussing the financing of sustainable urban mobility projects, the conceptual framework must precede their submission and care must be taken to ensure that the different modes of transport complement and build on each other appropriately, according to Petr Gelnar of Brno City Hall. The Czech Republic excels in European rankings in terms of quality and use of public transport, but lags behind in the use of cycle lanes or in the supply of charging points. This is confirmed, among others, by Jan Charouz from Škoda Auto DigiLab, which offers a wide range of services to support sustainable urban mobility, for example in the area of car sharing. He recalled that European cities have gone to extreme lengths in terms of sustainability, such as limiting the entry of cars with internal combustion engines or charging for access to the city centre.

CZ PRES SHOULD FOCUS ON INTERNAL MARKET, ENERGY SECURITY AND LABOUR MARKET, CZECH BUSINESSES SAY

A couple of weeks before the start of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Czech business community announced its priorities for the coming period. According to Czech businesses, the presidency should focus on, among other things, the development of the internal market, the finalization of international trade agreements, energy security, openness of the digital economy, and also on the humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees. The Czech Republic should use the presidency to influence legislative proposals, accentuate and moderate current important issues, and also show the Czech Republic as a full

and constructive member of the EU. The main priorities of Czech businesses within the Czech Presidency include: A resilient and open Europe, by strengthening the open strategic autonomy of European industry, its resilience, diversification, ambitious common trade policy and effective multilateralism. Another important pillar is a competitive and sustainable Europe, ensuring its energy security and a gradual path to EU climate neutrality, considering the impact on industrial competitiveness, as well as deepening and improving the EU internal market, increasing competitiveness and strengthening EU growth. The third pillar of priorities is

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>CZECH REPUBLIC SUPPORTS COMMON EU APPROACH DURING ENERGY CRISIS

The Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic promotes a common EU approach regarding the endeavour to decrease European dependency on Russian fossil fuels. In addition, Czech Minister Jozef Sikela mentioned that European investment should focus on gas infrastructure ensuring sufficient transport capacity from border countries to Central Europe.

>CZECH BUSINESSES EAGER TO INVEST IN PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEMS

The Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic announced it will allocate additional CZK 1 billion to support installations of photovoltaic systems among businesses. Due to current situation in the energy sector, companies are highly interested in reducing energy consumption, therefore the initial budget of CZK 3 billion wouldn't be sufficient

>NATIONAL RECOVERY PLAN TO SUPPORT WATER SAVINGS

A new support programme financed from the Czech national recovery plan will focus on water savings among businesses. Industrial companies that will want to implement the principles of circular economy and decrease their water consumption will be able to acquire up to CZK 25 million, while the total budget amounts to CZK 1 billion.

a Europe with a dynamic labour market. The EU should aim for an inclusive and flexible labour market in a time of recovery in the era of digitization and green transformation, as well as promoting employment by increasing the predictability of the regulatory environment, respecting diversity and reducing the administrative burden of the European labour market. These priorities were presented by the Confederation of Industry on 20th May during a press conference in Prague.

BUSINESSES WELCOME STRENGTHENING OF COOPERATION WITHIN THE EU-US TRADE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

The recent EU-US Trade and Technology Council held in mid-May in Paris reaffirmed the close transatlantic partnership in trade and technology, particularly in relation to the reconstruction of Ukraine, the strengthening of cooperation to promote the integrity of information in crisis situations, the joint enforcement of internationally recognised labour law, and the introduction of export controls on advanced technologies to undermine Russia's ability to further develop its industrial and military capabilities. The US and EU discussed, among other things, the supply chain security and the strengthening of supply chain resilience. The two sides also discussed joint public funding of digital projects in third countries, standardization in areas such as AI, additive manufacturing, materials recycling, and the Internet of Things. The EU and the US also reaffirmed their support for an open, global, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet and an agreement on platform governance. In the area of SME access to technology, the partners discussed ways how SMEs can achieve a better level of cybersecurity and benefit from simplified regulatory approvals and access to new export

markets. On environment and climate, the two sides will work together on green public procurement and on developing common methodologies for determining carbon footprints. On potential trade barriers, the ministers agreed to increase transatlantic trade and investment, particularly in the areas of public procurement, conformity assessment, and to exchange information on potential new trade barriers both bilaterally and in relation to third countries. European businesses are pleased to see the dialogue between the two sides developing and appreciate, for example, the progress towards a final resolution of disputes concerning large civil aircraft and steel and aluminium, the coordination of exports from the EU to the US and vice versa, and the promotion of energy and food security. Businesses also appreciate that ending Europe's dependence on energy resources from Russia is a shared priority between the US and the EU. Business leaders expect US-EU cooperation to address restrictive measures by third countries, including in particular Chinese anti-competitive market practices, and to increase investment in AI research, 6G technologies and semiconductor manufacturing.



EESC CORNER: SECURITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY - EUROPE IS BEING PUT TO THE TEST AGAIN



At May plenary, the European Economic and Social Committee threw its support behind the Commission's "REPowerEU" Communication, stressing that energy security must be accompanied by urgent measures to protect vulnerable users, accelerate decarbonisation, diversify energy sources and reduce demand on Russian gas. Energy independence is key for Europe's future and so the EU needs to secure its energy supplies as soon as possible, breaking free of Russian gas. This is the main takeaway of the EESC opinion on "REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy". The current geopolitical situation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further worsened the unprecedented surge in energy prices the EU has faced in the past few months. It is therefore extremely important to take immediate steps to mitigate the impact of high prices for European households, farmers, businesses and industry. In order to offset the price pressures consumers

are experiencing at the moment, the EESC pointed out that national fiscal or regulatory interventions will be needed to avoid sudden price increases, secure affordable prices for end consumers and prevent energy poverty. However, it warned that EU and national policymakers should ensure that any measures do not hamper the functioning of the internal energy market, do not jeopardise decarbonisation and energy efficiency efforts and do not cause investment uncertainties in the energy industry. Moreover, they should be decided in close consultation with the relevant stakeholders. The EESC also stressed that "windfall taxes" must be handled with care so as not to discourage investments by energy companies in low-carbon solutions precisely at a time when Europe is being asked to press ahead with them to reach Green Deal goals and when it is confronted with extra costs for weaning itself off Russian gas. The new reality requires a drastic acceleration of the transition to clean energy and the increasing of the EU's energy independence and

autonomy. In order to accommodate the switch to the green transition towards Green Deal goals and also to diversified gas sources, while at the same time ensuring the flow of energy among Member States via transmission interconnections, infrastructure needs to be enhanced. Security of energy supplies also means a versatile energy production palette, making the most not only of wind and solar power, but also of a wide variety of other low-carbon energy sources that fit economically and ecologically within an energy system. Until the EU energy diversification has been completed, the EESC is in favour of using, from a practical point of view, stable and affordable energy sources that meet the low-carbon requirements, and urges the Commission to put forward a detailed action plan aimed at enhancing biogas production. The situation is very serious, we have to activate all energy sources at our disposal and ensure a great level of solidarity and trust among Member States in order to secure energy supply for all Europeans. Europe is being put to the test again, as it was during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and solidarity and cooperation among Member States is key to ensure the smooth running of our economy.



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