

BULGARIAN

ECONOMY

MONTHLY REPORT

Based on statistical data up to 19 April 2022

The materials in this report are based on statistical data published until 19 April, thus some of the indicators already reflect the consequences of the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine on 24 February.

The emergency epidemic situation in the country, introduced due to the outbreak of the COVID-19, was not extended after 31 March 2022 due to the substantial improvement in the health situation in the country. Regarding the current state of the pandemic, almost all domestic containment measures were dropped, including wearing masks in public places, thus citizens now enjoy much fewer restrictions on daily life. Meanwhile, the share of fully vaccinated people remains the lowest in the EU at 29.7% as of mid-March. Slightly over 10% of the population had administered an additional dose.

Short-term Business Statistics

In March, the business climate and the consumer confidence indicators

both deteriorated. The decrease in consumer confidence (-9.1 points) mostly reflected a fall in households' expectations about the general economic situation in the country. The lower business climate indicator (-4.8 points) was on the back of worsened expectations for the business situation of the enterprises in industry, services and retail trade. An increase in selling prices over the next 3 months was expected by 29% of the managers in industry and 53.2% of those in construction. In construction, 19.5% of the respondents declared problems with shortage of materials, which is 13.5 pps higher compared to February.

In February, the short-term indicators continued to grow steadily. The industrial production went up by 14.5% yoy, still driven by *electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply and manufacture of machinery and equipment*. There was a deceleration in the growth in *mining*

and quarrying. Energy products had the biggest contribution to industrial turnover growth (56.7%). Retail trade turnover was up by 6.6% and there was a deceleration in trade with non-food products. The construction production index increased by 4.3% over the same month in 2021.

Labour market

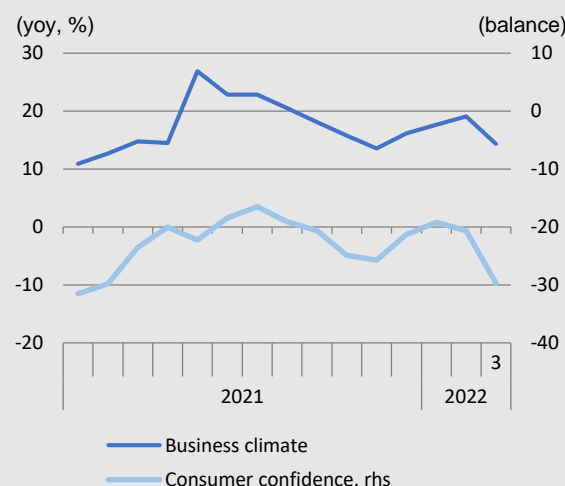
In the first three months of 2022, the number of registered unemployed followed its usual seasonal dynamics observed in the previous years. After its increase in January, the number of registered unemployed went down over the next two months and reached 155 863 people at the end of March. If this trend continues, it can be expected that during the summer of 2022 the indicator will register new historic lows. The employers still point out the shortage of

skilled labour force among the main impediments for their business growth, which indicates that labour demand will remain high.

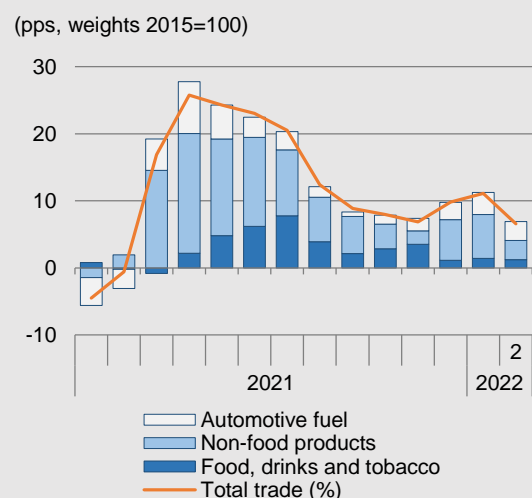
Inflation

In March, the monthly inflation rate stood at 2.1%, as measured by HICP, with price increases in all of its major components. Energy contributed the most, followed by food and non-alcoholic beverages, thus accounting together for 1.53 pps of the monthly increase in the headline rate. Prices of transport fuels went up by 12.7% over the previous month, as Brent prices soared to 115.6 \$/bbl on average in March, up by 24.3% mom in euro terms. On the other hand, prices of processed and unprocessed food both increased by 3.1% over February. Substantial increases were reported in prices of sunflower oil (+23.3% mom), eggs (+8.3%), flours and other cereals

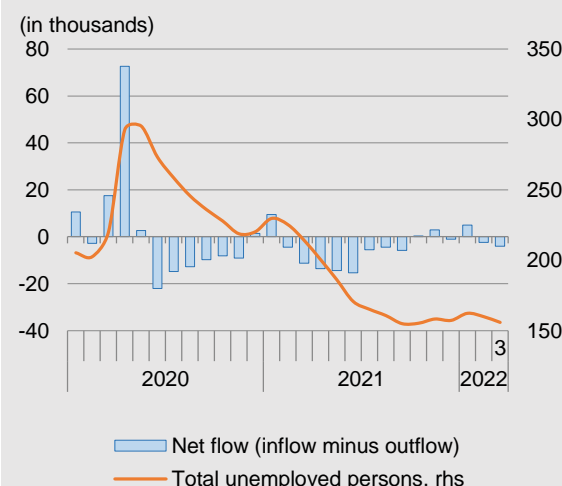
Graph 1 Business climate and consumer confidence



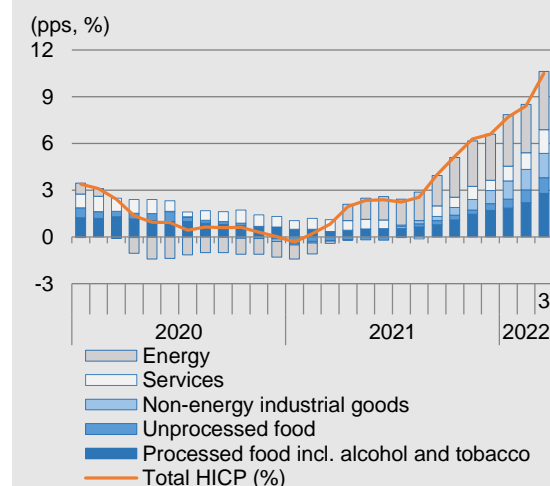
Graph 2 Contributions to retail trade turnover yoy growth



Graph 3 Net flow and stock of unemployment



Graph 4 Contributions by main HICP components



(+5.9% mom), meat (+5.2% mom). Services also contributed positively with second round effects from higher food and energy prices continuing to unfold. Consequently, prices of passenger transport by road increased by 6.2% during the month, whereas prices of catering services went up by 2.9% mom.

The annual HICP inflation rate continued to accelerate to 10.5% yoy in March, as all major components of the index contributed to this. Food and energy prices increased by 16.5% and 27.8%, respectively, and accounted for more than 70% of the increase in the headline rate over the same month in 2021. **Core inflation also accelerated to 7.3% yoy** with almost equal contribution from services and non-energy industrial goods.

External sector

The current account balance worsened in the beginning of 2022, as the deficit expanded to EUR 433 mln against an almost balanced position a year earlier. The negative change was mainly driven by larger deficit on trade with goods. Export of goods increased by 34.3% yoy, but was outpaced by the rise in import, up by 53.5% yoy. Surging

international prices pushed up both nominal growth rates. According to NSI data, export was led by intra-EU trade, while import growth was stronger in non-EU trade. Services surplus remained almost unchanged from a year earlier at 0.3% of projected GDP. Flows on primary and secondary income were limited during the first month of the year.

Gross external debt stood at 55.3% of projected GDP at end-January. Its level increased from a year earlier, up by 7.2%, with higher indebtedness in all institutional sectors, except FDI related debt. Still the ratio to GDP improved, due to positive denominator effect. Short-term debt by remaining maturity increased by 0.5pps to 36% of total external debt.

Financial Sector

Credit to the private sector accelerated to 9.7% yoy vs 8.5% yoy growth in January. The upward dynamics were led by both credit to non-financial corporations and to households, which increased by 6.6% and 13.8% yoy, respectively. Corporate overdraft and regular loans contributed to the higher NFC credit in line with the improvement of short-term business indicators, while bad

and restructured loans in the corporate segment continued to decrease with a double digit annual rate (down by 20.6% yoy). Meanwhile, consumer loans (up 11.3% yoy vs. 11.2% in January) and loans for house purchase (up 18.1% vs. 17.9% in January) continued to gain speed.

Higher demand for housing loans was driven, on one hand, by still low nominal interest rates, as well as the negative real rates on deposits in an environment of accelerating inflation, on the other, while house prices increased. The house price index (HPI) accelerated to 9.4% yoy in the last quarter of 2021 driven also by the significant increase in construction costs, for labor and especially for materials.

Weighted average interest rate on consumer loans declined further by 58 bps to 7.74% in February. The average price of loans for house purchase was down by 2 bps to 2.62%. Weighted price for corporate loans also went down by 8 bps to 2.44%. The weighted average return on new time deposits of NFCs and households remained negative (-0.02%). This was entirely due to the rate on NFCs' deposits in national currency

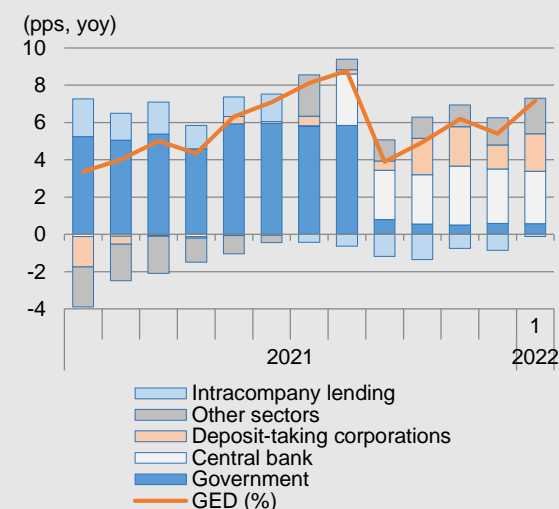
and euro, which were -0.39% and -0.01%, respectively.

Fiscal sector

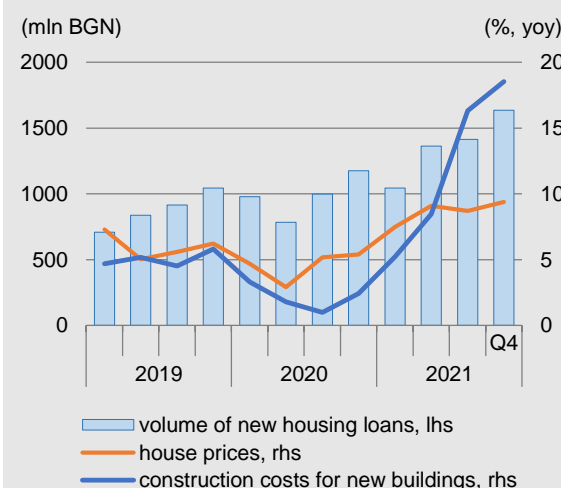
The balance on the Consolidated Fiscal Program (CFP) was positive at BGN 713.3 mln in the first two months of 2022 or 0.5% of projected GDP. Consolidated revenues and grants increased by 9.8% yoy, led by strong contribution from tax revenues and more specifically indirect taxes, up by 13% yoy. The latter was due to rise in VAT receipts from import, up by 48.2% yoy. Social and healthcare contributions also supported the increase in tax revenue, up by 9.3% yoy. At the same time direct taxes lowered on a year earlier, as personal income tax receipts continued to decline, down by 7.5% yoy, due to higher tax relief on children. Expenditure edged up by 0.4% yoy. The major contribution came from social spending, up by 7% yoy, followed by personnel costs (up by 2.3%) and maintenance spending (up by 3.2%).

Consolidated government debt in February remained unchanged from the previous month at 22.5% of projected GDP, being 22.0% of GDP in February 2021.

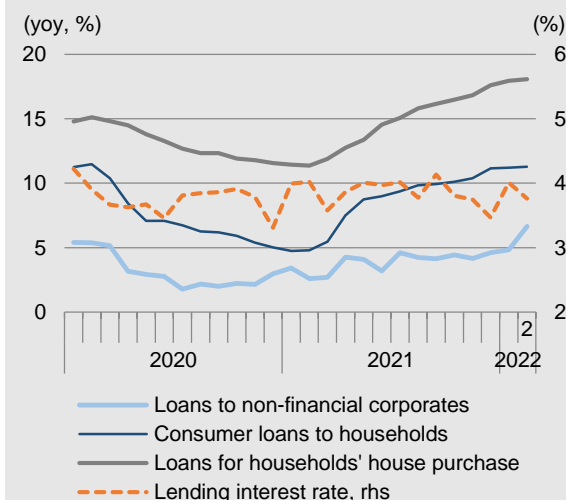
Graph 5 Contributions to GED dynamics



Graph 6 House price index, construction costs and new housing loans



Graph 7 Private sector credit



Graph 8 Contribution to growth of tax revenues on the CFP

