

BULGARIAN

ECONOMY

MONTHLY REPORT

Based on statistical data up to 19 October 2022

Gross domestic product – revised data

On 19.10.2022, the National Statistical Institute published revised National Accounts data. According to them, the nominal values of GDP for 2020 and 2021 were revised upwards, the increase for 2021 being BGN 6.3 bn. The decline in GDP for 2020 was changed from 4.4% to 4%, and real growth for 2021 was significantly raised - from 4.2% to 7.6%. For the first half of 2022, real GDP growth was reported at 4.1%, being 4.5% before the revision.

Short-term Business Statistics

In August, the growth of the short-term indicators gained momentum. Industrial production grew by 18.4%, with the manufacturing sector and particularly the *manufacture of food and metal products* accounting mainly for the reported acceleration. Industrial turnover growth stood at 92.2% with a more distinct acceleration in domestic market turnover which reached 112.6%. The growth was

driven by *energy, food products* and *metals*. The construction production index increased by 3.9% mainly on the back of building construction. An increase of 2.1% was recorded in the retail trade turnover.

In September, the decline in the consumer confidence indicator continued, while the business climate went up. The assessments for the current business situation of the enterprises in services and retail trade were favourable. At the same time, the expectations for future production in the industry and for the construction activity over the next 3 months deteriorated. Consumer confidence went down by 2.4 points as the outlook on consumers' future financial situation and the general economic situation in the country worsened.

Labour market

The number of registered unemployed decreased to 138 380 people at the end of September, which was the lowest value of the indicator for the last thirty years. During the summer

months of the year the indicator stabilized, thus the downward trend observed since the beginning of 2021 was no longer visible. The shortage of skilled labour force remained one of the main impediments for their business growth, but extra labour needed will be probably met through persons currently out of the labour force. In the last three months of the year, there will be a breaking point in registered unemployed dynamics and they are expected to start increasing.

Inflation

In September, the monthly inflation rate was 0.7% as measured by HICP. Prices of food products continued on the increase, up by 2% over the previous month, and kept their leading contribution to the rise in the headline rate. Energy prices reported higher by 1% on average as the administered price of natural gas went up by 16.7% over August, while prices of solid fuels increased by 11.7%, but these were largely compensated by a third consecutive decrease in prices of transport fuels, down by 5.1%

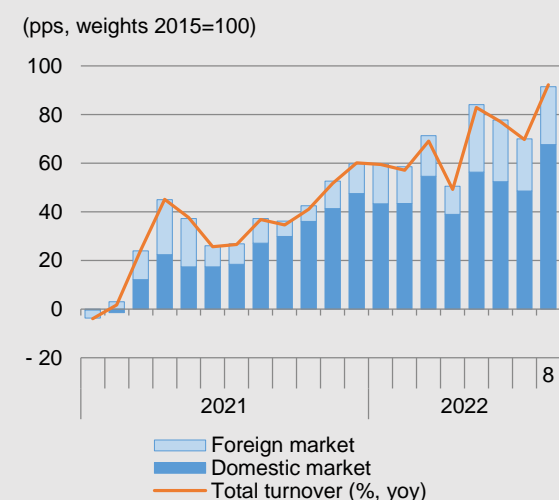
mom. Prices of non-energy industrial goods also reported higher, up by 1%. Only services prices declined by 0.9% over the previous month, mainly on the account of cheaper accommodation and package holidays at the end of the active summer season. Meanwhile, prices for catering services continued on the increase, this time up by 1.6% mom.

The annual HICP inflation rate gained further momentum at 15.6% in September. Food prices continued to contribute the most, followed by energy prices and together they still account for about 2/3 of the increase in the headline rate over the same month a year earlier. Core inflation accelerated to 12.7% yoy, with a higher contribution mainly from international airfares, as well as garments and footwear and pharmaceutical products.

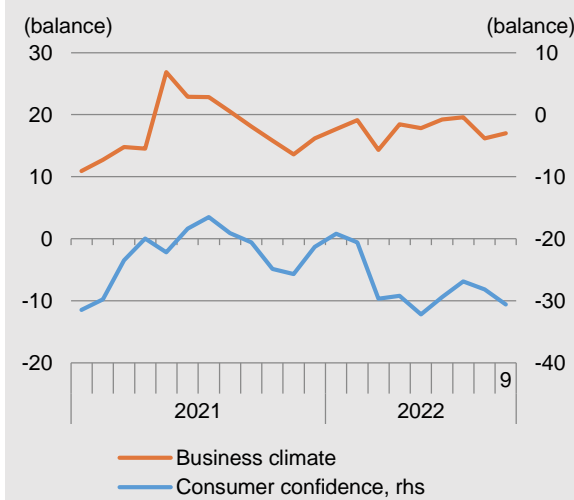
External sector

Current account balance remained positive in July, adding up to the accumulated surplus of 1% of projected GDP since the beginning of the year.

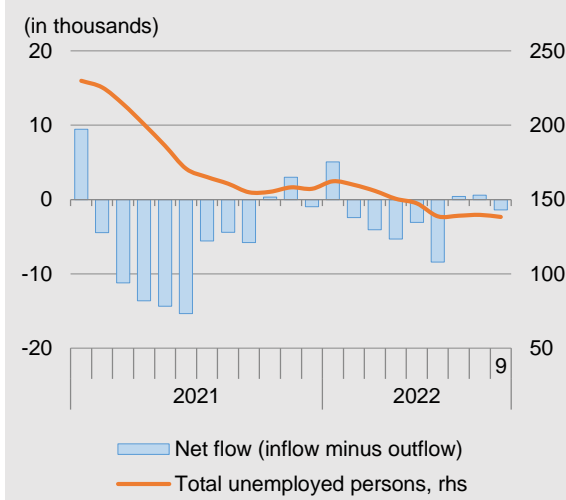
Graph 1 Contribution to industrial turnover yoy growth



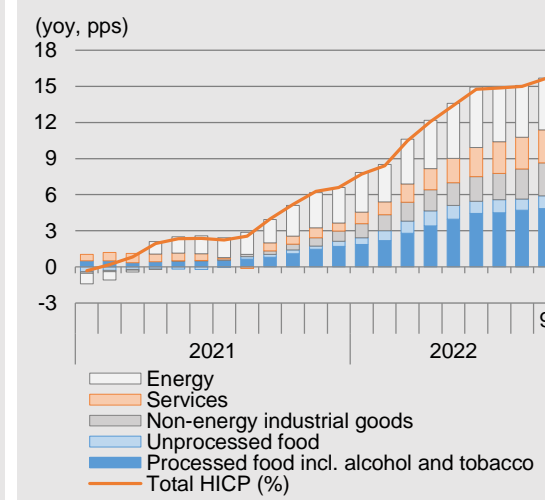
Graph 2 Business climate and consumer confidence



Graph 3 Net flow and stock of unemployment



Graph 4 Contributions by main HICP components



Trade with goods kept double-digit rates of growth, reflecting the surge in prices. In July, the increase in export, 40.5% yoy, was again outpaced by the rise in import, 55.1%, thus contributing to the widening of the trade deficit in the month and the year. On the other hand, the continuous recovery in travel receipts supported the higher surplus in services. Primary income balance also improved on a year earlier, as reported payments to non-resident investors are still below last year's. Surplus on secondary income increased in the month and through the period, too, due to higher inward transfers from foreign institutions.

Gross external debt equalled 50.9% of projected GDP, with FDI-related and private non-financial sector indebtedness representing the largest shares. Short-term debt by remaining maturity was 40.4% of the total.

Financial Sector

Credit to the private sector continued its upward trend in August, up by 13.9% yoy, compared to 13% at the end of the previous month. Credit to households went up by 15.1% yoy vs. 14.9% at the end of July, and contributed the most. Consumer loans accelerated further to 13.5% yoy coming from 13.1% yoy a month earlier. At the same time, while slightly losing momentum (18% yoy in August vs. 18.2% yoy in July), loans for house purchase reported the

biggest increase in absolute terms, fueled by record low interest rates on loans and deposits, alongside double digit inflation and house prices' increase. Loans to NFCs also had a sizeable contribution, going up by 12.1% yoy vs. 11% in the previous month. This time medium term loans (1 to 5 years maturity) led the increase (up by 14.4% yoy), followed by overdraft, which accelerated to 26% over the last 12 months.

Weighted average interest rate on corporate loans declined by 16 bps in August to reach 2.30% - close to its historical low, reached in April 2022.

The average rate on loans for house purchase remained unchanged for a third month in a row at its historical lowest point of 2.51%. Only the price of consumer loans increased – up by 10 bps to 8.22%. The average rate of return on time deposits reached 0.63% in August – the highest point since May 2016, after interest rates in all currencies for both NFCs' and households' deposits increased. Most notable was the increase in the interest rate on deposits in US dollars for NFCs, which accounted for 58% of the total sum of new corporate deposits for the month.

The annual rate of increase in house prices accelerated to 14.6% in Q2 2022, which is the highest growth of the indicator since 2009. Among the six cities with a population of over 120 000, for the second consecutive quarter the

most significant acceleration of the index was reported in Ruse, up by 23.3% yoy. It was followed by Sofia-city, where house prices increased by 17.3% compared to the same quarter of 2021. Construction costs for the same period gained a significant momentum, up by 56.7% yoy, which was mainly due to the higher prices of building materials, rather than labour costs. According to data from the Registry Agency, the growth of real estate transactions has significantly slowed down since the beginning of the current year, and even reported a 7.2% yoy decline in Q3 2022 (up by 30.1% on average for the country in 2021). All six largest cities reported decreases, and in Sofia this indicator went down by 15.2%. Registered mortgages followed a similar path, down by 2.7% on average in the third quarter, while a minimal 1.5% increase was recorded in Sofia. Against the backdrop of lower number of registered sales and mortgages, the average monthly volumes of new home loans remained comparable to those in the second quarter and very high in historical terms, which can largely be attributed to the rise in prices. If the decline in transactions continues in the fourth quarter, a slowdown on the housing market can be expected. As long as there is still no increase in interest rates, the high price level reached will be the primary factor behind reduced demand, which is already causing buyers to rethink their purchase intentions.

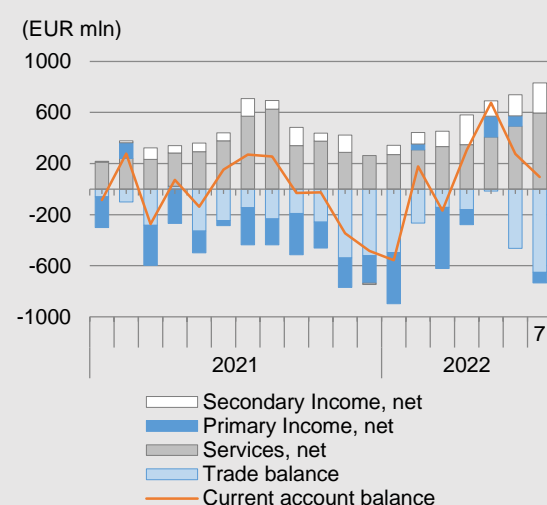
Fiscal sector

At end-August, the surplus on the Consolidated Fiscal Program increased to 1.1% of projected GDP. Receipts went up by 17.4% yoy, with a leading contribution of tax revenues, up by 14.8%. More than half of the increase in the latter was attributable to higher indirect tax revenues, and more precisely to VAT on import. Revenues from direct taxes and social security contributions also increased by a double-digit rate and held comparable contributions to the higher tax receipts. In July, fully incumbent electricity sector enterprises started paying contributions to the Energy system stability fund, which were then transferred as subsidies to the non-residential electricity end-customers. The contributions were reflected in higher non-tax revenues, up by 31.4% yoy.

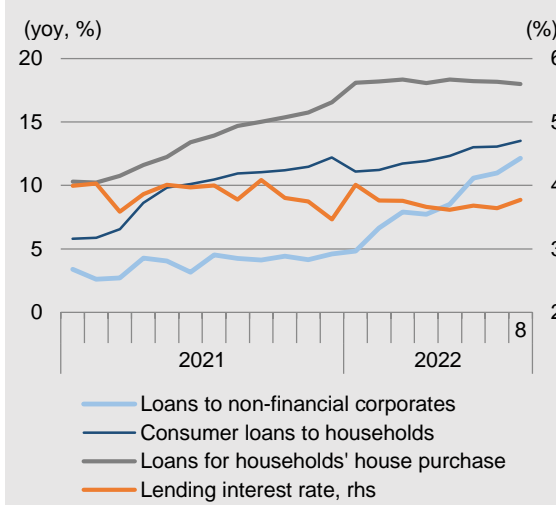
At end-August total expenditure increased by 15.3% yoy, due to higher subsidies to the non-financial private sector and social security spending, related to the increase in pension payments and support measures as a response to high electricity and gas prices.

Total government debt, incl. guaranteed debt, amounted to 20.6% of projected GDP, of which 6.6% was domestic and 14% - external indebtedness.

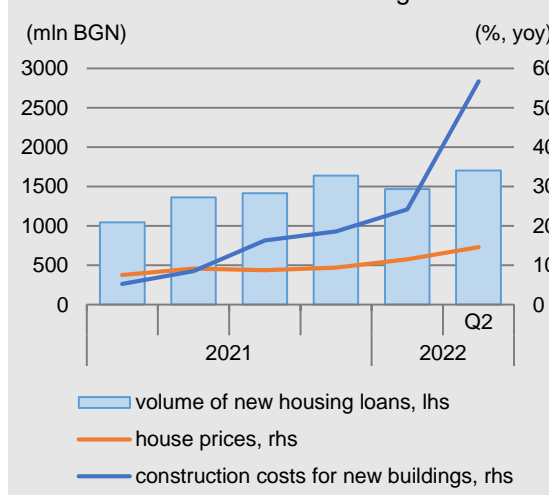
Graph 5 Current account components



Graph 6 Private sector credit



Graph 7 House price index, construction costs and new housing loans



Graph 8 Contribution to total cash budget receipts yoy growth

