

2.11. PLAYING THE STRATEGIC ROLE

The Czech Republic banking sector matures

As the Czech Republic transformed its economy over the past 8 years, the banking sector played a major role. Today the country's "Big Four" commercial banks, all partially state owned, are proving themselves increasingly important as the Czechs move closer to membership in the European Union.

Czechs banks **tend** to follow the German **template** in providing universal services and in being closely involved in the management of other companies. Several have their own brokerage houses and control big fund-management companies, which makes them owners as well as lenders, a **duality** that needs to be handled with care. Their control of major investment funds gives them considerable influence over the range of privatized enterprises.

In the 3 years from 1990, the Czech National Bank (CNB), licensed 55 new banks, but several fell victim to inexperience. CNB was obliged to announce a **moratorium** on new licenses. Since then, the Big Four – Investicni a Postovni Banka (IPB), Komerčni Banka, The savings bank Ceska Sporitelna and Ceskoslovenska Obchodni Banka (CSOB) – have strengthened their position with more than two thirds of banking business. Miroslav Kostel, Deputy Executive Director of CNB says that there is no reason to expect bank failures, because the banking sector stabilized now.

Task:

1. What conclusion can you make out of this text?
2. Read, translate, discuss and make up dialogs.
3. Explain the meaning of the emphasized words.

2.12. A RICH HISTORY AND DEVELOPED SERVICE LURE VISITORS TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Tourism is a powerful engine of growth for the Czech Republic, and has been so since the fall of the **Iron Curtain**. 17 million tourists visited the country in 1996, bringing in \$2.8 billion, an amount equivalent to 17% of total export earnings. The city's marvellous architecture is a particular **lure**, reflecting its past. Prague was a prosperous crossroads a thousand years ago. From the 13th century, it developed as a Gothic town and many of its stone-built houses having survived in

their old form. During the 14th century, Czech king and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV expanded the city several times over. He founded the Carolinum University in 1348, the first seat of the higher learning in Central Europe.

Architects, **stucco artists**, painters and sculptors combined in the 17th and 18th centuries to produce the distinctive Czech baroque and its masterpieces. In the 19th century came the style of the Czech National Theatre, powerful buildings that emphasized the desire for political independence from Austria-Hungary. Music-jazz, rock, opera, **chamber**, church, symphonic – is constant companion in Prague, as it has been for centuries. Mozart's "Don Giovanni" was premiered in the Estates Theatre, close to the House of the Three Queens, where Franz Kafka lived. Great numbers of students, Europeans and Americans, visit each year and many have stayed to make the city their home. Many visitors combine health with pleasure. The **curative** properties of mineral and thermal springs, and mud and **pits**, have been known for more than 1.000 years. By the 19th century, **thriving spa** towns offered theatre, opera, art galleries and casinos as well as cures. Nor is food neglected, from Irish pubs to restaurants that tempt **palates** of every preference. Moroccan **cuisine** of the new Casablanca restaurant found in the heart of Prague at Saviran Palace. The largest is Karlovy Vary, perhaps the most famous spa in Europe under its former name of Carlsbad. The spa was such a favourite with the Russians-Tolstoy and Turgenev. Its 60 mineral curative springs offer "curative drinking" for **glandular and circulatory** problems.

Mountains and valleys **embrace** the country along almost all its borders. Close to Austria there are such beautiful buildings that they were put on the UNESCO list of world cultural monuments in 1993. South Bohemia is known as the "Land of the Thousand Lakes." On the Polish border sits the highest mountain in the country, Snezka. Although it is only 5.256 feet, the region offers good skiing. The forests are paradise for hunting and **falconry**.

Czech beer itself offers a **fascinating slice** of the region's history. First brewed in the 10th century, it led to disputes between commoners and noblemen over the right to brew it. Europe's oldest glass-works, founded in 1414, are still in operation in North Bohemia, making superb cut glass that is **a must buy** for visitors-and yet another example of the old Europe that still lives in the Czech Republic.

Task:

1. What places of interest are described in the text?
2. What made possible to attract tourists to the country?
3. Imagine that you're a guide. Make the excursion to each place being described and answer the questions of the tourists.
4. Define the emphasized words.