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3.1. Social policy

Social policy is not a gift but a public service. Its mission is to create conditions for a dignified life for everybody. Equal opportunities for the development and self-assertion of all citizens are the basic elements of a socially just, free and democratic society and a condition of the future prosperity of the country. This is important especially in relation to the younger generation. The social policy must prevent the creation of unfavourable social conditions and must create equal life opportunities mainly for the younger generation. We build on the principle of solidarity of citizens with a good standard of living with those in danger of their standards dropping or those who have a poor standard of living. For this we will use devices that do not weaken the drive of people to work or their efforts to solve problems using their initiative and that at the same time provide assistance to the needy ones as effectively and quickly as possible. At the same time we will respect man's dignity, observe the rights of citizens to secure pensions, to get assistance in the case of illness, accident, maternity, bringing-up children and loss of employment. We will try to limit substantially the excessive differentiation of property and income which has its origins in fraud and speculation and we will ensure that none of our citizens find themselves unjustly on the fringe of society.

Part of our social policy, together with the care of the citizens of the Czech Republic without discrimination as far as sex or colour of the skin is concerned, is our concern for foreign citizens living in our country. We will focus special attention on them and give protection to their children regardless their origin.

In creating this policy we want to develop a democratic discussion focused on the definition of the basic values and principles of the social policy within the content of the social strategy of the Czech state. In this discussion we anticipate the partnership and co-participation of trade unions and other civil associations. Our target is to use the funds for the benefit of the citizens and to reduce bureaucracy.

The policy of social protection must get as close to the people as possible through the representatives of the insured on the boards of management of the pension insurance funds. These boards will independently manage and administer the premiums collected by the State as a guarantor of observing the conditions and aims contained in the relevant acts. Therefore we want to establish a Social Insurance Company and ensure the transparent management of the premiums collected. We will seek ways to compensate the insured and the pensioners at least partially for the losses caused by the transfer of the premium surpluses into the state budget by the previous government. One of the possible ways is also the introduction of the thirteenth pay-out of pension . In addition to the pension insurance we will enforce the introduction of a voluntary additional insurance payment by the employees with the tax-incentive participation of the employers.

In the social sphere we will create legislative conditions for the abolishment of the socially unbearable limitations on income of pensioners, families with children and the unemployed before the end of 1998 that were enforced in 1997 by the previous government. This step will be reflected in the state social support policy where we re-introduce child benefits for all families with children and we will return to the original level of the other benefits. We will enact legislation of the act on the protection of children and youth. Stressing the importance of the family we cannot forget the responsibility of the State, municipalities and civil associations for the development of the younger generation and for the process of their incorporation into the society.

The increase in unemployment calls for effective action by the State including finding preventative measures. The development of the active employment policy will be supported by regional three-party councils under the labour offices. We will insist on the development of a system of works for the public benefit.

We will enforce European standards of protection for working people. Therefore we plan to accept a new Labour Code, introducing the institution of labour courts, speed-up the ratification of the Social Charter of the European Council, extend the validity of the collective agreements of higher level and adapt the labour and social legislation to the standards of the European Union.

In solving the problems of unemployment we will devote special attention to the most affected regions and social groups. It is intolerable that the funds collected as premiums for possible unemployment should be used for other purposes. We will develop an active employment policy and will re-introduce the original rates of and extent of the unemployment benefits. We will devote special attention to the employment of people with limited ability to work. The compulsory rates for these people will be given directly by the law on employment. The employers that fail to meet

these rates will be obliged to transfer a certain amount to a special fund. We will make the monitoring of the safety of working conditions generally stricter including in the places where foreign citizens work.

Discussion on further development and on the possibility of improving the pensions and disability pensions will be carried out with regard to the needs of both today's elderly and the ones who will retire in the near future. First of all it is important to humanize conditions for granting disability pensions and to allow the early retirement for health reasons. We will create a comprehensive system including the education, rehabilitation and life-time working and social integration of the disabled.

We will try to incorporate into the new law on social assistance the principle of an active partnership between those granting the given service and those receiving it. It will mean the gradual and consistent extending of capacities and the improvement of the quality of institutional care and developing such forms of eligibility and granting of social benefits that will not make the recipients feel ashamed and dependent, but that will extend their chances of independent decisions. We see as an guard protection against material and social poverty the increase of the minimum living standard and minimum wage reflecting the development of average wages.

The social policy must cease to be viewed as a social burden funded at the expense of state development, but must be understood as an important stimulating factor that is an inseparable element of the life of a democratic society.

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