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Women in the Czech Republic in 2007

Alena Králíková
Slovak-Czech Women's Fund

1. European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

The year of 2007 has been filled by a number of issues and decisions relevant to women's position in the society. They included, primarily, economic matters: the government decided to change – in the scope of a large reform of public finance – its approach towards parental leave, concept of antidiscrimination: a discussion on a so-called antidiscrimination code was led during the whole year, work-life balance: a number of companies has entered the discussion on alternative working hours or company kindergartens and many others, definitely not minor ones.

The European Commission launched 2007 as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (EYEO) and thus, focus on equality issues was expected also by the Czech civil society.

First discussions related to the year of 2007 being the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All were undertaken in the Czech Republic in summer 2006. Then, a vast variety of NGOs focusing on human rights met representatives of the Governmental Office and a so-called European Forum was established. The political context was rather unfortunate since all initiatives happened in a period when the country did not have any government. Thus, a number of the NGOs gathered in the European Forum felt that this grouping may be very useful for the idea of human rights and equality discussion in the Czech Republic.

Call for Project Proposals was launched in autumn 2006 and a number of organizations responded with their projects. The selection process took a very long time – the approved projects were announced only in the early 2007. Among them, no women's organization received the grant.

The following projects have been realized under the EYEO heading:

- IQ Roma Servis: Brno celebrates the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All
- Partners Czech: Our Neighbours – film documents on minorities for schools

- Člověk v tísní (People in Need) – Support of the Roma integration principle via multicultural education courses for teachers at primary and secondary schools
- Národní rada zdravotně postižených ČR (National Council of Health-Handicapped People in the CR) – Study of the current situation in discrimination against people with health handicap and recommendation for measures)
- Poradna pro občanství/Občanská a lidská práva (Counselling Centre for Citizenship, Civil and Human Rights): Expert anti-discrimination campaign
- Člověk v tísní (People in Need) – Equality is cool!
- Liberecké romské sdružení (Liberec Roma Association) – Contact Centre

The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All was officially launched in the Czech Republic on 2 April 2007 in an event where Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner who is also responsible for equality issues, and Mirek Topolánek, Prime Minister, gave speeches. While the first one was primarily inclusive and gender sensitive, the second one raised several protests for its complete ignorance of equality matters in the Czech society and is, unfortunately, illustrative of the current state of gender sensitivity level shared more or less by the Government representatives. Another speech was also given by Minister of Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities, Džamila Stehlíková whose approach has been sensitive but whose position within the government is rather weak and functions as an excuse for the government otherwise not focused on cooperation or contact with the civil society and the non-governmental sector.

Since then, the European Forum met only once – in June 2007 – to be informed of the projects selected and further steps – not very clear and strategic ones. The existence of the Forum was also used as an argument for women's organizations protesting against the fact that none of the projects focuses primarily on gender equality – representatives of the Governmental Council claimed that women's organizations could have raised their voices in the Forum. This was, logically, impossible due to the informal nature of the Forum and the fact that it only met twice – in autumn 2006 and then in mid-2007.

The government developed a document entitled "*The National Strategy of the Czech Republic for the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) – Towards a Just Society and Priorities of the European Year*"¹, which – among others – also relates to specific challenges in the national context. In the area of gender-based discrimination, it says – being self-explanatory when it comes to gender equality issues in the Czech Republic under the government in place – the following:

Since 1993, due to its membership of the United Nations, the Czech Republic has assumed the obligations of the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic ensuing from the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. Later on, in 1999, the Czech Republic signed the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, which entered into force on 26 May 2006. The Government of the Czech Republic adopted in 1998 the programming document *Priorities and Practices of the Government in Promoting Equality of Women and Men*, the national action plan for promoting equality of women and men. The national action plan comprises approximately 40 measures, the accomplishment of which the Government evaluates annually, at the same time updating the measures contained therein.

¹ http://www.vlada.cz/assets/cs/nvk/rzrk/ev_rok_rov_prilez_2007/narodni_strategie/Czech-rep-national-strategie_07_03_2007.doc

An adequate institutional environment has been created for the fulfillment of the obligations ensuing from applicable national laws and international conventions. The function of coordinator of policies in the area of equality of women and men was vested in the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 1998. Since 2001, the issues of gender equality have been tackled also by the *Government Council for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men* (see above). After 1989 there emerged a large number of non-profit non-governmental organisations dealing with gender issues, which cooperate with the Czech Government through the Council. The most significant of these organisations include the Czech Women's Union, Gender Studies, Association for Equal Opportunities, Association of Businesswomen and Female Managers, Forum 50%, the Union of Catholic Women, and others. Equality of women and men at work is being promoted with significant assistance of social partners.

Current challenges

Although the Czech Republic has already undertaken a number of measures in respect of legislation and institutional environment for the promotion of equality of women and men in practice, there still remain aspects that require attention.

Thus, more attention needs to be paid to *systematic and continuous implementation of existing laws in practice* and to introducing procedures and practices for effective implementation, verification and enforcement of these regulations. Insufficient awareness of legal regulations and the processes of their implementation on the part of victims of discrimination, and also on the part of experts, may be one of the many reasons why only a few lawsuits have been brought in court on the grounds of discrimination based on sex², in particular by women from the most disadvantaged target groups, such as Roma women.

The Czech society still clings to the deeply rooted *traditional stereotypes in the understanding of the roles and duties of women and men in the family and in the society in general*, which project themselves in the choice of the branches of education and training of women, their position in the labour market, and their less extensive participation in political and social life. The Czech Republic thus has one of the lowest rates in the EU of representation of women in political decision making and in politics in general. The persisting stereotypes are strongly manifested in particular in the field of promoting *equal opportunities in employment and in the labour market*. Considerable structural differences between the rate of employment of women and men still persist in the Czech labour market – in particular the gap between salaries of men and women, concentration of women in certain professions and fields of study, and low representation of women in managerial and decision-making positions. In this respect it is necessary to strengthen cooperation between the state, social partners, civil society, political parties, the private sector and the media for the purpose of targeted dissemination of information to the general public concerning the established stereotypes underlying the discriminatory approach to women or men, with a focus on employers, person with decision-making powers, experts and specialists in the field of education, young persons and marginal groups of population.

² A Joint Shadow Report for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, containing comments on the Third Periodic Report of the Czech Republic submitted in compliance with Article 18 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, elaborated by the European Roma Rights Centre, the Human Rights Leagues, Gender Studies, Prague, 2006.

Combination of multiple discriminatory bases is seen in respect of women from the most disadvantaged groups – in the Czech Republic these include in particular *women of Roma origin*. It is necessary to take a number of steps with a view to improving the status of Roma women and girls, in particular in respect of *education, training, and participation in public life and in decision-making processes*. It is notably necessary to support more *surveys* focussed on mapping all forms of discrimination against Roma women, and to seek to uproot the persisting stereotypes applying to the Roma community.

As women's organisations have not received any support within the Call for Proposals, they have developed their own projects addressing the EYEO's context. Gender Studies, o.p.s. celebrated the Equality Day with the support of other women's organisations at local and international level and initiated cooperation with a number of Members of the European Parliament lobbying in favour of the Day's introduction among important days in the European Union; Forum 50% realized a conference on women's political participation etc.

It is also important to underline in this context that the Minister of Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities and her team happily accepted the organization called *Spravedlnost dětem* (Justice for Children) to perform some of their projects under the EYEO heading. Briefly said, this organisation defends father's right to stay in touch with their children after divorce. At the same time, a number of these men were – according to women's organizations providing advocacy to victims of domestic violence – aggressors and thus their positive image is very complicated to assess. The minister did not analyze activities of this organization and was simply glad that it wants to realize their project – without any support from the governmental budget – under the EYEO concept.

Promotion of the EYEO at the national level was launched very late in 2007 – only in summer, the Governmental Office representatives got in touch with people of different age, gender, ethnic etc. background to perform the role of "faces" or ambassadors of EYEO, but visibility of the whole idea has remained very low, definitely not being perceived at all by majority of the society.

Already in November 2007, a concluding conference of the EYEO was held in Brno with very low attention paid to its results by media, public or politicians. Most of the activities realized by NGOs in the framework of the EYEO took place in autumn 2007 with rather presence in media. The only exception was *Karneval rozmaností* (Carnival of Varieties) organized by *Člověk v tísni*.

2. Institutional mechanisms related to gender equality policies

The year of 2007 can be definitely described as a period of time when institutional mechanisms in support of gender equality were not developed or structured further on by the government or at regional and local levels. The year was seriously marked by the fact that the country lacked a government for certain period and, as already mentioned above, when the government was appointed, it included Minister of Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities, which is a step that can already now be fully understood as an excuse for the government meaning that it does develop certain activities in the area of human rights. The positive

trait is, however, that this is the first government in the modern history of the Czech Republic having a minister with such portfolio.

Since 1998, the Czech government has regularly developed an action plan in the area of gender equality and related policies, which formed the major part of the country's strategy towards gender equality. The document is entitled *Priorities and Procedures of the Government in Promoting the Equality of Men and Women* and covers major tasks of the government for the given year. It is then followed by *Summary Report on the Fulfilment of Priorities and Procedures of the Government in Promoting the Equality of Men and Women*;³ each ministry usually also develops its specific priorities concerning its portfolio. The document names seven areas which respond – to a large extent – to 12 critical areas defined by the Platform for Action. They are the following: (1) Promoting principles of the equality of women and men as part of Government policy, (2) Ensure the legal prerequisites for gender equality and raise legal awareness, (3) Ensure equal opportunities for women and men in their access to economic activities, (4) Levelling out the social status of women and men caring for children and needy family members, (5) Take into account women's reproductive function and physiological differences, (6) Combat violence perpetrated against women, (7) Monitor and assess efficiency in applying the principle of the equal status of women and men.

The quality of the governmental action plan can definitely be seen in the fact that it names the most urgent issues related to gender equality policies and mechanisms in the Czech Republic, and details tasks that should be tackled by relevant institutions – especially those at the state level. However, the reports on their fulfilment mirrors the situation in the country and the very low level of readiness or willingness of its representatives to deal with issues outlined. Many tasks and goals are postponed from one year to another, others are fulfilled rather vaguely, and the whole idea of the action plan and concrete results is thus more than empty.

One of the major problems can be identified in the institutional structure of gender equality policies in the country. According to the action plan, it seems that the institutional background of equal opportunities is rather strong and thus effective to carry out all goals planned for the concrete year. Unfortunately, it is not the case.

As of 1 January 2002, each ministerial resort established a position of a gender focal point, a person responsible for gender mainstreaming and gender equality issues within the ministerial portfolio as well as the ministry as an institution. Originally, this position was to be part-time, as of 2004, it was allowed to be increased up to one full-time person, which has not happened so far in majority of all Czech ministries. Moreover, most of the people having such a responsibility within their job specification hold very low positions within the hierarchy of a ministry. Their potential influence on any decision-making or adopted policies is thus very limited. The intention can be surely perceived as very positive but the whole concept would be even more effective and not just good at first look if the person responsible for gender policies held a position of a deputy minister or director of a department. Hereby, they would have a more direct and stronger impact on decision-making related to gender policies and would not need to be recommending various actions only.

³ See <http://www.mpsv.cz/en/2014> where summary reports in English are posted.

In 2007, the coordination of gender equality policies has been executed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, just like in the previous years. Its Section for Equality of Men and Women was until November 2006 included within the Department of International Relations and European Integration; since the change, it has been responsible to Family and Social Policies Department. This situation will change again from 1 January 2008 because the Section will be moved under the Governmental Office and hereby the Minister of Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities.

It can be expected that such a decision will lead to a more coordinated and better-structured approach to gender equality along with human rights policies that are covered by the minister. However, the system of focal points will remain unchanged and thus, expectedly, with low impact on any policies reflecting gender perspectives in any way.

Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women is another mechanism in favour of gender equality measures. Its foundation in 2001 was stimulated by NGOs and has since then executed the role – as a number of other government councils – of an advisory body of the government in the area of equal opportunities of women and men. It is formed of representatives of ministries, academia, NGOs, trade unions, employers, Czech Statistical Office as well as the Commissioner for Human Rights.⁴ In 2007, it only started its operation after a very long gap in November 2007 when new members were invited in the Council. So far, the Council met once and its committees met also once. The Council has set up two primary issues to focus on: violence against women and work-life balance, which shows two most urgent topics as also perceived by the society. It is however very difficult to assess functioning of the Council as it only started its activities recently.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that a big discussion related to the Commission, which also appeared in the media, was started by the Czech Men's Union protesting against the fact that majority of the Council are women. This is rather ironic as most of other Government Councils are formed primarily of men, which nobody has questioned so far.

Another Council related to gender equality and women's rights is the Government Council for Human Rights,⁵ which has a number of Committees and one of them is Committee for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men (until mid-2007, it operated under the name of Committee for Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). This Committee again consists of experts in the area of gender equality at various levels: ministries, academia and NGOs. It first met in November 2007 and the following meeting is planned for January 2008.

Two more commissions fall within the institutional mechanisms in the Czech Republic in relation to gender equality matters. They are Permanent Commission on Equal Opportunities⁶ and Permanent Commission on Family Issues,⁷ both operating in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and founded in autumn 2006. During the previous government, both issues, i.e. family policy and equal opportunities, were tackled by one Commission for Family and Equal Opportunities. Members of both

⁴ http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/2025/Composition_130907.pdf

⁵ <http://www.vlada.cz/en/rvk/rfp/home.html>

⁶ <http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/sqw/hp.sqw?k=95&ido=810>

⁷ <http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/sqw/fsnem.sqw?f1=5&f2=3&id=809>

these Commissions are rather interested in gender policies and tend to participate in events organized in this matter by non-governmental organisations.

As outlined above, none of the institutions – either committee, council or commission – has a specific decision-making power with a direct impact on policies and political decisions taken. Considering, moreover, the fact that at regional and local levels no institutional mechanisms have been so far introduced, the Committee for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men decided in its first meeting to urge the Government to follow the EC Directive 2002/73/ES from 23 September 2002, which among others demands that the EU member states “appoint one or more subjects charged with support, analysis, monitoring and promotion of equal treatment with all people without discrimination based on gender.”⁸ The Czech Republic has not yet appointed or founded such an institution though they should have started to act not later than on 5 October 2005.

It is equally important to quote one of the CEDAW Committee recommendations related to institutional mechanisms in the Czech Republic, article 12: “*The Committee reiterates its recommendations that the State party strengthen the institutional structure of the existing national machinery in order to make it more effective by providing it with decision-making power, visibility, human and financial resources so that it can effectively implement its mandate and monitor progress towards reaching the goal of gender equality across all ministries and Government agencies. It encourages the State party to ensure that gender focal points within each ministry are composed of senior level staff with direct access to decision-makers. The Committee also reiterates its recommendation that the State party establish regional and local gender equality machinery and to ensure effective coordination among all relevant mechanisms and entities on gender equality at the national, regional and local levels. The Committee encourages the State party to continue to raise awareness and build capacity of Government officials and staff at the national, regional and municipal levels on gender equality on an ongoing basis.*”⁹

Though this recommendation dates back to 2006 and the EU Directive even further back in the past, the Czech government has not reacted in any way.

The situation is even more difficult at regional and local levels of administration. If there are at least any people responsible for gender equality policies at the state level and the above-mentioned committees and councils are in existence – though their authority is doubtful – there is no such structure built at the level of 14 regions and locally in towns. Representatives of regions were and have been invited to sessions of the Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women; their participation is not, however, obligatory, and there is no measure forcing either local or regional governments to introduce policies or mechanisms in the area of gender equality.

⁸ http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/2503/32002L0073EN_CS.pdf

⁹ Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Czech Republic, CEDAW Committee, 36th session, 7-25 August 2006

3. Women and economy

Women in the Czech Republic represent an important part of the workforce. According to recent data, their economic activity almost reaches the goal set up by the EU to be reached by 2006 (60 %) – it is 57.3 % while the level of men's economic activity is 75.2 %. Unfortunately, there are no recent data available concerning part-time – according to those from 2005, there are 8.3 % of women working part-time and only 2.3 % of men. It can be assumed, however, that women's interest in part-times or various different alternative working hours will gradually increase in the nearest future because of them being at parental leave and ready to work parallel to taking care of their babies. The question remains if the employers will be ready to offer such possibility.

There are two more factors influencing current situation of the labour market: in November 2007, the unemployment rate in the Czech Republic reached the lowest level since 1997 – it was only 5.7 %. And the country is experiencing a so-called baby-boom that started in 2006. Both these aspects can be understood as a possible advantage for women – if they are on parental leave, they may still earn unlimited amount of money a month while assuring full-day care for their child. Thus, they may be an interesting workforce for employers in need of qualified and experienced employees to work on specific projects or activities upon agreement and in defined flexible or alternative working hours. The Czech labour market urgently needs workforce and those whose employees have been on parental leave may be ready to rely on them, hereby stay in regular touch, make use of their experience and knowledge, support their professional development in exchange and even motivate them to return back to work earlier than after three (or even four) years of parental leave.

The changes in the labour market, however, demand a different understanding of the concept of part-time or alternative working hours. So far, part-time has not been made so much use of due to the fact that it has not generated an interesting income, often was more demanding than the number of hours assigned to it and it was then difficult to negotiate change of part-time to full-time. This has, fortunately, started to change as confirmed by a number of employers.¹⁰

Talking of unemployment rates and positive challenges of the labour market towards women, negative aspects need to be added: women in the age gap 25 to 34 years of age count among the most risky group of people when it comes to their employment, career growth, success at interviews and promotion. They are at the same very active in case of being unemployed – they seek new work opportunities or attend professional requalification courses (they are more than 60 % among all of those interested in such trainings).¹¹

Discussion on gender pay gap continued also in 2007, though no “new” data were introduced. The only number quoted was 19.1 % dating back to statistics from 2004 as published in 2005 by the Czech Statistical Office.¹² No other relevant numbers have been presented since then. Thus, when talking of differences in pays, the gap of approximately 20 % is usually mentioned. It is also, surprisingly, often

¹⁰ Meetings, interviews, email exchange with HR managers from Nestlé Česko, IBM Česká republika, Škoda Auto, Hewlett-Packard, Citi etc.

¹¹ Ženy a muži v datech 2005, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Czech Statistical Office, Praha 2005.

¹² Ženy a muži v datech 2005, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Czech Statistical Office, Praha 2005.

compared to national pay gaps identified in other European Union countries although not all of the countries share the same approach to measuring gender pay gap. As of 2005, the Czech Statistical Office has relied on median pays of women and men while until then, it worked with average pays of women and men. It meant, therefore, that in 2004 the gender pay gap was 26 % and a year later it was 19.1 %. This change from one year to another can be, if further details are not considered, perceived as a positive development and the same positive assumptions may be concluded if the gender pay gap in the Czech Republic is compared to other European countries. Some of them work with average pays, some with median, and some even with surveys conducted in households. Data received from searches run on the basis of different inputs are logically incomparable.

Certain aspects of gender pay gap are, according to the Czech Statistical Office, ascribed to structure of the labour market in the Czech Republic, especially to unequal representation of women and men in various labour market sectors and division of positions within an organisation, with fewer women in higher and top positions. Other factors include less number of hours spent by women at work and level of education. Approximately 10 % of the gender pay gap is unexplained and can be ascribed to discrimination based on gender stereotypes.¹³ Researchers also point out areas where discriminatory behaviour can be identified and could be anticipated: career growth and transparency of promotion and recruitment and horizontal and vertical segregation.¹⁴

Horizontal segregation indicated that women perform different professions than men. Women are twice as likely to be found in unqualified work (10.3 % of women compared to 5.2 % of men). The lowest representation of women can be found in the army (5.3 %), among craftsmen and skilled labour, producers and processors (12.5 %). Jobs carried out almost purely by women include care and education of children, especially the small ones, lower healthcare professions and operating machines in textile industry. On the other hand, jobs carried out by men include those requiring operation of technical equipment.¹⁵

Vertical segregation relates to greater representation of men in senior and top positions within a hierarchy of an institution. Today, women account for approximately 7 % of top management of medium-sized and large companies in the country.¹⁶ They are often completely missing in senior and top management of many companies: female managers can be more often found in those types of companies paying their managers less.

Antidiscrimination measures first appeared in the Czech legislation in 2001 when a major amendment of the Labour Code came into force on 1 January 2001 transposing relevant directives of the European Commission. Along with several following amendments and other laws (such as Employment Code, Act on Wage, Act on Salary etc.), it explicitly defined direct and indirect discrimination, transfer of burden of proof, equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, ban on harassment and other concepts supporting gender equality and non-discrimination based on European directives. Relevant issues also

¹³ Štěpán Jurajda, Daniel Můnch, *Relativní srovnání postavení žen na trhu práce: shrnutí výzkumu*, In: *Kariéra, rodina, rovné příležitosti – výzkumy postavení žen a mužů na trhu práce*. Gender Studies, o.p.s., Praha 2006.

¹⁴ Štěpán Jurajda, Daniel Můnch, *Relativní srovnání postavení žen na trhu práce: shrnutí výzkumu*, In: *Kariéra, rodina, rovné příležitosti – výzkumy postavení žen a mužů na trhu práce*. Gender Studies, o.p.s., Praha 2006. *Shadow Report on Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*. Otevřená společnost, o.p.s., Praha 2006.

¹⁵ *Ženy a muži v letech 2005*, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Czech Statistical Office, Praha 2005.

¹⁶ Štěpán Jurajda, Daniel Můnch, *Relativní srovnání postavení žen na trhu práce: shrnutí výzkumu*, In: *Kariéra, rodina, rovné příležitosti – výzkumy postavení žen a mužů na trhu práce*. Gender Studies, o.p.s., Praha 2006.

The non-admission of the law during 2007 is especially intricate for the context of non-discriminatory policies in the Czech Republic, not only in the labour market but also other areas, though the labour market situation can be considered a very serious one. The problem remains in the fact that the amendment of the Labour Code as in force since 1 January 2007 refers to the so far non-existent Antidiscrimination Code in all cases where it relates to equal treatment in the labour market. Thus, in reality, non-discrimination policies have not been reflected in any law in 2007.

Antidiscrimination Law should integrate requirements in the scope of equal treatment and protection from discrimination so that legislative guarantee of the same protection standards was assured for all victims of discrimination disregarding reason or legal relationship within which discrimination occurred.

The Code should, moreover, cover a vast number of issues falling within right for equal treatment and protection from discrimination in employment, access to employment, self-employment, special education, assistance and requalification, membership in organisations of workers or employers, social protection including social insurance and healthcare, social benefits, education and access to products and services available to the public, including housing. It means that it enlarges the antidiscrimination scope covered until last year in the Labour Code.

It is also important to note that adopting the Code would mean assigning an institution with responsibility in relation to the Code, i.e. mediation, provision of legal assistance and information, publication of recommendations and statements and realization of research and survey. At the moment, no such institution is in existence.

The amendment of Income Tax Law that came into effect in January 2006 will be rescinded by the end of 2007 and will represent one of the changes forming the reform of finance. Short life also applies to the increased birth grants effective only in 2007 when they were increased within the pre-election fights for voters and their support. As of 1 January 2007, birth grant will be CZK 13.000 for each child born.

What can be assessed positively is that in 2008, abolition of limit related to income parallel to parental allowance will remain effective. Thus, parents taking care of their child and working for example part-time from home will not have their parental allowance cut or completely taken away from them because of their interest in staying in touch with their job and career. It will also be possible, as introduced in February 2006, for children older than 3 years of age to attend kindergarten or similar institution on a daily basis for maximum four hours a day and parents will not lose their entitlement for parental allowance. Younger children (younger than 3 years of age) could attend nursery schools or kindergartens for five days a month and again, parents will remain entitled to receive parental allowance.

In the Czech Republic, the idea of gender equality in legislation has been recently – more or less – translated into family policies. Thus, if any discussion has been led in respect to gender issues in 2007, it only relates to family policies, their development, changes etc. One of the important parts of the reform of finance introduced in 2007 by the Government to be effective as of 1 January 2008 does concern family, i.e. parental leave. In the near future, the relevant ministries will also focus on nursery schools, kindergartens and other alternative institutions providing care for children.

The three-speed system of parental leave is explained as allowing parents more liberty in making their option and more flexibility in work-life balance; the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs also claims that it responds to modern international trends of childcare.²⁰

Three speeds as introduced in the reform are the following: parents can choose between 2-year-long (i.e. until the child is two years old; the parental leave starts after maternity leave usually ending 22 weeks after return from maternity hospital), 3-year-long and 4-year-long parental leave. The 3-year-long leave is the most supported one when it comes to the total amount of finance received during parental leave.

- (1) Faster pace – 2-year-long: parent on parental leave will receive CZK 11.400 a month until 24 months of age of the child under the condition that she/he is entitled to maternity leave allowance at least CZK 380 a day – total amount of finance received during parental leave is CZK 216.600.
- (2) Classical pace – 3-year-long: parent on parental leave will receive CZK 7.600 a month until 36 months of age of the child if she/he is entitled to maternity leave allowance – total amount of finance received during parental leave is CZK 235.600.
- (3) Slower pace – 4-year-long: parent on parental leave will be receiving CZK 7.600 a month until 21 months of age of the child, and then CZK 3.800 until the child is 48 months old allowance – total amount of finance received during parental leave is CZK 224.200.

The concept of the three-speed parental leave has represented one of the most discussed segments of the reform. One of the major reasons is the situation in which the country is: the phase of baby-boom has not ended yet at all. Until December 2007, it was not, moreover, clear who will be affected by the reform, i.e. its parental leave part. The result is that all parents entitled to maternity or parental leave will have to choose the speed of their parental leave.

There are a few questions that appeared along with the introduction of the three-speed parental leave system. After the choice is made, the option is unchangeable. Parents who choose the faster pace will face a difficulty when seeking institutional care for their child: in the Czech Republic, there are only 54 nursery schools available.²¹ The reform claims that the two-year-long option is favourable for parents who want to return back to their work earlier, or parents planning two children shortly one after another. This is quite questionable since parents are allowed to earn unlimited amounts of money parallel to receiving parental allowance, which can, nevertheless, be expected not to attain or exceed their original income. Thus, their income to be considered for the second parental leave may be lower and hereby they might not reach the level for being allowed to apply for the 2-year-long parental leave with their second child.

The problem is that all examples of families, single parents or foster care are only presented as positive ones. The above-mentioned concerns are not quoted at all and do not appear in any material addressed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to the public.

Several Members of Parliament²² mentioned their fear of the three-speed parental leave and the reform representing more than a step back in the framework of gender equality policies in the Czech

²⁰ *Special supplement of Mladá fronta Dnes, 12 December 2007*

²¹ *Interview with director of the Family and Social Policies Department, MLSA.*

²² *Interviews with MPs run in October-December period on the issue of three-speed parental leave.*

Republic. Briefly summarized, they say that the reform introduces a so-called “flexible option” for parents while not providing them with adequate institutional care system. The state representatives refer to the legislation making local administration responsible for providing enough places for children in kindergartens and not ministries. They simply get rid of responsibility when it comes to childcare and refer parents to their municipalities to seek response to their needs. At the same time, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs does not hide his dislike of nursery schools and prefers to outline his plan of support to be provided to company kindergartens, mother centers and alternative certified care provided by a parent – under given conditions – to a few children in her/his home and receiving certain amount of money for such care. These can definitely be understood as very good alternative ideas enlarging the scope of childcare services but definitely cannot compensate lack of institutions such as kindergartens and nursery schools.

The idea of father’s leave has represented a topic of political concept of family policies (please note that father’s leave is not contextualized with gender equality policies) – the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs claimed he wants to introduce a paid five-day-long father’s leave (while he said, unofficially, that, in the near future, he will focus on this father’s leave being gradually prolonged).

The impact of the reform of finance on women and their position in the society is rather difficult to assess at the moment when the reform has not yet been effective. Women will definitely face a change in maternity leave allowance: it will only last for 28 weeks for all married and single mothers (until today, single mothers were entitled to 37 weeks of allowance). Only those women who will give birth to twins or more children will be entitled to 37 weeks of maternity leave allowance. Unemployed women will not receive maternity leave allowance at all but will be directly getting parental leave allowance that is paid from social insurance. They will receive their allowance in the 4-year-long speed, i.e. CZK 7.600 a month.

It can also be expected that women’s situation will be influenced by changes in taxes²³: for example single women will save less on tax deductible interests on mortgages. Most of the pluses relate to families, which may support family life and the concept of traditional family but does not definitely regard as relevant other types of co-habitation. For example, tax abatement related to wife (please note the fact that it is wife who is mentioned in this respect) with income not exceeding CZK 38.040 will increase to CZK 24.840. Further discounts for families with children will be introduced: tax abatement on a child will increase from CZK 6.000 to CZK 10.680 but it will decrease a bit as of 2009 again.

In conclusion, a number of changes can be expected in the Czech Republic in 2008 – they relate to a variety of aspects – value-added tax, income tax, increase costs related to living, healthcare etc. Their impact on lives of women is difficult to evaluate at the moment and definitely needs to be followed throughout next year so as to see both positives and negatives of the reform, not only the three-speed parental leave but the whole reform and its gender aspects as perceived and reflected in the society.

²³ 100 změn. Vše, co potřebujete vědět o daních a zdravotnictví v roce 2008, *Hospodářské noviny*, December 2007.

4. Women and politics and decision-making positions in public offices

The country lacked leadership since election in June 2006 until early 2007 when the current Prime Minister was named for the second time to set up Government, which has been in operation since then but has been rather weak due to misapprehensions in the governmental coalition.

It is important to note that women's participation in the Chamber of Deputies has decreased since the last election four years ago from 17 % to 15 %. In local elections, however, women's participation increased from 22.7 % to 26.3 %. In the Senate, after the election in autumn 2006 when one third of Senators were altered, there are 12 women among 81 Senators, i.e. 14.8 %. At this level, the situation is slightly better as in the previous composition of the House, there was only 11 % of women.²⁴ Among commissioners of 14 Czech regions, there is no woman.

Still, the Czech Republic with less than 20 % of women in both Houses of the Parliament can be found at approx. 70th position in the scale developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on women's representation in politics.²⁵

The current Government has two women ministers – Minister of Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities, Džamila Stehlíková, and Minister of Defence, Vlasta Parkanová. Originally, another female minister was a member but the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports, Dana Kuchtová, resigned from her position in mid-2007. She was replaced only recently after very long discussions, or even disputes, by another Green Party MP, Ondřej Liška.

As mentioned above, the Government in power named for the first time a minister responsible for human rights, including women's rights, which can definitely be seen very positively.

As to women's membership in political parties, the Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD) have 25 % quota for women and young people in the internal party bodies. The party also has a women's organisation – Social Democratic Women (SDŽ). Women who are not party members may become members of this organisation if interested but not all female party members have to enter SDŽ obligatorily. There are 30.4 % of women in the party, among its 6 members of presidium, there is one woman (i.e. 16.6 % representation).

Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) have no internal policy focused on gender equality though its female membership is as high as 52 %. Until very recently, the party did not have a single woman in the presidium. This changes with Vlasta Parkanová becoming one of its 8 members (i.e. 12.5 % representation).

The Communist Party (KSČM) applies a rule of at least one woman to be nominated on candidate lists among first three candidates. Among party members, there are 43 % of women, the six-member presidium includes one woman (i.e. 16.7 % representation). A leftist female organisation called Left-Wing Clubs of Women does not form direct part of the political party.

²⁴ http://www.padesatprocent.cz/?r_id=21

²⁵ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

Civic Democrats (ODS) do not perceive gender equality issues as of importance. Women count 38.2 % of the membership and there is no woman in the party presidium – Miroslava Němcová was not reelected at the last party congress.

The Greens (SZ) has so far been the only political party that introduced quota system in candidate lists. The 1/3 quota has been also applied for internal party bodies. The party also established a gender section dealing with gender equality matters. Representation of women in the party is unknown, there are two women in the six-member presidium of the party (i.e. 33 %).

In 2007, the NGO focused on women's political participation, Forum 50%, continued its training programme for women interested in entering politics initiated by Miluř Kotišová, an activist and journalist. In 2007, the programme was introduced in the regions where the organisation cooperated with those who already attended the courses. Moreover, the organisation started to prepare Open University project²⁶ where gender equality and relevant subjects will be available for studying. The curricula were developed in cooperation with academics, researchers, politicians and representatives of NGOs.

Next year will be the year of presidential election where there is so far not a female candidate and probably cannot be expected. Nevertheless, Forum 50% and an independent platform called Czech Female President organized in October 2007 1st Symposium of Czech Female President.²⁷ Speakers like Meda Mládková, Alena Wagnerová, Jana Hybášková, Renáta Vesecká or Helena Illnerová were present and shared their views and concerns not only in regard of women's political involvement but also their in the society in general.

In 2008, several projects will be run by women's organisations – especially by Forum 50% and Association for Equal Opportunities – focusing on party conferences nominating candidates to regional election, women's participation in politics, media information campaigns and activities attracting attention to lack of women among politicians not only at regional level.

5. Women and violence (violence against women, prostitution)

Violence against women is in the Czech Republic, as in many other countries, a major problem which has been – after years of reluctance or silence – also approached by political representation and focused on within its decisions. It was the non-governmental sector that originally initiated the discussions and provided various types of help and support to victims of violence.

According to surveys quoted in media,²⁸ approx. 36 % of all women were victims of some kind of violence from their close relatives, usually husband or parent – current or past. Only 10 % of them informs police of the incident and less than 3 % of women said that the perpetrator was brought a charge against.

²⁶ <http://www.otevrena-univerzita.cz/>

²⁷ http://www.padesatprocent.cz/?c_id=398

²⁸ One of the surveys mentioned is: S. Pikálková, *Mezinárodní výzkum násilí na ženách – Česká republika/2003: příspěvek k sociologickému zkoumání násilí v rodině*. Sociologický ústav AV ČR. Praha 2004.

Data also show that violence against women has still been perceived as a taboo in the Czech society and very low awareness relates to it.

On 1 January 2007, a law on protection from domestic violence has been effective. It is based on rules existing in countries that are close to the Czech practice both from cultural and social perspective. It has been inspired by the Austrian model. The law intends to be neutral in relation to victim and perpetrator and is based on general signs of domestic violence that repeats and graduates. It also combines both social and legal measures so as to provide for immediate reaction and effective intervention. The law also accentuates prevention against domestic violence. So far, it was possible to interfere at the moment when serious attack or even injury happened.

The law is to allow for intervention in a relationship where a person is maltreated with the perpetrator being ordered out of the house. The victim is given enough time to assess situation she/he finds herself/himself in and plan further steps.²⁹ It also introduces so-called intervention centres³⁰ providing individual social-legal help to victims of violence and cooperating with police.

As outlined above, the law and general approach of the Czech society and expert NGOs in the area of domestic violence towards concept of domestic violence is rather specific. It prefers to consider domestic violence gender-neutral though women form approximately 95 % of all victims of violence. It is also quite peculiar that help to victims is usually provided by non-governmental organisations without general ongoing support from the state.

Many steps were realized by several organisations gathered in KOORDONA – Coalition of Organisations against Domestic Violence and its predecessor, Coordination Circle against Violence against Women. Organisations working in the scope of this umbrella organisation have been pointing out the urgency of violence against women measures for lots of years, especially mentioning relevant legislative changes, need for a system of asylum houses for victims and importance of trans-sectoral cooperation between NGOs, experts, state institution and police.

It is very difficult to seek up-to-date data concerning number of perpetrators being ordered out of house. By the end of June 2007, Bílý kruh bezpečí (White Circle of Safety) informed of 479 people having to leave their home for ten days on the basis of committed violence.³¹ In August, media quoted another statistics: on average, 3 people per day are ordered out of house.³² No further data are, unfortunately, accessible. However, according to numbers quoted above, it can be assumed that the law is considered seriously and followed with special attention. In further detail, effectiveness of the law can be evaluated in the beginning of next year.

²⁹ http://www.donalinka.cz/redaction.php?action=showRedaction&id_categoryNode=386

³⁰ <http://www.icm.cz/novy-zakon-na-ochranu-pred-domacim-nasilim>

³¹ http://www.donalinka.cz/news.php?action=showNews&id_categoryNode=480

³² http://www.denik.cz/zpravy/z_domova/nasili_domaci20070807.html

6. Women's and gender NGOs

Though the Czech Women's Lobby was established three years ago, it started to be more active only in the end of 2006. In 2007, it worked out a protest note developed and distributed jointly in relation to a speech given by the Prime Minister on the occasion of the EYEO launch. The organization has grown in number – member organisations now count over 20, it holds regular monthly meetings, has undertaken joint steps so as to become registered officially and be able to apply for grants and support. It also succeeded in negotiating its member representatives to become members of the Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women and Committee for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men.

The Czech Women's Lobby and organisations forming it have been extremely active in lobbying in support of the Antidiscrimination Code and initiated a number of lobbying letters addressed to politicians and MPs in this respect.

The major barrier, however, remains in place: as the organisation is formed of member groups and organisations that need to apply for grants and support themselves so as to provide services and fulfill their own goals, it is very difficult to keep even the umbrella organisation sustainable along with the individual organisations struggling for existence.

It is especially the case in the turn of 2006-2007 when the European funds have not been launched yet – the first ones are expected to be opened in January 2008, which means that deadlines of calls for proposals will be in March 2008 the earliest and thus projects could start before summer if everything went on smoothly. Due to the fact that majority of women's organisations have realised projects ending in summer 2008 the latest, they face a potential problem of financial instability in mid-2008.

The Czech Women's Lobby member organizations supported the idea of the Equality Day brought in by Gender Studies and then – in this respect – also raised its voice at the European level of the EWL. So far, it has not been fully overheard, only by some national EWL coordinations.

There were several events covered even by the Czech media and visible to the general public in 2007. Among them, the project of Silent Witnesses of ROSA can be mentioned focusing on victims of violence against women committed by close partners or relatives of women.

Gender Studies, o.p.s. organized another year of the Competition for the Best Company with Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the Czech Republic. Its results were announced in November 2007 with IBM Czech Republic becoming winner and the Czech Airlines being awarded special prize of Gender Studies, o.p.s. for very good development in the area of gender equality and related measures. Gender Studies, o.p.s. also organized the very first conference of its kind focused on gender marketing with speakers not only from Czech PR and marketing agencies and companies working – at least to certain extent – with gender perspectives, but also people from abroad (Germany and Finland) having their specific experience and knowledge.

gitA – gender press and information agency – prepared for the period of 13-20 December 2007 “UDIVERSUM – Prague Week of Media Diversity”.³³ This series of events draws attention to role of media in constructing reality starting with a conference on diversity in media and diversity of media. The project involves all kinds of media, its representatives and students of media studies in a discussion on diversity, media, gender specificities, minorities, media agenda etc. It is important to note that gitA was started in 2006 as a project run by proFem, o.p.s. and got established as an NGO in 2007.

Talking of media and their education towards gender sensitivity, Open Society Fund Praha run several trainings aimed for journalists of mainstream media in the Czech Republic. After certain difficulties to attract their attention and be respected, it was, in the end, attended even by spokespersons of some companies interested in use of gender sensitive language.³⁴

Another interesting project was run by Association for Progressive Communication and its Women’s Networking Support Programme.³⁵ In cooperation with IBM Czech Republic, the organisation ran a number of seminars for female students of high schools to motivate them towards studying technical universities and seeking career in IT. Following such a series of seminars, another round followed – for women interested in working in IT companies. Their motivation might have varied – they could have been women just after maternity or parental leave thinking of their future jobs, women interested in changing their jobs and entering something completely new or women simply considering their future career paths.

It is only a very brief selection of project or activities of women’s organisations run in the Czech Republic in 2007. There were many more held for example by proFem,³⁶ La Strada,³⁷ Aperio,³⁸ Czech Women’s Union,³⁹ Žába na prameni,⁴⁰ eLnadruhou,⁴¹ Gender Information Centre Nora⁴² and a number of others. All of them have been extremely valuable providing information and resources for media and public, assistance and consultations in legal matters, training and education, direct help to victims of violence and trafficking in human beings etc.

*** The opinions of the author do not necessarily reflect the views of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.**

³³ <http://www.ta-gita.cz/udiversum/prazsky-tyden-medialni-diverzity-udiversum/>

³⁴ <http://www.ta-gita.cz/feministicka-gita/redaktory-si-skolime-sami/>

³⁵ <http://dev.apcwomen.org/node/177>

³⁶ <http://www.profem.cz>

³⁷ <http://www.strada.cz>

³⁸ <http://www.aperio.cz>

³⁹ <http://www.csz.cz>

⁴⁰ <http://www.zabanaprameni.cz>

⁴¹ <http://www.elnadruhou.cz>

⁴² <http://www.gendernora.cz>

