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Gender equality in the Czech Republic

Working Paper

1. Facts & Figures: Current Situation of the Gender Equality in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is still under the world average as well as the European average of the representation of women in all important political bodies. On the one hand there is historically the highest number of women in Chamber of Deputies (22 %), but after the elections in 2010 the government was assembled as men-only. The first woman (not on ministerial position) was appointed after one year after assembling the government and nowadays there is also one female minister – which means 12.5 % of women in the government. Situation on other levels of decision-making is very similar – women get support from voters (14 out of 44 female deputies gained their mandate thanks to direct support from voters), but they are not appointed into the positions of power.

Women have to face many kind of barriers which hinder them to succeed and enter politics as easy as man. Barriers are individual (lack of self-confidence, responsibility for kids and family) and structural (patriarchal model of the family, gender stereotypes etc.). The most dangerous and strongest barriers are within the political parties where women are highly represented in the member base but excluded from the leadership (glass ceiling). Only one (Green Party) of the Czech political parties is using quotas for assembling ballots. Women have only little chances within political parties to influence the most crucial decisions as political programmes etc.

Many gender inequalities still remain also at the labour market. According to the latest Gender Equity Index published by Social Watch the country reaches only 74 points from 100. The gender pay gap is the second highest in the EU – 18.7 %. There is a lack of women in the top management – according to the Deloitte study among the 100 biggest companies in the CR there are only 7.6 % women in their boards. There is still a splitting of „typically men's and women's branches”, those „women's ones“ are less paid. In case of work-life balance a strategy and state support are still missing; this could well be illustrated by former PM Mirek Topolánek's statement who proclaimed: „A woman can freely choose not to have children and then in such a case I am sure that she has the same job opportunities like a man.“ According to the CZSO data „by the two year /of age/ of the youngest child there still persists a traditional model in the Czech Republic that points to a woman looking after her child at home and her working partner; then in most cases they both work full-time. Absence of any partial parental leave or part-time job possibilities does not allow more flexible partner role division in case they care for children until

their age of six.“ Mother's working activity with her children until their age of three has been influenced with insufficient supply of organized childcare.

The insufficient situation still remains in the fields of women's reproductive rights and violence against women. Women are limited in free choice of their place of childbirth in the Czech Republic and it defies all decision of the European Court of Human Rights. The Ministry of Health's actions defies scientific findings about what the safe childbirth really means. Many redundant medical examinations into which the expectant mothers are forced are also the part of common Czech practice. The term “violence against women” points out the gender context of the violent behaviour no matter whether it's sexual or domestic violence. 86 % of the victims of sexual abuse were actually women in the year 2010 (1140 persons in all), 38 % of women experienced some of the forms of violence of their partners.

2. Current Hot Issues Concerning Gender Equality in the Country

In relation to the current political context one of the hottest issues in the Czech Republic is the impact of social and other reforms on women. According to various rankings the economic and social position of woman (as a group) is in the country worse than the position of men (as a group). Therefore cuts in social welfare and health care, taxes or pension reform have worse impacts on women and make their current situation even worse.

Among hottest issues we must also add the situation in obstetrics. Women are limited in free choice of their place of childbirth and midwives helping with home childbirths are prosecuted. There was a big case concerning the most famous Czech midwife Ivana Königsmarková. After a home childbirth a baby died in the hospital after a few days and she was accused for being responsible for this situation (she was accused by the hospital, not by the parents). Königsmarková was found guilty by the court and got the penalty of 2 000 000 Czech crowns. Also she can't do her profession anymore. The court was much harder comparing to similar situations which happened in hospitals. Also the way how the court was directed was very biased and did not take into account the expert evidences speaking for her.

Another important issue is connected with institutional safeguarding of equal opportunities for women and men. A new chairperson of the advisory body of the government – The Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men – was not appointed after the election in

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May 2010. For almost one year even the position of Government Commissioner for Human Rights was not occupied. In November 2011 the Council was transferred from office of the government to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the minister become its chairmen. The first session of restored Council took place in February 2012 (which means after almost 2 years break), it still consists of representatives of state, academic and NGO sector, but its agenda rather tends to be connected with the ministry's agenda. It is quite soon to evaluate the situation, but there is a risk that some issues (e.g. work-life balance) will be preferred at the expense of others (e.g. women in decision making, violence against women).

As mentioned above, another serious problem is the underrepresentation of women in decision-making both in politics and business sector. There is no systematic approach to solving this situation. Gender quotas are denied as “limiting free competition” but there are no alternative suggestions. One of the latest news is the direct election of the president which – comparing to the parliamentary elections – gives in the Czech context more chances for female candidates. Some gender or women's organisations are currently forming a new platform for nominating a female candidate which would be acceptable for NGOs and general public in order to support her campaign. There will be also regional election in autumn 2012. The participation of women on regional level is low – after the election in 2008 there are 17.5 % of women. Forum 50 % – NGO striving for equal political participation of women and men – is preparing a campaign supporting female candidates through preferential votes.

Last, but not least, another hot issue, also mentioned above, is violence against women. This issue is not recognized by the state in its gender perspective – it is called “domestic” violence including gender based violence as well as violence against children. Recently the Czech government refused to sign Council of Europe’s „Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence“.

3. How Favourable is the Current Political Situation to Advancing Gender Issues?

The current political situation is not much favourable to advancing gender issues. The current Czech government is rather conservative in many ways therefore it does not find equal opportunities of women and men to be an important issue. Ministry of Human Rights (responsible also for this issue) was terminated, or rather was not restored after the government was appointed. As mentioned in the previous part the whole system of institutional safeguarding

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of equal opportunities is restoring very slowly. Some advisers of the government are also very conservative and sometimes explicitly reject gender issues to be relevant. Adviser of the current PM Petr Nečas responsible for human rights and foreign affairs is Roman Joch, director of conservative “Civic Institute”. His appointment was criticized by various NGOs. Another two persons connected with this institute are cooperating with the government and at least for some time gender issues were part of their agenda (Matyáš Zrno is Deputy Government Human Rights Commissioner and Vojtěch Belling is Secretary of State for European Affairs). Therefore there is no will or financial support from the state to promote gender equality even at least convenient environment for promoting such issues. On the contrary – parts of NGOs' and other experts' time and energy is invested into objecting to government activities and decisions and appealing on international commitments and other strategic documents undertaking the Czech Republic to advance gender equality. The only gender-related issue somehow recognized by the state is work-life balance and domestic violence.

4. Positions & Strategies of Parties, NGOs, TUs

Positions and strategies of political parties represented in the Chamber of Deputies are annually evaluated by NGO Forum 50 % in the competition Women Friendly Party. For the long time the Green Party has been winning the competition due to its respect to gender equality within the party as well as in its political programme. Generally we can say that conservative or “rightist” parties are not much open to gender issues assuming men and women already have equal opportunities. The only issue they reflect is work-life balance (e.g. the Civic Democratic Party promotes company kindergartens or small home nurseries). Parties placed on the left side of political spectrum are more gender sensitive emphasizing rather the role of the state. Since 2006 no “leftist” party is represented in the government therefore it is hard to judge the actual promoting gender equality on the state level, but while communists are able to gradually increase representation of women in politics, social democrats are not much successful in promoting their politicians. E.g. in Chamber of Deputies the number of women representing the Czech Social Democratic Party is still decreasing, now it is only 8.9 %.

In view of the fact that the state does not currently use any comprehensive conception in the field of promoting gender equality, the role of NGOs is principal in this sector. It does not only cut down on the present status monitoring or fulfilment of the international commitments control but it also builds up methodology and conception in the field of gender equality. With regard to

work-life balance NGOs also offer and use their expert's report, many of them have already put particular programmes into practice sometimes in cooperation with particular companies. On one hand we can find examples of such a good cooperation with non-profit sector at the level of the municipalities and regions, as well. On the other hand it was already said that the systematic and well-planned cooperation between the state and NGOs is lacking and information gathered by the non-profit sector could not reach men and women representing our state (see e.g. speech of former PM Mirek Topolánek mentioned above).

Due to grants of the policy of the state a lot of organisations direct their attention to work-life balance and they do not have enough human or financial capacity for other activities, which they pursued originally. Different spheres of unequal men's and women's social rank are covered at different levels. If organisations deal with different problems than regarded ones by our state, they will be depended on support of private – namely foreign – foundations for such an activity. This situation seems indefensible in its long term, because there is a danger that these foundations begin to transfer their resources into the less economic developed countries in the course of time.

Trade unions reflect and deal with gender issues but their strategies are not much well known. This could be caused by current governmental politics which in its consequences makes worse situation of all employees; therefore TUs oppose these cuts, reforms and other measures as such. TUs have special committee for equality of women and men which recently appealed to elimination of gender pay gap. This committee also considered impact of governmental reforms on women; work-life balance and discrimination of women on workplace are also part of their agenda.

5. Topics, Approaches and Co-operations/Networks of NGOs Working at Gender Issues

Comparing to the state's approach there is a very active and operational non-profit sector. Gender and women's NGOs supply the role of the state and cooperate together in many areas. The most of them are associated in the umbrella organisation Czech Women's Lobby . Czech Women's Lobby declares its support to the feminist belief that women have the right to political, social and economic equality with men. Czech Women's Lobby lobbies and asserts the interests of all women regardless of their race, ethnic origin, health condition, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief. At the same time, CWL promotes diversity and acknowledges and asserts diverse values and needs of women with regard to the above mentioned characteristics. Czech Women's Lobby accepts variety of its organizations as well as variety of feminist trends professed by

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individual organizations. The main issues of the Czech Women's Lobby are: sexuality and reproductive rights of women, prostitution and human trafficking, violence against women, women in decision-making positions, women in labour market and gender roles and stereotypes. There are 21 member organisations at the moment.

Another coalition focusing on gender inequalities is Social Watch. “It is an international network of citizens’ organizations in the struggle to eradicate poverty and the causes of poverty, to end all forms of discrimination and racism, to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the realization of human rights. We are committed to peace, social, economic, environment and gender justice, and we emphasize the right of all people not to be poor. Social Watch holds governments, the UN system and international organizations accountable for the fulfilment of national, regional and international commitments to eradicate poverty and gender inequalities.” It has a watch-dog function. Every year the monitoring report on the current state of human rights and gender inequalities is published.

There are a few municipalities promoting equal opportunities of women and men. Some of them are also signatories of the “European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life” implementing concrete measures in order to reach gender equality in everyday life.

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