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1. Introduction

This, the third in a series of documents which the Czech Republic has presented in connection with the World Summit for Social Development, testifies to the need to understand social development as a dynamic process which evolves in relation to a number of factors - objective and subjective, internal and international.

Much has changed in the short period of five years since the meeting in Copenhagen. Above all, the economic difficulties accompanying the profound transformation of the Czech economy, which had only begun to appear in 1995, have emerged with the full weight of their social consequences since 1997. There has been considerable progress in the process of European integration, including the harmonization of steps which directly or indirectly affect the social status of Czech citizens. The Czech Republic became a member of NATO, thus strengthening its position in the world security system. However, immediately after its accession it had to face the social consequences connected with the conflict in Kosovo. The new government that emerged from the June 1998 elections thus finds itself in a situation which differs greatly from that in which the previous reports were produced.

Social policy is not an area for revolutionary change. Therefore, this government must follow up on measures adopted by previous governments, continue taking steps towards reform, revise measures which have proved to be mistaken, and also build and foster that delicate balance of competencies and responsibilities in the

social sphere which are divided among the government, the non-government sector, the family and the individual.

Of all the strategic measures which the government is taking in the social sphere, the most crucial would seem to be a conceptual, balanced and long-term approach to individual components of economic and social policy and a participatory method of adopting key social measures.

The Czech Republic perceives social policy as an important productive factor, and not as a residual area that consumes 20.7 percent of the GDP, thus sapping the dynamism of economic growth. Given that human resources are the key factor in the economy, economic measures must be taken with a view to these resources. One example of this new, complex approach is the elaboration of a National Employment Plan, which combines strategic and operative measures and deals not only with the consequences of unemployment but also, by connecting the economy to labour market policy, creates the preconditions for the emergence of an integrated system of prevention of destructive levels of unemployment.

Overcoming the current economic difficulties and restoring economic growth as well as the standard of living will require a number of important measures, which cannot be implemented without basic consensus between the government and its social partners, as well as among these social partners themselves, that is, without attaining social peace. The state, employees and employers are not the sole actors in social policy, rather it involves practically all citizens. Therefore, the government is striving for the widest possible dialogue, for public discussion of all key problems, many of which - for instance, those in the area of pension insurance - will affect the lives of future generations. This discussion is all the more necessary in that realization of many of these measures - for instance, modernization of the social welfare system - cannot take place without a decisive role being played by non-government entities.

One decisive external factor which has and will continue to have a fundamental influence on the way social policy is conceived in the Czech Republic is the country's effort to gain accession to the European Union. The Czech Republic fully supports the principles of the European social model. The government of the Czech Republic shares the view that precisely these principles - a high degree of social protection, social solidarity and dialogue between the state and its social partners - create the preconditions for social stability and long-term sustainable economic growth. Therefore, the specific steps and aims described in this report should also be evaluated from this perspective.

2. The Fight against Poverty

2.1 National Strategy and Its Poverty-Fighting Methods

During the 1990s, when the Czech Republic was undergoing the transition from a totalitarian regime to a democratic society based on a market economy, the risk of the rise and reproduction of poverty and social exclusion became stronger, especially among certain specific population groups. Therefore, the Czech government had already drawn up a strategy for fighting poverty at the beginning of the Nineties.

The ideas on which the strategy for fighting poverty are based give priority to citizens' personal responsibility for their own status in life, and to society's support of the social, economic and work activities of each individual. Alleviating income deficiencies and reducing inequalities in wages and other sources of livelihood (insofar as these derive from objective phases of life, handicaps and unalterable events) by means of social transfers is always only a secondary, auxiliary mechanism.

The set of methods used in the fight against poverty combine traditional means which have been evolving in the CR since the 1920s with methods and mechanisms created under the influence of actual, newly arising socio-economic conditions. They include the following in particular:

- a. Support for citizens' active use of their abilities on the labour market and their acquirement of sources of subsistence from earned income. The institutional basis here is the existing network of state labour offices, and there are private employment agencies as well. The definition of the level of earned incomes is markedly liberal; the lowest permissible level is defined by the minimum wage. an active employment policy (including support for private enterprise and flexible types of employment) influenced a low level of unemployment, which stood at approximately 3 to 4% of the CR's working population up until roughly the middle of 1997. Only the strong economic recession led to a considerable rise in unemployment during the second half of 1997 and in 1998 (at the beginning of 1999 unemployment had reached 8% and was still rising). Unemployment is becoming a substantial cause of poverty. Income supports for the unemployed (conceived as a special type of social benefit with an absolute maximum amount) are relatively low (40 to 60% of earnings with a fixed ceiling) and short-term (maximum six months). For more on the government's employment policy, see section 6.
- b. Systems of social benefits compensating for a temporary loss of earned income (monetary benefits during sickness, maternity leave or parental leave). The level of these benefits makes them a supplementary source of income for complete family units, but they are not always sufficient, especially for incomplete family units (single mothers and the like).
- c. The system of old-age pensions, whose basic component is based on pay-as-you-go financing (obligatory contributions from employees, employers and private entrepreneurs), covers practically the entire population of retired people. an average old-age pension represents 45% of gross average wages (59% net), and protects elderly people against living in poverty. The state contributes to volunteer supplementary pension insurance on a civic basis, involving 1,740,000 persons, or more than a third of the active population (figure from the end of 1998). The parameters of this supplementary system, however, have not so far given sufficiently intensive motivation towards creating long-term monetary resources for security in old age. a deeper reform of retirement insurance in response to unfavourable demographic growth remains in the discussion phase, with the government's proposals still being evaluated. These ideas continue to place an emphasis on reform and modernization of the existing system based on pay-as-you-go financing, together with further support of employee and commercial supplementary insurance systems, rather than a radical transition to fund management.
- d. The disability pension system (and pensions intended to reduce other risks - widow's, widower's and orphans' pensions). The basic system is an integral part of mechanisms founded on pay-as-you-go financing. In cases of full disability, these pensions provide income on a level comparable to that of old-age pensions.
- e. The system of state social support, consisting of a system of benefits for specific problem situations in families (predominantly families with children), was

brought to completion in 1995-96. The right to claim the most widely-used benefits (child allowances, social allowances for families with children, housing allowances) and the amount thereof depend on the household income level. With an overall reduction of the share of state support benefits in household incomes, their importance (share) has increased in low-income households with children. State support benefits prevent a considerable number of them from sinking below the poverty line. There is ongoing discussion about further development of the system, in connection with the planned conceptual reform of the tax system in the CR (the relationship between benefits and tax breaks, etc.). These measures should also bring back the child allowance for all children, regardless of a family's income level.

f. The social welfare system for citizens with substantial health or social handicaps and severe income deficiencies resulting from these handicaps, or from other serious, objective causes or their way of life. These areas and forms of care for needy people represent the field of "battle" against poverty in the strictest sense of the term, and vary considerably. Institutionally, activities by state administration and local administration converge here with activities by civil associations, churches and other initiatives.

A substantial part of social welfare consists of monetary benefits, predominantly from state budget resources, provided to citizens through district offices and designated communities, based on testing of the income and property situation of people who find themselves in socially unfavourable circumstances.

The subsistence minimum, which defines the income limit below which a state of need (deep poverty) exists, is the criterion for the adequacy of a household's income. Actual incomes are supplemented up to this limit by means of social benefits. The subsistence minimum was made into law in 1991 as a basic mechanism of the "social safety net". Roughly 3% of all citizens, or approximately 300,000 people, show an actual income permanently below the minimum subsistence level, which is valorized according to the growth of consumer price levels.

Direct (material) social assistance and social services represent an extensive area of social welfare; they focus mainly on the following:

- senior citizens unable to perform basic life functions on their own (permanent outpatient care services for approx. 90,000 people, old people's homes for approx. 50,000 people),
- citizens requiring special care because of severe physical or mental disabilities (special care facilities for approx. 20,000 people),
- children and young people - abandoned, dysfunctional background, young offenders (diagnostic and special education facilities),
- persons with reduced liability (the homeless, the imprisoned, ex-prisoners).

Despite long-term legislative preparations, the planned overall reform of social welfare systems has not been implemented thus far, due to larger political and institutional circumstances; but work on it is still continuing. The aim of this reform is to ensure that citizens are not passive objects of the care provided, but rather active subjects who have the opportunity to secure a service from a provider they choose.

2.2 Specific Measures

Poverty and social exclusion pose the greatest threat to those population groups in which certain factors or a combination of factors (health disabilities, advanced age, low level of education and qualification, different mentality and way of life) have a strong effect. In the Czech Republic, the groups most in danger of poverty and social exclusion are people with health disabilities, senior citizens with low old-age pensions, low-income families with children (particularly single-parent families), migrants and the Romany ethnic group.

Specific national strategy mechanisms aimed at reducing social risks are used in the case of groups of people who are especially in danger of poverty and social exclusion. These concern the following groups and corresponding mechanisms:

People with Disabilities

- The legal regulations contain a definition of people with reduced working ability (RWA).
- Employers' obligations with regard to RWA have also been defined (hiring people with RWA for reserved positions and in the required amount in firms with more than 20 employees; when establishing state-supported sheltered workshops and workplaces; announcing suitable positions for people with RWA and filling these positions with such people; an employment contract with a person with RWA may be broken only with the approval of the labour office).
- Income tax breaks for employers for each employee with RWA.
- Vocational rehabilitation (preparation for employment) for people with RWA, organized by the labour office with material support and other requirements.
- Disability pensions in conjunction with earned income (see paragraph 2.1).
- Tax reliefs: the income tax base is lower for persons with disabilities and, especially, for persons with severe disabilities.
- Advantages according to social welfare regulations (free or discounted public transportation, contributions towards rehabilitative and compensatory aids, housing modifications, purchase, repair and modification of motor vehicles, etc.) for persons with severe disabilities.

Families with Children

- The system of state social support, which is aimed in large part at decreasing the risk of poverty for families with children (see paragraph 2.1).
- The social welfare system (social benefits conditioned on need), in which, with regard to the structure of the subsistence minimum, there exists a relatively high level of income for families with several children.
- Tax reliefs (income tax base reduced by a certain amount for each child).

Senior Citizens

- The old-age pension system, the possibility to make use of supplementary pension insurance with state contributions (see paragraph 2.1).
- The possibility of simultaneously collecting an old-age pension and earning income.
- Direct social assistance (outpatient care services, old people's homes and homes-lodging houses for the retired; see paragraph 2.1).

Migrants

- At the present time, access to the labour market and employment for legal migrants in the CR is conditioned on their obtaining a work permit and being issued a residence permit. Persons who have been granted refugee status do not require a work permit. The planned amendment of the employment law stipulates that applicants for refugee status will also not be required to have a work permit.
- Placement in asylum facilities (accommodation, food, the prospect of gaining a residence permit).

The Romany Ethnic Group

- Here all the aforementioned instruments of the fight against poverty are employed; specific mechanisms cannot be characterized. Romanies are particularly impaired in terms of their access to the labour market, given their low level of education and lack of qualifications. The high rate of unemployment among this ethnic group has led to a strong dependence on state social support and social welfare benefits. These forms of income are combined with "grey" and "black" forms of economic activity: "official" poverty converges with an actually sufficient income. The fight against poverty among the Romany ethnic group is part of its overall integration into social structures. Both state and non-state activities are co-ordinated by the government's Plenipotentiary for Human Rights and the CR Government's Council for Nationalities.

3. The School System

The Czech Republic considers education a priority, and views the general level of education as a decisive factor in economic development, social stability and a high rate of employment. Equal access to education is one of the preconditions for equality among citizens in their later lives. The length and degree of education a person has attained directly corresponds to his chance of finding a good job, his income and the stability of society. Negative social phenomena such as criminality, drug dependency and other forms of asocial behaviour occur more frequently among population groups with a lower level of education. Besides the obvious economic impact (national prosperity), education also has strong social ramifications.

In an international context, the level of secondary school education attained by the population of the Czech Republic is above-average. The percentage of the population in the 20-29 age group with a complete secondary school education is 92%. In terms of the overall population, 83% of people of economically active age have completed some form of secondary school education. The universal introduction of nine class years at basic schools as of 1996 and the reduction in the amount of short-term preparatory courses for apprentices during the Nineties have contributed to an increase in the average length of study. The data on completed tertiary education are not quite so positive. Currently, more than 30% of the young population is accepted into colleges and higher-level professional schools, which is twice the amount in the period before 1989. The basic strategic objective in this area is a tertiary sector which is richly diversified and permeable to a maximum degree, with sufficient capacity to allow applicants to make use of their specific aptitudes, so that by the year 2005 50% of the eighteen-year-old population will be able to enter the tertiary sector of education.

An advisory board for questions of ethnic education has been established within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEYS), including representatives of the Polish, Hungarian, German, Romany, Slovak and Ukrainian minorities living

in the CR. Members of ethnic minorities have the right to be educated in their native language. Classrooms or schools where a minority language is used as the language of instruction are established based on needs defined in co-operation with the appropriate authorities.

Special attention is being given to education of members of the Romany ethnic minority. The Czech Republic supports expansion of the network of preparatory classes for children from socially and culturally disadvantaged backgrounds. Romany assistants working in these preparatory classes and at basic schools provide significant help in overcoming the language barrier. a Romany co-ordinator has been employed by MEYS. a system of tests for placing Romany children in basic and special schools is also being prepared. The goal is to curb the existing practice of too often placing Romany children in schools for children requiring special care. MEYS is prepared to accept alternative proposals on the education of members of the Romany ethnic group from members of the majority society and, above all, from Romanies themselves.

The Czech Republic also makes education possible for the children of foreigners, especially the children of refugees and migrants. In the case of children fulfilling their compulsory school attendance, schools are obliged to accept all children. In the case of higher education, this is tied to obtaining permission for long-term or permanent residence. If such permission is granted, study at secondary schools is free of charge. Under the new law on education, study at university-level schools is free of charge for foreigners so long as they study under the same conditions as Czech students (i.e. in Czech).

One point of focus in the period to come will be deepening the relationship between education and the labour market, as well as effective integration of basic and advanced education.

4. The Development of Health Care

The right to receive health care is contained in valid legal norms, including the Czech Constitution and the Charter of Basic Rights and Freedoms. a person who is insured through public insurance has the right to receive health care free of charge, within the scope defined by law. an insured person is anyone with permanent residence in the CR and anyone whose employer is based in the CR. a second fundamental principle is the opportunity to freely choose a physician and health care facility, with the exception of at-work preventive care.

The protection and promotion of health is the basis of the state's health care policy. It has been formulated in the "National Health Promotion Plan", which is a national variant of the WHO regional strategy "Health for Everyone by the Year 2000".

One example of practical preventive efforts is the creation of programmes intended to promote health, aimed at both the general public and individuals. At present, health is promoted in the form of both nation-wide campaigns and local and regional programmes. Individuals programmes focus on preventing smoking, primarily in the form of a mass media campaign and, above all, the preparation of new legislation corresponding with European Union directives. Besides this, a system of professional help for smokers who have decided to give up smoking is being formed. Another risk which the promotion of health focuses on is

an unhealthy diet. Besides projects aimed at high-risk behaviour, programmes oriented towards individual diagnostic categories of disease have been implemented, such as the cardiovascular, cerebrovascular, diabetological, oncological, perinatological, gerontological, traumatological and other programmes.

The activities of the National Committee for the Prevention of AIDS are directed at issues of sexual behaviour and AIDS prevention, and are carried out based on principles recommended by the World Health Organization. The growth of HIV/AIDS in the Czech Republic is, for the time being, not alarming. According to the Reference Laboratory for AIDS, 361 people with HIV and 110 people with AIDS had been recorded as of December 31, 1997. There is a network of consulting and blood-test sites, whose services are free of charge and anonymous, as well as a number of answer lines operated by non-government organizations. The CR is taking part in the UN's UNAIDS programmes.

Infant mortality in the Czech Republic has traditionally been quite low. The Czech Committee of UNICEF, in co-operation with other interested groups, has initiated and is co-ordinating the Baby Friendly Hospital Program, aimed primarily at supporting breast-feeding. There has been a dramatic change in the area of planned parenthood, with artificial interruption of pregnancy declining by a full 50%. At the same time, the use of hormonal contraceptives has tripled.

The problem of drug dependence is reflected in the implementation of the government's anti-drug prevention programme. In 1996 5,941 people were treated for dependence on drugs in the Czech Republic. While official statistics do not indicate any clear rising trend for the past few years, it may nonetheless be assumed that the actual number of people who are dependent on drugs will be considerably higher. As part of the Crime Prevention Program (coordinated by the National Committee on Crime Prevention of the Czech Ministry of the Interior), the Ministry of Health is helping to solve the problem of preventing child abuse and neglect, sexual abuse and child prostitution, and injuries and poisoning.

In general, the professional level of health care workers in the Czech Republic, especially physicians, is high, and there is a dense network of health care facilities, both inpatient and outpatient, which are well equipped (including staff). The transformation of outpatient care has shown positive results, and the stable percentage of GDP spent on health care, as well as the number of physicians and hospital beds, is comparable to that in developed countries. Regional health care facilities have state-of-the-art technical equipment and use modern medical technologies. Likewise, the ongoing trend of an increasing average life span and the high level of prevention of infectious and potentially epidemic diseases are among the Czech health care system's strong points.

On the other hand, the system's weak points include the difficult economic situation and the high level of indebtedness of health care facilities, the lack of clarity in specifying potential sources for financing health care, the problem of transforming health care in inpatient facilities connected with optimizing the number of beds for acutely or chronically ill patients, and the lack of effective controls on the quality and economic management of health care. The cost of health care is covered both by health insurance contributions taken from earned income and directly by patients. Further, a relatively small amount of financial resources from the state budget are spent on health care, especially on selected investments and certain financially demanding health care projects.

In 1997 the percentage of GDP represented by public expenditures on health care was 6.6%.

5. Regional Policy

The basic framework for providing support for regional development is outlined by the Regional Policy Principles approved in the spring of 1998. According to this document, regional policy is understood as a conceptual activity on the part of the state and regional and local bodies, whose aim is to contribute to a balanced and harmonious development of individual regions in the CR, to reduce differences between the level of development in individual regions and to improve the regional economic structure.

The Regional Policy Principles were accepted as an interim measure until such time as the law on support of regional development is prepared and enters into force (the anticipated date of the law's coming into effect is the year 2001).

In connection with the Czech Republic's ongoing preparations for accession to the European Union, the main contribution of these Regional Policy Principles consists primarily in creating conditions for harmonizing Czech regional policy with EU regional policy, particularly in the area of regional policy principles, methods and institutional background, and so on.

The process of preparation for the CR's joining the EU has been going on for several years now. A basic framework for co-operation in the area of economic and social cohesion was formed by the Association Agreement between the CR and the EU. This preparatory phase has already brought our country several benefits, particularly through participation in the PHARE programme. In the area of regional development, projects for cross-border co-operation with EU member states (and, potentially, with the other associated countries as well) have a particularly great importance.

At the present time, the key preparatory phase for the Czech Republic's use of EU structural funds is taking place. In connection with this, the relevant programme documentation required for this purpose by the European Commission has been made ready. This concerns, above all, the Regional Development Plan (RDP), which will serve as the basic documentation for the Community Support Framework (CSF) and individual operational programmes.

Elaboration of the Regional Development Plan for the years 2000-2006 is one of the Czech government's main priorities this year in the area of preparations for accession to the EU. It represents the basic programme document demonstrating the Czech Republic's overall readiness to implement a policy of economic and social cohesion. The RDP will be used in negotiating with the EC on pre-structural and PHARE fund support, and subsequently on structural fund (SF) and cohesion fund (CF) support as well.

Insofar as it defines priorities and strategic objectives, including the measures for achieving them, the RDP will, following government approval, become an important program document which should not only unify internal (Czech) procedures and development concepts but also ensure harmony with other EU policies. The RDP will thus be the starting point for preparation of individual regional and sector-level operational programmes.

6. Employment

During the past two years fundamental changes, both quantitative and qualitative, have taken place on the labour market. Employment in the traditional manufacturing branches is decreasing, existing positions are vanishing and new ones are being created only with difficulty and in insufficient numbers. Unemployment is affecting an ever-widening circle of people, who find themselves without work repeatedly or for long periods of time (whereas 286,902 people were unemployed in the CR as of December 31, 1997, and the unemployment rate was 5.2%, the figure was 386,918 as of December 31, 1998, with the rate of unemployment at 7.5%). For people with handicaps, particularly those with no or only inadequate qualifications, with health problems, or members of minority ethnic groups, it is even harder to find a place on the labor market. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' National Employment Plan approved by the Government of the Czech Republic should help in solving this problem.

6.1 National Employment Plan

Besides the Czech Republic's planned accession to the European Union, which requires bringing its conception of employment policy into line with that of EU countries, the reason behind the National Employment Plan was that the increase in the number of unemployed people requires a move away from the current passive employment policy, which is oriented mainly towards giving financial support to the unemployed.

The newly-defined employment policy should, therefore, redirect attention and the transfer of financial resources to various proactive measures for the unemployed, which will increase their opportunities and abilities to take on new work.

The measures proposed in the National Employment Plan are aimed at both the supply side (i.e. the labour force) and demand side (i.e. employers) of the labour market. At the same time, the plan deals with the problem of unemployment on three levels:

1. the situation of job applicants, i.e. actual unemployment,
2. preventing unemployment or retaining current employment,
3. new employment, i.e. creating conditions for new job positions.

The proposed measures are divided into 4 main directions, in accordance with employment policy in EU countries.

1. Support of Employment
 - ensuring an adequate level of qualifications and flexibility in the labour force in relation to the needs of the labour market,
 - facilitating young people's transition from school to work,
 - removing the barrier of insufficient development or loss of work habits among the unemployed or persons re-entering the labour market after a longer period of time,
 - increasing the labour force's motivation to find employment and remain with it, and improving its position on the labour market with respect to foreign labour.

2. Support for Enterprise
 - general improvement of conditions, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises,
 - balancing out the competitive environment and improving business conditions for investors,
 - revitalizing a defined group of enterprises experiencing economic difficulties,
 - maintaining or increasing employment levels.
3. Supporting Enterprises' and Employees' Adaptability to Change
 - creating preconditions for a dynamically evolving and flexible labour market,
 - creating conditions for modernizing the organization of work and working hours,
 - motivating employers to increase their own employees' qualifications as a means of increasing employment and competitiveness.
4. Support of Equal Opportunities for All
 - removing discrimination in access to employment,
 - strengthening legal and institutional mechanisms and means for removing all forms of discrimination on the labour market,
 - creating conditions for adopting extraordinary temporary measures in favor of certain groups of citizens, whose access to employment is made considerably more difficult by their being of a particular race, sex, and so on.

It may be said that the differentiation of development in individual regions has deepened over the past two years. Regional differentiation in unemployment exhibits the same basic features as the current dynamics and level of economic development in individual territorial units. The best situation is seen in the qualitatively most highly developed and favourably-located large centres and their immediate surroundings. The difference between Bohemia and Moravia/Silesia is considerable (above all the consequences of inversion of the geopolitical and geo-economic situation, as well as, in part, demographic structure).

The strategy for development of human resources in individual regions, based on the European Union's regional policy principles, is to proceed from the Regional Development Plan and the operational programme for human resources connected therewith.

7. Social Integration

7.1 Political Initiatives Supporting Social Integration

The Czech Republic is a member of the Council of Europe, whose goal is to protect basic human rights, among which are civil rights, political rights, economic rights and social rights. Their protection is ensured by the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and the Social Charter, which the CR has signed and whose ratification is currently underway. Social exclusion is viewed as a reflection of unequal access to five basic pillars of society: employment, health care, education, housing and social protection.

7.2 Specific Means of Assisting Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Groups

The change in the economic and social climate has affected all of society. Some groups of people (the mentally or physically handicapped, the elderly, people with low education or social status, people without social skills or unable to form relationships with others), however, have not been able to adapt to these changes. They are incapable of contributing to the life of society, and find themselves in isolation, unable to take personal responsibility for their lives. Some of them find themselves in difficult social situations (without material resources, and sometimes without a home). In such cases they are dependent on assistance from the state (social benefits) and humanitarian organizations.

Laws on social need and minimum subsistence were already passed in the early Nineties. Over the years these laws have been repeatedly amended. The right to claim social benefits and the amount thereof are based on the criteria of social need and minimum subsistence.

The help provided by non-government organizations, whether these be humanitarian or charitable, communal or private initiatives, is not without importance. These organizations may be eligible for financial resources in the form of grants approved by authorities of the Government.

People with Disabilities

A comprehensive approach to people with disabilities is taken in the April 1998 National Plan on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, in which specific tasks by the individual ministries aimed at integrating people with disabilities into society are formulated. These tasks focus on the following areas in particular: public education in relating to people with disabilities, prevention of disabilities, rehabilitation of people with disabilities and all forms of social services, removal of barriers, environmental accessibility, education, employment, social security, family life (support for foster care, family care), culture, recreation and sport, economic policy, associations and clubs for people with disabilities, and training people who work with those with disabilities.

One of the basic areas of integration is education. Existing educational legislation enables both individual and group integration of pupils with sight, hearing or physical disabilities, as well as those with speech defects. The integration of pupils with mental handicaps has been the subject of long-term discussion in specialist circles. Integrated education is economically ensured in the form of subsidies for people with disabilities. The process of integration is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves gradually. The field of special education reacts flexibly to the given changes.

Another important instrument is providing grants to organizations for people with health disabilities and humanitarian organizations. This entails support for activities by citizens with health disabilities themselves, which frequently signifies an important step towards their social integration. One such example is the grants provided to the League of Paraplegics project - providing aids, information and help to paraplegics. a total of 73 agencies in the home care field have received grants for improving the quality and availability of such care. Also significant is the grant provided to the "United Organization for Blind and Visually Impaired People" for the development of Internet to help expand their opportunities for communication and integration, the grants awarded as part of the therapeutic rehabilitation programme, and so on. The use of the appointed funds is monitored on an ongoing basis by the Ministry of Health.

Ethnic Groups

Social integration of ethnic groups is dealt with as part of the government's grant policy via the Comprehensive Co-ordination Programme, under which projects contributing to improving inter-ethnic relations, bettering the unfavourable social situation of Romany communities and positively emancipating individual Romanies are implemented at the local level. The projects are aimed at supporting employment (retraining and professional advisory services), education of children and young people, organization and operation of information and advisory help lines, interest group activities and a better level of information. During the time of the programme's existence (1996-99), a total of 174 projects supporting the Romany ethnic group in 32 cities were subsidized from the state budget, representing an amount of 582,714 USD.

Youth

Since 1995 many activities aimed at contributing to more substantial implementation of the Convention on Children's Rights, and thus at leading to the social integration of young people, have been undertaken. Projects by non-profit organizations which work to integrate or educate children and young people from socially disadvantaged minority groups have been given priority financing.

Further, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport supports the Our Child Foundation, which operates a telephone help line, as well as the activities of the Endangered Children's Fund, which is involved with foster care. Nor should the activities of all the other non-government organizations working with children and young people go unmentioned. Members of minorities are being integrated here in a non-violent, highly successful manner.

Leisure time centres for children and young people play an important role in influencing the young generation's social environment. There are currently 295 such centres in the CR (of which 183 were established by school boards, 100 by communities and 7 privately). Over 200,000 members regularly make use of activities at these centres. Many centres have attempted to serve the needs of national and ethnic minorities by creating independent departments for them. However, we consider the integration of minorities into the centres' regular activities to be more valuable. In some cases, the centres also deal with fundamental questions of social, ethical and moral education, as well as the formation of a healthy lifestyle, personal hygiene, health education and so on.

The government's approval of a policy concept regarding the young generation up to the year 2000 may be regarded as the greatest contribution made in this area. Generally speaking, the tasks proceeding from this policy concept may be divided into four basic groups:

1. the state's role in ensuring conditions for the development and growth of character in children and young people, via state institutions,
2. creating conditions for performing family functions,
3. creating conditions for raising young people to be fully responsible members of society and for their participation in the life of society,
4. preventive measures to protect children and young people from the negative phenomena to which they are exposed.

Migrants and Foreigners

Conditions on the movement and residence of foreigners in the Czech Republic are defined by Article 14 of the Charter of Basic Rights and Freedoms and by the Act No. 123/1992 Coll. on residence by foreigners, in the wording of later amendments. Foreigners may also reside in the CR as applicants for refugee status or as refugees, according to the Act No. 498/1990 Coll. on refugees, in the wording of later amendments.

The current legal regulations define a wide range of foreigners who may be granted permanent residence for the purpose of uniting a family, valid for both immediate family members and other, more distant relatives. It does not allow permanent residence to be revoked in any other manner than following prior notice thereof.

The number of foreigners dwelling in the Czech Republic has been steadily rising from year to year. As of December 31, 1998, 220,187 foreigners with long-term or permanent residence were registered in the CR. The number of illegal migrants on Czech territory has increased. In 1998 44,672 instances of illegal border crossings were recorded. The CR gives preference to the voluntary return of illegal migrants to their country of origin over deportation.

One specific form of residence by foreigners in the CR was "temporary refuge" for citizens of the former Yugoslavia, based on a resolution by the government of the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic. This was valid until September 30, 1997, with regard to developments in that country.

In connection with the termination of temporary refuge status, refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina with physical disabilities and their family members were offered the opportunity to settle permanently in the CR. The question of their legal status was resolved by granting them permanent residence for humanitarian reasons. Permanent resident status ensures these people the necessary access to health care, social and material security, the labour market, education, and so on.

In 1998 the programme for integration of people with refugee status or foreigners who were granted a permanent residence permit in the CR due to physical disability continued, based on a resolution by the government. The purpose of this assistance is to ensure dignified living conditions, particularly housing and employment. With regard to longer-term residence by immigrants in the CR, we support a description of their situation in the CR, as well as initiation of the necessary political and factual discussion on the topic of their legal status and the possibility of their social and cultural integration.

The aid program for resettlement of ethnic Czechs to the Czech Republic continued in 1998. The program is based on the Czech government's policy principles regarding the resettlement of foreigners of Czech origin living abroad. The project also includes the granting of permanent residence for the purpose of uniting a family to immediate relatives of different ethnic origin. Between 1994 and 1998 material conditions for the resettlement of 158 families were secured.

A national round-table discussion on the topic of inter-community relations became a watershed in the area of integrating foreign nationals in the CR. This discussion took place in Prague on February 19, 1998, as a result of co-operation between the Department for refugees and the integration of foreigners of the Czech Ministry of the Interior and the Council of Europe, in particular its

Committee on Migration (CDMG) and the non-government Migration Policy Group. The conclusions of the discussion created the preconditions for mapping and surveying the area of inter-community relations in the CR.

Intensive mutual communication between state administration, local administration, specialized scientific institutes and non-government organizations was initiated in 1998, as one of the conclusions of the round table discussion. This communication is being carried out on two levels - by working consultation groups within the Ministry of the Interior and on the regional level.

7.3 Housing Policy

Housing policy was given a more solid conception during the latter half of the Nineties. The main problem for Czech housing policy is the low availability of housing, resulting from the considerable and, given current economic conditions, practically insurmountable disproportion between the prices of newly-built housing and the level of income in most households. Low financial availability, however, mainly affects the purchase of new housing, thereby threatening primarily those households that are entering the housing market, characterized, among other things, by a lack of housing available for rent, for the first time. The percentage of net monthly household income spent on housing reached an average of 19% in 1998. The largest housing expenditure burden was felt by older people living alone and families with children.

Construction activities continue to be undertaken mainly by non-government entities, although the state has introduced measures to improve the overall availability of housing. This includes in particular support for mortgage credits and building and loan savings, interest-free loans for new construction, subsidies for building apartments and technical infrastructure, and subsidies for building apartments in buildings with social services.

Besides the aforementioned means of making new construction less expensive or providing access to sources of credit, the financial availability of housing is increased mainly by means of housing allowances, which are provided to all households at up to 1.6 times the subsistence minimum, regardless of where they live. Besides this, households affected by the rise in heating prices and rent can obtain two other specific forms of benefits (rent allowance and heating allowance); these, however, have a temporary character. Also available are social need benefits, which are not subject to claim but, rather, have the character of social assistance.

In the coming years, a more effective solution to the social aspects of housing will proceed from the plans set forth in many programme documents, including the planned amendment of the housing policy concept. This concerns primarily the acceptance of legal regulations enabling development of non-profit co-operative housing, the creation of new housing allowances, which will respond not only to low household incomes but also to the actual housing expenditure burden, and the development of a sheltered housing concept, which will enable adequate housing to be secured for the elderly, people with disabilities, members of various minority groups, and so on.

7.4 Fighting Criminality and Violence

Since 1993 the National Committee on Crime Prevention has also been involved with issues of social integration. Its activities focus on three areas: primary (where attention is given to all citizens), secondary (focus on high-risk individuals and groups and socio-pathological phenomena) and tertiary (concentrating on criminally disturbed individuals and dysfunctional social environments). The problem of social integration (or disintegration) is dealt with on the local level as part of the government's grant policy via the Comprehensive Co-ordination Programme (hereinafter the CCP). Cities with a high crime rate are awarded grants by both government and non-government organizations, based on the projects submitted. During the time the CCP has existed, a total of 1,401 projects have been granted 9,292,428 USD.

In 1997 the Czech Republic announced its Crime Prevention Strategy for the period up to the year 2000, which is effective for the entire country but focuses mainly on crime prevention at the local level. Funds from the Comprehensive Co-ordination Program are used in this area as well. The goal is to link community, government and non-government forms of preventive work on the local level into a functioning system, leading to a more effective approach to various forms of social pathology. The following areas in particular are at the centre of attention:

1. locating the social causes of criminal activity,
2. reducing opportunities for committing criminal offences,
3. assisting crime victims and reducing the fear of crime,
4. projects aimed at high-risk groups of young people, i.e. projects for leisure time activities and psycho-social assistance centres,
5. informing citizens about legal means of protection against crime.

The organization called White Safety Circle is undertaking important activities in the country's five largest cities, based on principles similar to those of the British organization Victim Support. Its crime victim counselling centres have the most complete statistics in the area of domestic violence against women. According to these statistics, domestic violence against women represented 37.5% of the total number of cases reported to this organization by crime victims last year. As part of efforts to prevent repeated victimization, the Ministry of the Interior supports asylum homes for women victims and their children.

For a number of years the Czech Republic has given considerable attention to the fight against organized crime, whose activity has been escalating. In 1995 an inter-ministerial working group was formed, with the goal of making co-operation and co-ordination of activities among individual components of state administration more effective in the fight against organized crime.

In 1998 the EU member states and the individual candidates for membership, including the CR, signed a Pre-Entry Pact on Organized Crime. The pact outlined the main directions for co-operation in the fight against organized crime, which are based on the *acquis* of the EU, and contained provisions regarding close co-operation between these countries and EUROPOL. It also specifies the obligations of these countries for rapid ratification and full implementation of those Council of Europe measures essential for fighting organized crime.

The organization of regular consultations concerning the fight against organized crime among specialists at the inter-ministerial level has been a positive initiative by the Ministry of the Interior. The acceptance of further measures enabling more effective inter-ministerial co-operation, the definition of weak spots in the existing

legislation, and more significant participation in international co-operation in this area should be among the results of the activities of individual working groups.

The drug problem also unquestionably affects social, health, economic, communal and political aspects of life. The strategy of the Czech government's current drug policy is evident in particular from its "Concept of government anti-drug policy for the years 1998-2000". This concept defines tasks for the appropriate ministries, which are monitored on an ongoing basis by the Inter-ministerial Anti-Drug Commission, which is the government's co-ordinating and advisory body in the area of drug policy. A basic theme of the concept is the balance between repression and prevention, which has taken on a new dimension in connection with the change in Czech drug legislation.

The new law is aimed at a new conception of fighting drug criminality, mainly by taking into account the CR's international obligations. The Czech Republic has adopted all the agreements on drugs valid within the UN. These international documents contain the obligation for member states to make the possession of drugs in general, i.e. without reference to the reason for their possession, punishable under law.

In accordance with the UN Agreement from 1988, the regulations of our criminal code as well as our criminal laws provide for separate procedures with regard to individuals who are addicted to drugs and those who merely experiment with them. From this perspective, activities in the area of prevention, such as re-socialization and therapeutic programs based on the government's anti-drug policy concept, are significant. In the area of repression of drug use, several criminal law methods were instituted in connection with the new anti-drug law (under which the mere possession of drugs is punishable, regardless of the reason for possession). The task of these methods is to alleviate the impact of this new law, primarily in the social sphere - e.g. "probation". The introduction of probation into the legal code has enabled better differentiation when dealing with offenders.

8. Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

There have been considerable positive developments in the area of introducing a policy of equal opportunities for men and women in the Czech Republic during the period following submission of the last report on the implementation of conclusions from the World Summit on Social Development. The establishing of an institutional framework for carrying out this policy and the definition of its basic goals are concrete manifestations of these developments.

The institutional framework is formed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, whose leadership was entrusted by the government with co-ordinating equal opportunity policy at the beginning of 1998, and the government's Human Rights Board, which is authorized to monitor and evaluate human rights as well as the state of equality between men and women, and to initiate the adoption of appropriate measures. The interested section of the public is represented directly on the government's Human Rights Board, in the form of non-government women's organizations. In Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies' Sub-Committee for Equal Opportunities and Family Affairs is concerned with equal opportunity issues.

In April 1998 the Czech government approved a program document entitled "Government priorities and procedures in promoting equality between men and

women". It thereby for the first time officially declared its intention to effectively assist in removing the existing physical and formal barriers that keep women from achieving a status comparable to that of men. The government thus responded to the real state of things in those areas of society where the consequences of inequality between men and women can threaten or limit the degree to which human rights are exercised in the most serious way. With regard to the current state of Czech society, the government considers it a priority to ensure equal conditions for women and men in terms of access to economic activities, equal treatment in performing gainful employment and equality in receiving remuneration for their work. It regards thorough elimination of these unjustifiable inequalities as a basic condition of women's economic independence, and thus a precondition for the exercise of their other individual rights. The measures by which the equal rights of men and women in employment relations are ensured in practice are contained in the aforementioned program document, as well as in other documents of a conceptual nature, e.g. the National Employment Plan (see part 6.1). Amendment of the law on employment should produce concrete results, making the prohibition of discrimination between men and women in access to employment and in the workplace more precise. It also forbids discrimination in employment advertising. In connection with the process of the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, the principle of equal treatment for men and women in employment has also been introduced into the proposed amendment of the Labour Code and the proposed amendment of legal regulations concerning remuneration for work.

The degree to which equality between men and women in gainful activity actually exists depends to a considerable extent on the existence of conditions under which people who care for children or needy family members - that is, predominantly women - are, at the same time, able to perform duties tied to their employment. Support for the creation of such conditions, primarily by maintaining the network of pre-school care facilities, is also among the government's chief priorities. Changes in employment law regulations have been planned in an attempt to motivate employers to modify the organization of work and forms of employment. Real possibilities for strengthening equal employment opportunities are also being opened up by means of collective bargaining.

Continual attention is being given to the protection of women's health, including that of pregnant women, above all in the workplace. The formal legal framework for such protection is at a high level, and the state's interest is therefore focused on the effectiveness (amount, quality, thoroughness) of the inspections performed.

Overall, it may be said that, from a political point of view, the mobilization of interest in this problem has contributed to the development of a civil society and solidified civic self-awareness.

9. Mobilization of Resources for Social Development

9.1 Use and Distribution of Resources Employed in the Social Sphere

Expenditures on social and health care measures represented 20.7% of the GDP in 1998. This ratio has been slowly but gradually increasing; in 1990 it represented 19.1%.

If we compare the indicators for the Czech Republic with those for EU member states (comprising data on pensions, health care, sickness benefits, family allowances, unemployment and employment policy, social assistance, housing support, administration of systems and other social programs), we discover that the CR is basically on a level comparable to that of the poorer EU member states, such as Portugal, Spain and Ireland. The average for the European Fifteen (excluding Greece) is 28.5%.

Percentage of social security components in relation to GDP :

	B e l g i u m	D e n m a r k	G e r m a n y	S p a i n	F r a n c e	I r e l a n d	I t a l y	L u x e m b o u r g	N e t h e r l a n d s	A u s t r i a	P o r t u g a l	F i n l a n d	S w e d e n	U n i t e d K i n g.	E 14	ČR
Sickness	1,4	1,2	2,0	1,2	0,9	1,1	0,2	0,7	2,2	1,2	0,6	1,3	1,7	1,0	1,3	1,0
Health	5,8	4,7	6,7	5,2	7,5	5,6	4,8	5,2	6,4	6,2	5,4	5,5	5,9	5,8	6,2	7,3
Disability	1,8	3,5	2,0	1,6	1,7	0,9	1,7	3,2	4,6	2,2	2,2	4,7	4,3	3,1	2,3	1,7
Old Age	11,8	12,6	12,0	9,6	12,5	5,0	15,4	10,9	11,2	13,9	8,0	10,4	13,0	10,4	12,1	7,4
Family	2,3	4,1	2,1	0,4	2,6	2,2	0,8	3,2	1,4	3,3	1,1	4,2	4,0	2,4	2,1	1,7
Unemployment	4,0	4,9	2,6	3,0	2,4	3,3	0,5	0,7	3,0	1,6	1,0	4,6	3,9	1,6	2,3	0,3
Housing	0,0	0,8	0,2	0,1	0,9	0,6	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,1	0,0	0,5	1,2	1,9	0,5	0,1
Social Assistance	0,7	1,5	0,6	0,1	0,5	0,4	0,0	0,4	0,7	0,3	0,1	0,7	1,1	0,3	0,5	0,8
Administration	1,3	1,0	1,1	0,5	1,2	0,8	0,8	0,7	1,2	0,6	1,0	0,9	0,5	1,0	1,0	0,4
Other	0,5	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,5	0,0	0,4	0,2	0,4	0,4	1,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,2	0,1

TOTAL	29,7	34,3	29,4	21,8	30,6	19,9	24,6	25,3	31,6	29,7	20,7	32,8	35,6	27,3	28,5	20,7
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More significant differences between the CR and the EU countries are seen in the structure of social expenditures. In general, it may be said that while in the European Fifteen countries the most important component is expenditures on pensions, in the CR first place is shared by pension expenditures and health expenditures. To this, of course, it must be added that pension expenditures in the CR rose between 1995 and 1998 in terms of their relative share of the GDP, from 7.8% to 9.1%, respectively. Should this dramatic trend continue, and all indications now are that it will, pensions will become the most important social expenditure component in the CR as well. On the other hand, the figure of 9.1% of the GDP spent on pensions is basically comparable with most EU countries. Structurally, however, it appears that whereas in most EU countries expenditures on unemployment benefits and employment policy are among the most important components, in the CR these components remain modest despite growing unemployment.

Expenditures connected with strengthening social security are "mandatory components" in the state budget. Mandatory components of the state budget in the area of social policy include pensions, social benefits, expenditures on active and passive employment policy, social welfare benefits and benefits for people with disabilities. (A mandatory component is also a binding indicator for the given calendar year, which is approved by the state budget law; should it be disregarded, the minister of finance is empowered by means of a government resolution to cover it for each year, either from state budget reserves or transfers within the state budget, or by creating or increasing a deficit.) The percentage of mandatory components for the social sphere in relation to total state budget expenditures represents more than 12% of the GDP (approx. 40% of state budget expenditures).

9.2 Measures for More Effective Use of Resources

The effort to make the use of resources designated for social spending more effective is expressed in the measures described in the individual sections of this report. This involves, of course, an ongoing process based on assessment of the effectiveness of social policy and its adaptation to current as well as long-term needs.

With regard to anticipated demographic developments, measures were approved in the area of old age pensions (for instance, gradual increase of retirement age), and other steps are being prepared (reinforcing the insurance principle, limiting the extent of "substitute periods" in the basic pension pillar). Connected with this is the diversification of sources of financing for this kind of insurance. While the key tasks of the basic, obligatory and pay-as-you-go financed pillar are retained, a strengthening of individual supplementary insurance resources and the introduction of supplementary pension insurance on an employee basis is being planned.

The area of state social support benefits, particularly those intended for families, has undergone substantial change, with both the awarding and the amount of certain benefits being made conditional on the income situation in a given family.

The government is making efforts to forestall difficult social situations and to motivate citizens to solve their social problems through their own efforts. Therefore, emphasis is placed on preventive measures and on removing the de-motivating relationship between social benefits and earned income. The minimum wage is

gradually being increased. The manner in which the subsistence minimum is determined is being re-evaluated.

The financing of social assistance and social welfare should also undergo a substantial change.

In 1997 a large number of cost-saving measures in the social sphere were approved, motivated by the effort to achieve savings in public finances during a period of suddenly worsening economic conditions. These measures were conceived as temporary; some of them have already expired, while in the case of others a return to the original status quo is being contemplated.

Systematic attention is being devoted to successful collection of social insurance payments. In the period just past the rate of success was 95-97%, which represents a high figure on an international scale.

10. Conditions for Realizing Social Policy and Programmes

10.1 Development of a Legislative Framework

Legislation is an essential precondition for the realization of social policy and programmes. In the past two years, the Czech Republic, aware of the need to create a legislative framework for its future accession to the European Union and, among other things, to fulfil the obligations of the Copenhagen summit as well, has approved or amended a number of legal regulations in the area of social security, and is preparing further such regulations.

Among the most important legal measures approved in the past two years are ongoing valorization of pensions in cases when the overall consumer price index shows 5% growth, an increase in the subsistence minimum and an increase in the minimum wage, as well as an increase in sickness insurance benefits (which will rise annually according to the growth of wages). The amended law on employment prohibits discrimination between men and women in access to employment and in the workplace, including discrimination in employment advertising. In the area of state social support, there has been an increase in certain allowances (funeral grant, increase of coefficients used in calculating coverage of children's needs in foster care). The conditions for adopting children were modified by means of a law on the family. The law on sign language, establishing its use as a means of communication among or with deaf people, is greatly significant in terms of helping these people integrate into society.

Among the most important legal regulations in preparation are the following:

- the proposed law on a guardian of human rights (ombudsman),
- the proposed amendment of the Labour Code and proposed amendment of legal regulations concerning remuneration for work,
- the proposed law on protection of employees in case of their employer's inability to pay wages,
- the proposed law on health care, which is intended to respond to changes that have occurred in this country as well as in EU regulations; legal provisions will be in line with the Agreement on Human Rights and Biomedicine,
- the proposed law on legal protection of children, in accordance with the CR's constitutional law and international obligations, e.g. the Convention on Children's

Rights, concerning the legal protection of children, including mediation of adoption by people in foreign countries,

- the proposed law on institutional care, protective care and preventive care will define this specific area, which involves a restriction of individuals' personal freedom,
- the proposed law on education, which is to define the state's education policy and create a strategy for providing all levels of education, including life long learning,
- the proposed law on pre-school, basic, secondary, higher professional and special interest education, which will respond to new requirements in the area of education and implement legally-binding EU regulations,
- the proposed law on social assistance. Here the starting point is to precisely define the role of the state, local administration and non-government entities in social policy, as well as the relationships between them, including financial relations.
- the proposed law on residence by foreigners, which contains provisions enabling temporary protection to be granted to foreigners who, for reasons defined in the proposed law, are forced to leave their country of origin; it also permits toleration of foreigners' residence in the CR, allows foreigners in foster custody to reside in the CR until the age of 18, and enables the issuing of a Czech passport to foreigners without a passport.
- the proposed law on asylum, clearly defining the legal status of foreigners taking part in the process of seeking asylum. The proposed law rules out the possibility of mass deportation of foreigners or the deportation of a foreigner to a country where his life is endangered (the non refoulement principle).

10.2 Development of Institutions

Besides state social policy, as represented by the individual bodies of state administration, the activities of inter-departmental bodies directly subordinated to the government also contribute to implementing the conclusions of the World Summit.

One such body is the CR Government's Human Rights Board (established in December 1998). The board is a government advisory body for questions concerning protection of human rights and basic freedoms under the jurisdiction of the Czech Republic. It oversees fulfillment of and adherence to the Constitution of the Czech Republic, the Charter of Basic Rights and Freedoms and other legal norms concerning protection of and adherence to human rights and basic freedoms, including fulfilment of the country's international obligations in this area. Besides state officials, representatives of the public are also members of the board.

Another important body is the CR Government's Council for Nationalities, whose authority includes, in particular, contributing to government measures concerning the rights of ethnic minorities, preparation of analytical reports on the ethnic minority situation, co-ordination of policy on ethnic affairs and co-operation with local administrative units. Along with this institution, the Inter-ministerial Commission for Roma Community is also active in this area as a government advisory, co-ordinating and initiating body.

The Research and Development Council of the Government of the CR is concerned with issues of research and development.

Since problems associated with the use of narcotic and hallucinogenic drugs are growing in the CR as well, presenting a serious risk to society from a social, health, economic, communal and political perspective, the Inter-ministerial Anti-Drug

Commission is responsible for co-ordinating work in this area. Among its main tasks is to produce a long-term concept for government anti-drug policy.

The CR Government's Board for People with Disabilities, a government advisory and co-ordinating body, assists in solving the problems of people with health disabilities.

In connection with the Czech Republic's preparations for accession to the EU, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has, by a resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic, been made the administrator of the European Social Fund. At present, the ministry is working intensively on creating program documents, such as the sector parts of the Regional Development Plan in the area of human resource development, and will commence work on the Sector-level Operational Programme for human resource development in the near future. The ministry has also been assigned to co-ordinate tasks associated with equal opportunities for men and women.

The Council for Economic and Social Agreement of the CR, whose task is to ensure dialogue on social issues at the national level, has a quite exceptional standing. It is made up in equal parts of representatives of the government, trade unions and employers.

Non-government entities also play an essential role in implementing the conclusions of the World Summit, taking on an ever larger share in providing social services. They offer supplementary services which the state or local community cannot provide. The state supports initiatives and projects by non-government entities in the form of grants, whose number has been increasing. In 1995 123 non-government entities were subsidized by the state, while in 1999 some 250 non-government entities active in the social field will likely receive support from the state budget.

11. Domestic and International Factors Affecting Implementation of World Summit Commitments

The implementation of World Summit commitments is influenced by a number of economic, political, demographic and social factors, both internal and international.

The most important of these factors are the following:

1. Economic growth. Since 1997 there has been a slowing of economic growth, with all the associated consequences in terms of creating resources for use in the social area. The government's economic strategy for the coming period (prior to joining the European Union) seeks to ensure long-term sustainable economic growth, enabling the Czech economy to continue to approach the average EU level. Among the priorities are finishing essential structural reforms, creating a stable macroeconomic framework and strengthening the country's ability to compete.
2. The process of European integration. The aim here is to create all the economic, institutional and legislative conditions for accession to the EU, including application of the basic features of the European social model, by the year 2003.
3. Demographic growth is leading towards ageing of population, which creates pressure for more rational use of social resources. The preceding text describes a number of measures which have been accepted or are being considered.

4. The danger of pressure from migrants, connected especially with the uncertain course of events in the Balkan countries.

12. Conclusion

Five years is too short a period for a complete evaluation of trends in the field of social policy, which is so complicated and so intertwined with other areas of social life. Nonetheless, it may be said that the Czech Republic is successfully fulfilling most of its obligations proceeding from the World Summit in Copenhagen. On a world scale, it is a country with a high standard of living and advanced social standards, which have their value even in a European context. A practically universal system of social protection, social harmony, a high level of education, a high standard of health care, increasing life expectancy, a relatively low rate of crime and drug abuse and a low incidence of AIDS - these are values which, unfortunately, cannot by any means be taken for granted in the world at the end of the 20th century.

However, the period just past, which was characterized by continuing economic and social transformations, was not favourable to the implementation of social objectives. Economic difficulties, as well as subjective political errors such as underestimating the importance of social policy, a non-conceptual approach to solving individual problems, the slow formation of a suitable legislative framework, underestimating the importance of an institutional background and a lack of dialogue between policymakers and citizens, have led to a situation in which the measures taken were not always adequate, or else came too late, if at all. Despite positive developments in a number of areas, as described in this report, a fundamental improvement in the standard of living of the average citizen has not taken place. On the contrary, certain undesirable social phenomena have appeared or even worsened, above all steadily rising unemployment, deepening social differences and a weak middle class. These are all factors which can negatively affect social stability in the future.

During the past few months, these phenomena have been analyzed in a number of documents, especially the "State of the Nation Report" and the "Economic Strategy for Accession to the European Union", as well as in strategic documents prepared by the individual ministries. This has created the basis for establishing an integrated strategy aimed at forming and strengthening the Czech Republic's ability to compete in European economic space, and based on mutually supportive interaction between the economic and social spheres. Social policy is conceived as a productive investment, giving impetus to the creation of a cohesive structure for a civil society, as well as to the growth of work productivity, thereby increasing the country's ability to compete.

The Czech Republic believes that it can best contribute to world social development by striving to attain prosperity and social harmony. In a global economy, however, international co-operation and solidarity, together with an improvement of living conditions, are especially relevant. The Czech Republic is therefore prepared to support the UN's efforts to see that the objectives of the Copenhagen summit are thoroughly implemented, and to take part in these activities as much as it is able.