

Dear Ministers,

Commissioner Vladimir Spidla,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank to the Czech Presidency for organizing this conference, which was announced at the meeting that I organized in Paris during the French Presidency. Thank you also for the chance of briefly introducing to you family policy implemented in France.

### **Context**

Population aging has become a concrete fact: our states face a real "boom of grandpas". Prognoses report a decrease in the active population from 2017, a decrease in potential growth and a significant increase in social expenses. Family policy and childcare policy play a significant role in the reaction to these challenges.

We need to work together to support demographic renewal while still respecting the choice of Europeans: in 1970, the birth rate per woman was 2.35, currently it is 1.5.

Prognoses of the European Statistical Institute for 27 EU countries report that:

- in 2035 the European Union population will reach 521 million, compared to 495 million on July 1, 2008;
- of these 521 million, 25.4% will be 65 years or more, compared to 17% at the moment, and 7.9% will be older than 80;
- after 2015, the mortality rate will exceed the fertility rate; the only factor contributing to the growth of the European population will be migration;
- last, but not least, if we believe demographers, in 2035 the European population decline will be because of insufficient migration and by 2060 it will decline to 505 million.

To reduce the decline in the active population, we need to focus on employing senior citizens and women and to use the offered possibilities for developing personal services.

For this reason, at the meeting of September 18 last year we emphasized the importance of:

- **supporting freedom of choice for families:** the choice of working or terminating or reducing one's professional career when caring for children,

- **diversifying the ways of caring for small children**, and in addition to the current efforts of public administration, also to look at companies getting involved in achieving this objective.

Family policy is subject to many public policies, such as:

- the fight against discrimination
- the fight against poverty (children are affected more than adults)
- intergeneration solidarity and reconciliation of private and family life
- social services of common interest, which also includes childcare, as I said before and I will come back to this later.

All these agendas are a part of the « Social Agenda Package», which was introduced by the Committee on July 2<sup>nd</sup> last year. All these agendas were subject to the agenda of the Council of Ministers EPSSSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council) held on December 16-17<sup>th</sup> last year.

This morning, we are gathered here again to discuss the European family policy and particular objectives that we established in Barcelona in 2002, i.e.: « to eliminate elements that are detrimental to the participation of women in the labour market, and in accordance with state systems to strive to introduce by 2010 structures for enrolling at least 90 % of children up to 3 years of age until

they start attending school and for enrolling at least 33% of children up to 3 years of age ».

The objective we defined together in Barcelona during the European Council in March 2002 determines what we are to achieve. It is up to us, what methods we use to achieve this objective.

The report on childcare, which was published by the Committee on October 3<sup>rd</sup> last year, proves that we need to work on achieving this objective by 2010.

### **French Family Policy**

France with 2.02 children per woman has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe.

Currently, there are 4.825 million children up to 6 years of age in the total population of 64.3 million inhabitants.

The employment rate for women 25 to 50 years of age is 83%.

**To enable French women to actually make their choice, we have implemented a policy pursuing these 4 targets:**

- **the choice to resume professional activity:** To enable parents particularly women to choose when to resume their professional activity after the birth of a child, we have implemented various types of assistance: a supplement giving a free choice of the method of childcare within the care for young children, which provides compensation for increased expenses for childminding; a cheque for employment services (CESU), which as of 2006 simplifies the administrative procedures and covers expenses (all or part) associated with childcare, and tax allowances, (deduction of 50% of the costs of childminding covered by the family)

In addition to this assistance, from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 we have implemented a new type of parental leave, called "optional supplement to the free choice of activity", shorter (1 year), but better paid, from the birth of the third child. The objective is that the parent taking parental leave is not remote from the work process for too long.

- **Choice of Reducing Employment Activity:** a supplement for the free choice of an activity provides compensation for a partial reduction of employment (employment from 50 to 80 %). This is complemented by a supplement for the free choice of the type of childcare.

- **Facilitating reconciliation between company employment and family life:** Entering the modern economy opens up the scope of the operation of a company in relation to parenthood. Currently, we are aware that an enterprise must focus on human capital and on new forms of social organization. To assist employers in implementing particular projects on behalf of employees - parents, in November last year we established an office for monitoring parenthood in enterprises. One of the main functions of this office will be to evaluate the practices of employees in assisting in the reconciliation of professional and family life.

On the financial side, French enterprises can use "tax credits for family / enterprise", which allows enterprises incurring particular expenses associated with enabling its employees to reconcile their professional and family life to take a tax credit of up to 50%. We hope that thanks to this measure, we will be able to establish more than 10,000 places in company kindergartens by 2012.

In terms of a « *family-friendly* » policy, we have developed the « **Family charter of parenthood in companies** », the objective of which is to support families in providing employees-parents with an environment that is better suited to parental obligations, and the « **Equality Brand** », the objective of which is to valorise equal treatment and the equality of genders within a company.

- **To Diversify Childcare Methods:**

- ***Increase the number of childcare options:*** We will further develop childcare by providing better assistance to parents and by giving parents better information on childcare options. We assume that by 2012 we will have established more than 200,000 new places, due to more flexible standards for enrolling childminders and more flexible standards for collective structures. In this area, we have been influenced by the experience of Scandinavian countries.
  
- ***Support for innovative models, adapted to the specific limitations of parents and areas:*** Within the dynamics of « Suburb Prospects» we have initiated a project that should enable flexible standards of childcare to be developed, adapted to the requirements of the working process (late working hours, seasonal work). In relation to this declared intention to create new places in nurseries for young children, we have also **signed several agreements with hospitals, various public administration organizations and institutions providing family benefits, so French citizens can also use places in their nurseries**, which were, previously only for the children of employees of these institutions.
  
- ***To develop childcare, France has introduced the Plan for Childcare Sphere Professions. By the end of 2012, 60,000 new experts will be recruited and trained. For this we must increase the offer of education and also improve the***

***attractiveness of these professions, which are so humanly enriching! Therefore we have decided to make it easier to transfer from health-social professions to the care of small children to create a real future for these people!***

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As you can see we are exercising a broadminded and ambitious family policy. This policy is bearing fruit and our country is particularly proud of this. For us, it is proof that natality is not fatality!