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Czech women's entrepreneurship

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The paper is divided into five parts Basic facts on the Czech Republic Situation in the legal and institutional sphere from the women's point of view Position of women in the labour market Entrepreneurial activities of women in the Czech Republic Outlook for women in the Czech republic

Basic Facts on the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is situated in Central Europe, with an area of 78,864 square kilometres and population of 10.4 million.

The capital of the Czech Republic is Prague. The Czech Republic is a member state of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, NATO, WTO, OECD and an associated EU member. Currency - Czech Koruna (CZK), 1 EUR = 34,083 CZK (average in 2001) Gross Domestic Product - CZK 1 556 mld. CZK (first three quarters of 2001) Inflation Rate - 4,7 % (average in 2001) Average Monthly Nominal Wage - 14 847 CZK (November 2001) Gross External Debt - 119 mld CZK (end of 2001) Rate of Unemployment - 8,9 % (January 2002) (Source: Czech Statistical Office)

Situation in the legal and institutional sphere from the women's point of view

The Czech Republic can undoubtedly be counted among countries with a developed legal system, which, even in the past, provided sufficient support at the most general level for the implementation of equal position of men and women. Women's suffrage has existed in the Czech Republic since 1920.

However, the practical implementation has been lagging behind for years leading to a feeling of helplessness against being mistreated when looking for a job or being employed. Two thirds of women do

not believe that they would be successful if they sued and almost half of them has no idea about the legal basis for equal opportunities of men and women. Statistical figures show that the pay Czech women receive is lower by 28% than that of men. 1) The Czech legislation and civil administration faces a difficult task of incorporating the EU standards concerning equal-opportunities in the Czech legal system and the life of institutions.

So what has already been achieved ?

Labour Code and related regulations

Due to law no. 155/2000, which came into effect on 1st January 2001, a number of regulations have been amended to stipulate that employers are obliged to ensure equal treatment of all the employees as regards their working conditions including compensation for their work, their professional education, and opportunities to advance to higher positions. Any discrimination of employees whatsoever is strictly forbidden for well-known reasons. This ban also includes such acts on the employer's part that discriminate through their consequences rather than directly. It is unlawful to disrespect human dignity, which also includes undesirable sexual conduct in the workplace seen as unwelcome, unfit or defamatory. An employee has a right to demand a remedial action if the equal-treatment principle has been violated. The new measures also include the introduction of parental leave, which supersedes the former maternal leave. As yet, no one has found, and in the near future probably will not find, a solution to the problem of discrimination of businesswomen asking for loans or other services in the private sector.

Organisational and institutional level

There is a governmental programme that comprises a whole range of measures, reflections and continuing tasks for all the government members, particularly for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. There, a special department has been established to deal with equal opportunities of men and women. 1) Experts from the Institute of State and Law as well as other institutes of science and law have been invited to investigate these issues. On the other hand, in the sphere of civic associations, public administration, and universities, meetings, debates, and conferences are organized and projects are supported where the preparedness of the Czech women to take advantage of the equal opportunities offered is appraised from different angles, or direct help is offered to start businesses.

Position of women in the labour market

In order to get a better view of the situation it should be noted that, until 1989, the Czech Republic had been ruled by a communist regime with all the characteristics of a totalitarian system. The right to work was incorporated in the then political system and so 90% of women were employed full-time. In 1990 a democratisation of life and transformation of economy was started. The decade should be viewed as two separate periods: The first half of the 1990's:

In view of our interest, it should be noted that those who received the most benefit of the transformation from planned to market economy were men. It was they who started most of the businesses because they had been in the management of the former state-owned companies with at least some sort of experience in managing private companies. At that time, men, who in the socialist Czechoslovakia were appointed to an overwhelming majority of managerial positions, simply had far more experience, information, and business contacts.

These were the main reasons why Czech women could win no recognition in the first years of the new democratic society. However, there was, and still is, a huge potential. Ninety percent of all Czech women were employed before 1990, which was a situation unique in Europe. „The Czech model of an employed woman with no career ambitions is the most successful model of all times in terms of the male and female role complementarity in the family and household. It imposes the responsibility of earning money for the family both to husband and wife. It strengthens the inequality in the division of labour in favour of the husband both at home and in public. Thus women work at a maximum without rivalling men." 4

The second half of the 1990's:

In the today's Czech Republic, we are witnessing strong emancipation tendencies with women striving to find their own work and social identity. This aspiration of women for self-fulfilment obviously must have been reflected in the business and economic sphere in this country, as the outcomes of our research further show.

Different aspects of the situation of Czech women active in business sphere: In the Czech Republic, due to the communist regime, the women's liberation movement was not captured, analysed, and evaluated. Statistical figures again provide a picture that is not in favour of women:

During the 1990's, the policy of equal opportunities was neglected in Czech society and no discussion took place even on the basic types of equalities. For example, an overwhelming majority of women (63%) in our investigation would not sue their employer after being discriminated as a woman. This clearly indicates lack of faith in finding support in society for equal rights of men and women as well as some mistrust in the Czech courts.

In the Czech Republic no support exists as yet for

Women's professional careers Social differentiation of women and promotion of women to managerial positions Differentiation of men's and women's professions Just redistribution of professional and family roles between career-oriented parents

Entrepreneurial activities of women in the Czech Republic

Table 2: Number of women and men entrepreneurs

Men	498 100
Women	192 400
Total	690 500

Industry Branch		Men entrepreneurs				Women entrepreneurs			
		without employees	with employees			without employees	with employees		
	Total 000's CZK	000's CZK	%	000's CZK	%	000's CZK	%000's CZK		%
TOTAL including 1)	690.5	346.2	100.0	151.9	100.0	145.2	100.0	47.2	100.0
Commerce, repairs of cars and consumer goods	167.7	66.2	19.1	43.2	28.4	41.0	28.2	17.4	36.0
Construction	136.9	103.5	29.9	28.6	18.8	2.7	1.9	2.0	4.1
Real estates, real estate rentals, services for businesses, research and development	90.5	37.7	10.9	13.8	9.1	34.5	23.8	4.4	9.4
Processing industry	80.6	39.0	11.3	23.8	15.7	15.4	10.6	2.4	5.1
Other public, social, and	48.2	17.8	5.1	3.2	2.1	24.6	17.0	2.6	5.5

personal services									
Transport, storage, postal facilities and telecommunications	41.3	26.1	7.5	11.1	7.3	2.7	1.9	1.4	3.0
Restaurants, accommodation	32.5	9.4	2.7	11.3	7.5	5.0	3.4	6.7	14.?
Agriculture	27.9	15.7	4.5	6.1	4.0	5.0	3.5	1.0	2.2
Health and veterinary services, social activities	23.9	4.2	1.2	6.5	4.3	5.3	3.7	7.9	16.?

1) Ordered by the total number of entrepreneurs in branch

If 29% of the Czech women run their own enterprises, it is quite satisfactory. It is also not surprising that women are mostly active in commerce and services as the table shows. Women mostly begin to be active in the business sphere at the age of 30 to 35.

Outlook for women in the Czech Republic

Our research, which was conducted at the Faculty of Business and Management indicates a huge potential and preparedness of Czech women to take advantage of the job opportunities. Czech women are "still in the doorway" but a huge potential is forming among them. The fact that, in the past, Czech women managed to do all the household chores while being full-time employed, which required maximum workload, should be a good enough reason for expecting them to be equally efficient in the business sphere.

The table below shows the percentage of women who became successful in top management positions.

We used the CZECH TOP 100 as a list of companies, in the Registry of Companies valid as of 1st January 2002, went through the statutory bodies of all these 100 companies to see how many women were on the boards of directors and supervisory boards and set up the following Top 100 statistic

Field	Number of positions	Number of women	%
Activities related to financial market	27	0	0.00
Mining	65	5	7.69
Transport	33	4	12.12
Wood-processing, paper and printing industries	40	2	5.00

Electrical engineering and electronics	17	1	5.88
Power engineering	91	10	10.99
Metallurgy and metal processing	51	6	11.76
Chemical, pharmaceutical and rubber industries	52	2	3.85
Information technologies and systems	12	4	33.33
Commerce	29	2	6.90
Other processing industries	19	6	31.58
Finance and insurance	70	3	4.29
Food processing and tobacco industries	25	3	12.00
Glass, ceramics and building materials	41	3	7.32
Services	24	2	8.33
Construction	22	1	4.55
Mechanical engineering	53	2	30.77
Telecommunications and postal services	36	0	0.00
Textile, clothing, and leather manufacture	41	6	14.63
Agriculture and wood exploitation	34	5	14.71

The position of Czech women in politics is also worth mentioning. The current social democratic government has no female minister. This is the first government since 1990 with no women among its ministers. The representation of women in top politics (the Parliament and the Senate) amounts to 14%. In the regional political bodies their participation is 20%. Six percent of mayors are women.

The public opinion polls in 1999 showed that the public would welcome more participation of women particularly in social and environmental areas. Self-fulfilment of women through their careers changes not only the life of women and their families, but also the life of society. The degree of women's involvement in business is a barometer of the democratic life of the country. The first generation of the Czech women entrepreneurs can offer their maximum commitment. Their activities are admirable and significant in that they create and positively influence the so-called role. They demonstrate that this can be made.

If I was to paraphrase the well-known book: "I am dancing as fast as I can, I would have to add that a Czech woman in business often has to dance faster than she can."