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## **Czech women and European politics: a new year for action**

*Check Against Delivery*  
*Seul le texte prononcé fait foi*  
*Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Meeting with Czech Women Lobby to discuss 50-50 Campaign for Democracy

**Prague, 8 January 2008**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a pleasure for me to be here in Prague to talk about an issue that is very close to my heart: gender equality. First of all, I would like to congratulate the Czech Women's Lobby for the important work they are doing to promote equal opportunities between women and men.

The Czechs took over the EU Presidency on 1 January 2009. During six months at the helm of the union, the Czech Republic will have great influence in setting the political agenda and this would be an excellent opportunity to push the issue of gender equality.

Unfortunately, it seems equality of men and women is a marginal issue for the Czech government, despite glooming statistics of women in politics and leadership positions:

15% of the Czech Members of the Lower House Parliament are women (24% in the EU27)

14% of the Czech Members of the Upper House Parliament are women (20% in the EU27)

27% of Czech leaders of business are women (28% in the EU27)

The highest decision-making body of the Czech Central Bank is comprised solely of men

There are a few exceptions...

The Czech Republic is for instance the only country among new EU member states to currently have a woman leader of the Supreme Court, Ms Iva Brožová, and the traditionally male dominated ministerial portfolio of defence is handled by a woman: Vlasta Parkanová.

... But this is not enough. The "2008 Shadow report on equal treatment and equal opportunities for women and men" reveal the following:

The Czech government has not yet begun addressing the most important problems in relation to gender inequalities: pay gap, equal representation of women and men in leadership and management positions, and vertical and horizontal gender segregation.

So far, no comprehensive conceptual framework for implementing equal opportunities has been set – neither by the government nor by individual ministries. Thus there is no basis for the formulation of strategic goals, measures and measurable indicators.

The present institutional arrangements for securing the implementation of an equal treatment policy remain absolutely insufficient; and the existing bodies have minimum powers and financial and human resources.

It seems the main obstacle to the implementation of a gender equality policy in the Czech Republic (and the rest of Europe) is a lack of political will among the political elite, which unsurprisingly, is composed mainly by men.

Equal opportunities are attractive only in pre-election periods as a lure for undecided male and female voters.

Unfortunately, gender equality is often seen as a secondary issue – one that does not belong to the "high politics" agenda and that can be discussed in the margins or should stay within the discussions amongst groups like ours here today: women.

When big questions such as security, politics and the future of Europe are discussed, you rarely include the women's perspective, or rather the gender perspective – how do these things influence men and women differently?

The same case goes for when discussing democracy, European citizenship and the soon approaching European elections in June 2009.

This must change. But how? What can we do about this European-wide situation of inequality? A few thoughts from my side:

Break stereotypes and build women's self-confidence. We need to de-bunk the myth that women are less able to take on leadership roles.

Show women that EU is relevant to them. EU policies affect areas of life that women tend to care about: education, social policy, environment, human rights, and international development. It is in the EU that important decisions are taken – where change takes place – and I am convinced more women would vote and be active in politics if they were aware of this.

Persuade our political parties to nominate more women candidates for election to the European Parliament, and that they need to focus on issues that concern women.

Finally, I would like to present two important tools that all of you can and should use to contribute towards a more gender equal Czech Republic and Europe:

The 50-50 campaign, launched by the European Women's Lobby. Sign it! Use their tools to act, and to persuade Europe's decision-makers that you care about this issue!

VOTE in European elections! (Preferably for a woman...) Your vote can and will make a difference.

Thank you for your attention.