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PROGRAMME OF THE SLOVAK AND CZECH GOVERNMENT AS THE CHIEF ISSUE FOR THE SENIORS' SOCIAL INSURANCE

Programové vyhlásenia vlád Slovenskej republiky a Českej republiky ako východiská pre sociálne zabezpečenie seniorov

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Annotation

The paper outlines the system of social insurance for seniors in selected countries of the European Union. Slovak Republic and Czech Republic were selected as reference countries, since both states shared common socio-economic as well as cultural scheme in the Central Europe. Presented article focuses on the system of social insurance of seniors as a point in the Program of the Slovak Government for the period 2016-2020 and the Program of the Czech Government for the period 2017-2021. The social insurance designed for senior citizens as a key point included in the Program of the Slovak and Czech Governments is analyzed and discussed in our paper. The method of description is employed while discussing the scheme of the governmental documents. The conclusions include comparison of the systems of social insurance for senior citizens included in the Program of the Slovak and Czech Government.

Keywords

region, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, social security, senior

Anotácia

Cieľom príspevku je poukázať na sociálne zabezpečenie seniorov vo vybraných krajinách Európskej únie. Za tieto štáty sme zvolili Slovenskú republiku a Českú republiku, nakoľko v minulosti zdieľali spoločný hospodársko-sociálno-kultúrny priestor v strednej Európe. Predkladaný príspevok sa venuje sociálnemu zabezpečeniu seniorov ako problematike, ktorej sa venuje programové vyhlásenie vlády SR vo volebnom období 2016 – 2020 a programovému vyhláseniu vlády ČR vo volebnom období 2017 – 2021. V príspevku aplikujeme metódu štúdia dokumentov a analýzy pri identifikovaní sociálneho zabezpečenia seniorov ako súčasť programových vyhlásení vlád SR a ČR. Súčasne využívame metódu deskripcie pri interpretácii obsahovej náplne programových vyhlásení v nami vybranej oblasti. Jadro záveru predstavuje komparácia programových vyhlásení vlád SR a ČR v oblasti sociálneho zabezpečenia seniorov.

Kľúčové slová

región, Slovenská republika, Česká republika, sociálne zabezpečenie, senior

JEL classification: I00, I38

1. Introduction

In the Slovak Republic and Czech Republic, the Program of the Government is a document creating the basis for coalition parties, heads of ministries and government nominees. It is a declaration created by the cabinet parties, formed following the legitimate democratic parliamentary elections. Government has the legislative duty to

propose the Programme of the Government to the parliament and to gain a vote of confidence in the National Council. Social policy along with its subsystem of social security of seniors, which is the main topic of this paper, is one the components of this document. The integration into the European Union had major impact on both countries. European Union is calling for deeper integration among the member states. According to Horváth (2003): „Regional policy is one of the key of the European Union policies, which can be demonstrated by the fact that following the agriculture, it is the policy with second highest expenditure.“ Social policy is however still in the full competency of the national governments, waiting for its dynamic integration (Lukáč, Hájek, 2016).

2. Parliamentary elections 2016 as a key determinant to the Program of the Government of the Slovak Republic for a tenure 2016-2020

The Members of the Slovak Parliament are elected for a four-year term, in case the term of office is not shortened and followed by snap election. Parliamentary elections are held under democratic conditions, while the voting itself is secret, direct, general and equal. There is an electoral threshold of 5% that political parties have to gain in order to get to the Parliament.

President of the Slovak Republic usually delegates the leader of the party with the majority of votes to form the new Government. The Government has a duty to propose the Program of the Government to the National Council for the vote of confidence within 30 days period since the nomination of its members to their offices. It is expected that the Program of the Government would be formed by parts of the election programme of each particular cabinet party. The extent of the election programme that is incorporated into the Program of the Government depends on the power of particular political party – number of seats in the National Council election results or on compromise following political negotiations among the cabinet parties. The Program of the Government is the base document for any other activity and direction of the Government. The members of the Government are able to take charge of their constitutional roles only after the positive vote of confidence in a Government.

Parliamentary election is considered to be the most important election in Slovakia and thanks to that really wide media coverage is given to them.“ (Horváth, Meluš, 2017). „Parliamentary parties come and go, yet the two-camp logic of party competition and government formation have provided some level of stability and predictability. In this sense the parliamentary elections that took place on March 5, 2016 represent a turning point and an electoral earthquake, even by East European standards: they produced many losers, a few and mostly unexpected winners, opened up new divides, and led to a highly fragmented parliament and an innovative four-party coalition government.“ (Rybář, Spáč, 2017).

Eight political subjects passed the threshold to win seats in the National Council of the Slovak Republic after the last parliamentary elections in March, 2016. Table No.1 illustrates their percentage and seats.

Tab. 1: Results for parliament parties from elections in 2016

Order	Political subject	Percentage	Seats
1.	SMER – SD	28.2%	49
2.	SaS	12.1%	21
3.	OLaNO – NOVA	11%	19
4.	SNS	8.6%	15
5.	Kotleba ĽS NS	8%	14
6.	Sme rodina – B. Kollár	6.6%	11
7.	Most – Híd	6.5%	11
8.	SIETĚ	5.6%	10

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

The chairman of the winning party SMER – SD Robert Fico formed the majority coalition with following parties: SNS, Most – Híd and SIETĚ. Members of the Parliament got to vote of confidence in a Government and the Program of the Government of the Slovak Republic on 26 April, 2016. From 142 Members of the Parliament present at the ballot, 79 voted in favour of the Government, 61 were against and 2 abstained in the vote (NR SR, 2016). The National Council of the Slovak Republic expressed the confidence in a Government with Robert Fico in the lead and therefor the Government gained all competencies given by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic to begin the process of pursuing the obligations given by the Program of the Government of the Slovak Republic.

The political crisis that was prompted by the murder of a journalist and his fiancée in February 2018, protests of citizens held repeatedly in many Slovak cities and towns and putting pressure by coalition partners on the current government to suspend the Minister of Interior Mr. Kalinak, have resulted in the process of reconstruction of the

Slovak government. Mr. Pellegrini has become the new Slovak Prime Minister, while the former Prime Minister Mr. Fico has still been the leader and the chairman of the leading political party SMER-SD and has taken over the responsibility of a Member of Parliament. Mr. Kalinak as the Minister of Interior has been replaced by Mr. Drucker. Also the heads of other ministries such as Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Culture are replaced. The new Slovak Cabinet headed by Mr. Pellegrini is supported by eighty-one MPs of the Slovak Parliament who also have proved the Program of the Slovak Government (NR SR, 2018). The ruling coalition has proved its majority mandate that enables them to introduce their proposals and make the Government Program real.

2.1 Parliamentary elections 2017 as a key determinant to the Program of the Government of the Czech Republic for a tenure 2017-2021

In both Czech Republic and Slovak Republic, the Parliament is elected for a four-year term. The same is the condition of democratic elections with secret, direct, general and equal voting system. There are though following differences compared to Slovak Republic: 200 deputies elected, instead of being one election district, the Czech Republic is divided into 14 territorial districts and political party creates the list of candidates for each district. It is not mandatory that political party would run in elections in each district. There is an electoral threshold of 5% that political party has to gain in order to get to the Parliament. In case two political parties run in elections in a coalition, the threshold is modified into 10%. After the last elections held in 2017, the majority party was ANO with Andrej Babiš as a leader of the party and except ANO, eight other political subjects got into the Lower House (Chamber of Deputies) of the Parliament. As is the custom, President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman, delegated ANO and Andrej Babiš as the party with the majority of votes to form the Government. As ANO was unable to form the coalition Government, they opted for the minority government but lost in confidence motion. The results of the vote of confidence were 78 in favour of the Government and 117 against (Poslanecká sněmovna parlamentu České republiky, 2018). Government is even despite this fact currently formed only by ANO which presented the Chamber of Deputies its Program.

3. The Program of the Government of the Slovak Republic in the context of the social security of seniors

According the introduction to the Program of the Government of the Slovak Republic, the activities of the Government should be based on: „*The Government of the Slovak Republic will place its activities in a framework which ensures the stable development of Slovak society and provides sufficient flexibility for reaction to the opportunities and threats of the external environment in order to secure the economic, social and environmental development of Slovakia, foster social cohesion, reduce regional disparities, strengthen the active role played by the state in combating corruption and enhancing the quality of public services for citizens.*“ (Programové vyhlásenie vlády na roky 2016 – 2020, 2016). *Social policy plays a irreplaceable role in everyone's life, whether directly or indirectly.*“ (Mandys, Mojžíšová, Korovchenko, 2016). Social development holds its importance already in the introduction to the Program and document elaborates this area on several segments. Its key pillar within the document is the social policy, but it has its implications also on the public policy aimed at job creation, health care policy, policy related to reducing regional disparities and partly also on the policy focusing of sports and Youth, as well as policy supporting national minorities.

Government identified several goals and priorities in the area of social security of seniors. It is specified that the Government: „*recognises the importance of high-quality and effective social services designed to adequately meet the needs of reliant persons. The Government will pay particular attention to the care of older people, especially to effectively linking health and social care services.*“ (Programové vyhlásenie vlády SR na roky 2016 – 2020, 2016). Government also aims at supporting a multi-source funding of social services and introducing an allowance based on the degree of reliance equally applicable to all founders of social care facilities. Government also aims at continuing with the process of decentralising the provision of social services. According to the document, the Government understands that it is necessary to continue focusing on persons with low pensions and to improve their living conditions. One of the aims is also adjusting the valorization of pensions while preserving long-term sustainability of public finances. The Government pledged to increase the Christmas bonus for pensioners, with an emphasis on an old-aged pensioners. In the area of pension savings, the Government expressed their interest to further support the voluntary pension saving schemes As stipulated in the document, the Government also aimed at reconsidering a possibility to use the supplementary pension savings to finance early retirement for people unable to find employment in the pre-retirement age. Further on it is important to provide more and better information service to people about their current and future pension entitlements across the entire pension system. Government also plans to ensure that savers receive adequate and high-quality information in order to facilitate their decision-making with respect to their old-age welfare. The collective of authors of this paper, namely Bočáková, Kubičková and Vavruš (2016) stipulates, that: „*The measures of social assistance and social support*

are considered by the Government as pillars of the fight against the social exclusion and elimination of disparities, whose existence is threatening the cohesion of society and can lead to its destabilization.“

3.1. The Programme of the Government of the Czech Republic in the context of the social security of seniors

The Government with Andrej Babiš as a prime minister is keen to restore the respect to senescence. They also aim to increase the legal protection of seniors and enforce an amendment to the Pension Insurance Act. The Government expects this change would increase the basic assessment rate of pensions to 10% of an average salary. The target group would be those older than 85 years of age. „*The amendment to the Pension Insurance Act will add a thousand crowns to the pensions of those who reach the age of 85.*“ (Programové vyhlášení vlády České republiky, 2018). A team of experts, established by the Government, should be addressing the pension reform. This team should propose the solutions aimed at satisfying rising claims, defining a standard for blanket reform in old age relying on the principle of solidarity, reinforcing the principle of merit, and motivating working age people to make use of all supporting forms of individual insurance to secure their old age. One of the plans is to establish a State Pensions Office, which would present a proposal retaining the benefits of the existing system, such as stability, a high level of legal certainty, low costs and professionalism while separating the administration of pension insurance income and expenditure from the central government budget. This system established by the proposed reform has to be stable, understandable and financially secure, therefore must be backed by changes with broad political and social support. In regards to social services, the emphasis should be focused on the development of services enabling clients to continue living at home for as long as possible. The conditions for the creation of social services network should be adjusted in regards to ensuring quality, timely, local and financially affordable services in the form demanded by clients. The Government plans to define standards and conditions applicable to each service. Those would form the basis for fair and controlled financing, including rules on co-financing and coverage. The new funding system should be balanced, based on multiple sources, reliable and predictable. As promised in the Program of the Government of the Czech Republic, one of the goals is to find a solution to the funding and functioning of cross-sectional services that hover between health care and social care.

Conclusion

The Cabinet headed by Mr. Fico and Mr. Pellegrini has focused their attention on the policy in the social insurance system for senior citizens, especially on the system of pensions. The significance of the pension is given by the fact that it is usually the only income for a senior. As Bočáková (2016) noted: „*The pension of a Slovak senior is too low to cover the expenses spent on housing and food.*“ „*The main aim of the pension is to provide an insurer with a certain income in the old age*“, as authors Bočáková and Kubíčková (2017) aptly quoted. This was understood also by the Government, which therefore placed more attention on the pension scheme. The Government reflects the demographic trends of Slovak population and focuses on facilities providing social services. These are under rising pressure created by the demand for their services. Achieving the goals that are set up in the field of social insurance of senior citizens and proclaimed in the Government Program, deserves some extra funds. The funds are allocated according to the national budget and furthermore the funds are limited also by political decisions based on the Program of the Slovak Government. The key role in the issue of funding is played by the stability of the government coalition and its ability to reach compromises in the field of the program, personnel and political issues. In case the coalition government fails or the term is shortened, achieving the goals set up by the Program is threatened to a certain amount.

The Government of Andrej Babiš also focused on pension policy while searching for possibilities how to raise pensions. One of the measures is to establish a State Pensions Office, whose competence would be proposing the reform of the pension system in order to form a sustainable and stable scheme. Like the Cabinet of Mr. Fico and Mr. Pellegrini also the Cabinet of Mr. Babiš focuses the government attention on the issue of social policy including social services. Key points of their interest should be those services that are helping clients to continue living at home for as long as possible. Unfavourable demographic development affects also Czech Republic which makes the changes in pension scheme and social services inevitable. Achieving the goals set up by the political party “ANO” in their Program is conditioned by the members’ list of the new government coalition that Mr. Babiš has been trying to assemble. The party ANO won a mandate in the parliamentary election that creates prerequisites and conditions to implement its Program. The ability of the party to assign a government is supported by the Parliament and can win its confidence. The qualities of the social policy presented by the party “ANO” in its Program may be affected by the composition of a new coalition government and by its diversity represented by the programs of the parties CSSD, KSCM, SPD and ANO. The parties can assign their members to form the cabinet or some of the given parties can support the minority government of ANO.

Both the Program of the Slovak and Czech Government deals with the issue of social insurance of senior citizens. The governments of both countries have tried to extend the scope of social insurance and assistance for such a large group of citizens and to improve the quality of services provided to this group by the government. The demographic development in both countries (unfavorable in both countries) has impact on the amount of expenditures on social issues in the national budgets. The number of retired people who are eligible to receive a state pension and elderly citizens who need an assistance is increasing. This fact may result in an increased costs on social policy in the national budget. At present the two Programs of the Governments differ in their substance: Slovak coalition government has majority of seats in the Slovak Parliament and can easily implement its Program, on the other hand the Czech Government is to submit its resignation and assigning members of a new government is still awaited.

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