

Child care priority of family policy: Schroeder [DE] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

BERLIN - German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder promised Thursday to make child care a priority in family policy if he is re-elected chancellor in the election this fall.

In a government declaration on family affairs to the parliament, Schroeder said "there is nothing that is more important than to reinforce the care of children in terms of family policies."

He vowed, if re-elected, to earmark one billion euros (about 900 million U.S. dollars) per year to promote a program aimed at offering day care to children of the parents for whom this kind of state support is necessary.

A "high-grade and reliable net" of child-care centers, kindergartens, day nurseries and schools is necessary to promote the program smoothly, he emphasized.

The leader affirmed his cabinet's achievements in family affairs, saying children's allowances have been enhanced by 40 euros (about 36 dollars) to 154 euros (about 138.6 dollars) per month, since his cabinet took power in 1998, while expenditures for families have risen by 13 billion euros (about 11.7 billion dollars) to 53 billion euros (about 47.7 billion dollars) per year.

"Families have never been supported so widely than nowadays," said the chancellor, criticizing his predecessor Helmut Kohl's government for making "unconstitutional" family policies.

But he stressed that a lot still has to be done to improve the situation of children's care in Germany. Politics must create conditions for people to better harmonize their occupation and family, he said.

The key to such harmonization is "child care for the parents in need," said Schroeder.

Germany still lacks flexible systems of child care and the situation for parents with children under three years old is "catastrophic."

More efforts both in the federal and state levels are needed to further develop day schools and nurseries, he said.

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Region: Europe ^[2]

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