

# European Parliament criticizes Czech presidency's proposals on childcare [EU] <sup>[1]</sup>

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**EXCERPTS** The European Parliament, in its not-binding report on discrimination adopted today, sharply criticised the Czech EU presidency's proposals that allegedly force women to give up their jobs and stay at home to look after children. Prague rejected similar criticism as unsubstantiated beforehand. In the report, the European Parliament expressed fears that the Czech presidency's proposals that children be considered an adequate alternative of professional career strive for the traditional division of work between man and woman, that is the vision of man working full time and woman taking care of household and family. ... According to the "Barcelona objectives" in childcare, which the EU outlined in 2002, the member states should have facilities (nurseries and kindergartens) for 33 percent of children under three years and for 90 percent of kids from three years to school attendance age available by 2010. A couple of days ago, the Party of European Socialists (PES) called on the EU not to let the Czech Republic undermine these objectives, in reaction to the Czech presidency's materials prepared for an informal meeting of the EU countries' family affairs ministers. However, Prague rejected it, saying the PES is wrongfully attributing to the Czech presidency the efforts to restrict care for pre-school children and force women to stay at home and look after children. "It (Czech EU presidency) is only trying to launch a debate on their possible revision. The reason is simple. The Barcelona objectives were approved in 2002 without the participation of the new member states," the presidency said in its statement on Sunday. The Czech Republic and another nine countries entered the EU in May 2004 and Bulgaria and Romania followed three years later. The care for small children is up to responsibility of individual member states, beyond the EU's central powers, according to the Czech EU presidency. Jana Rihova, Czech Labour and Social Affairs Ministry spokeswoman for the presidency, told CTK that it is not possible to demand that such EU objectives be fulfilled and that most EU member countries, including the Czech Republic, do not and will not meet them. This is why the Czech EU presidency would like to open a debate on the care of small children. The EU countries' ministers for family affairs will meet in Prague at the end of this week. - reprinted from České Noviny

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