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REPEAL OF SOCIAL BENEFITS LINKED TO THE COMMUNIST PAST*

On the last day of 2022, Act No. 455/2022 Coll.¹ came into force, which main mission is to make a vivid dot after the Czech communistic past in the previous century. Said law has condemned the communist era of Czechoslovakia and reduced the retirement pensions of communist leaders by CZK 300 for each year in office. Symbolically, Act 455/2022 Coll. was passed by the Parliament, in which the Communistic Party has not even one MP. The reduction of the old-age pension will depend on the total length of time spent in high office before November 1989 and will be reflected for the first time in the March 2024 instalment of the old-age pension. If someone becomes entitled to the old-age pension only after that date, the percentage will be calculated first and then an adequate reduction will be made. The reduction will not be made for people who are currently on disability pensions. The reduction will only be taken into account when the former official applies for a retirement pension.

Said act reduced the retirement pensions of people who are included on the list of leaders of the communist regime compiled by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR). The specific list of people will then be drawn up by the Office of the Security Service in cooperation with the Archive of the Security Forces. Those officials served in high political positions or the ranks of the StB, SNB, the Border Guard, or the Main Staff of the People's Militia before 1989. The government assesses that the Act will punish around 3 000 pensioners, who are still alive.

Speaking about reasons whose were mentioned in minutes of discussions in the Parliament or somewhere else, said the law aims to come to terms with the totalitarian past, just as other post-communist countries have done, including Slovakia, Germany, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland. Reduction of pensions was chosen because high communistic officials had received a retirement pension, which was often above average. Mr. Jurečka, the Minister of social affairs, who proposed the Act in a modified version that had been almost approved by the previous Parliament, explained the mechanic of the law as follows: « So if today, for example, a former high-ranking Communist Party official receives a pension of

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1 Full name of said law: *Zákon č. 455/2022 Sb. ze dne 13. prosince 2022, kterým se mění zákon č. 155/1995 Sb., o důchodovém pojištění, ve znění pozdějších předpisů, a některé další zákony.* In English: Act No. 455/2022 Coll. of 13 December 2022 amending Act No. 155/1995 Coll., on pension insurance, as amended, and certain other acts.

CZK 25 000 a month and we know that he held a high-ranking party post for 10 years, his pension will be reduced by CZK 3 000 ».

To be honest, such a measure came a little late to make any difference. Neither the adjustment will bring significant savings to the state budget, nor it is an important measure, which could affect the highest representatives of institutions that maintain and deepen the totalitarian regime. The reason is obvious: most prominent figures are dead because time passed and it is now more than 30 years after the Velvet Revolution. In addition, the reduction is capped so that the necessary level of social security in old age is maintained for these people.

The spiciest flavour, however, was added by the ongoing presidential elections of 2023. In January 2023, two candidates made it to the second round of the presidential election in the Czech Republic. The first is a convicted collaborator with the communist secret state security (STB) and the second, as an officer, has completed a prestigious subversive course as part of his training for the communist military counter-intelligence and was thus prepared to serve abroad.

The same law also brought about an adjustment to early retirement for medical doctors, paramedics, and firefighters. This breaks the previously uniform retirement age, from which only miners were exempt. The new measure could affect more than 6 000 members of emergency response teams and another three thousand or so members of professional plant fire brigade units. Specifically, it will concern members of emergency response groups and ambulance drivers, operators of the medical operations centers, and mountain rescuers. They will be joined by members of company fire brigade units. Earlier entitlement to the old-age pension is linked to the increased premiums paid to employers for the time spent doing this work. Other employees who do not have these benefits will not pay extra for the reduced retirement age of the selected group. The reason for the special arrangement is the demanding nature of the work and the increased requirements for perfect health.