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Report on the Czech health care situation (October 2010 – April 2011)

Practically all the above mentioned period was filled with the sharp phase of the „Thank you, we are leaving“ campaign, which was for the hospital doctors extremely important. At the end of November, we gathered about 4,000 declarations of readiness to quit the job by the end of the year 2010 if the government does not meet our demands (fundamental change in postgraduate medical education, base salary increase - 1.5 to three times the average salary in the country). During the entire period our activity was from the government explained away and we have not received a single offer to solve the situation.

Therefore we were forced to give notices in hospitals by December 31, 2010. Ultimately there were nearly 3900 of them. But until now the actual number of hospital doctors is unclear. Estimates vary from about 12.000 to 18.000. The most important was the high representation of physicians from key sectors (resuscitation, surgery, internal medicine, gynecology, neurology, radiology) - that multiplied our power. In January 2011, instead of receiving an offer for negotiations, we were intimidated, disrespected and most media were running a smear and victimising campaign against us. Part of these activities was an effort to break our unity by individual financial offers in hospitals. My colleagues demonstrated enormous bravery and moral compass - the word “solidarity” was filled to a tee. Another hundreds of our colleagues joined the action with quitting overtime work. Only this increased pressure brought finally success. The first offer to solve the situation we have got from government January 28, 2011. We were improving the conditions little by little and we signed the final wording of Memorandum with the government Feb. 17, 2011.

Confirmed was a fundamental change in postgraduate medical education and base salary increase of about 25% this year, of another 10% for the next year and from 1. January 2013 our salaries should be adequate 1,5 to three times the average pay in the country depending on qualification and the length of practice. But with the 8 – hour overtime per week. This claim, that has been required for about 16 years, appeared for the first time in an official document as the target state. In addition to that the Trade Union of Doctors (LOK) became an important place for comments in relation to the forthcoming reform steps. Even though there are occasionally some problems with implementation of the Memorandum, it can be now with hindsight clearly said, that the action was for hospital doctors very successful. It was with no doubt the biggest trade union action in our recent history (after November 1989). I do believe that only we ourselves can be the best guarantors of implementation of the Memorandum.

The current government is riven by enormous internal scandals (corrupt character), so the question is, how the political situation in our country is going to develop.

Prague, April 12, 2011

Dr. Martin Engel - chairman of the Czech Doctors' Trade Union (LOK-SCL)