

Good morning

I would like to make a short announcement and then I will willingly answer a few questions. As a result of extensive research by health ministry-sponsored scientists and other experts, the cabinet has decided to institute a coffee ban in all public places in The Czech Republic, with effect from 3 months from this announcement.

It will no longer be legal for coffee to be served in bars and restaurants, and it will not be possible to buy it in other retail outlets, such as small shops and supermarkets. Coffee will only be sold, under special licence, in registered, so-called “coffee shops” to persons over the age of 21, for consumption at home and in private.

The owners or managers of any bars, restaurants, supermarkets, shops or other sales outlets who are found to be selling coffee to the public after the introduction of this ban will be subject to a heavy fine, loss of licence or possible imprisonment. Illicit coffee dealing will be regarded as a very serious offence, comparable with the dealing of other hard drugs; the courts will deal with offenders very seriously.

As you may be aware, coffee has become a very serious problem in recent years. Our statistics department has discovered that children as young as six or seven are drinking coffee openly. Homelessness, caused by excess Café au Lait abuse, has more than doubled in the last two years, and the number of work hours lost as a result of accidents caused by the effects of night-time coffee abuse have increased by a staggering 225%. In some student areas, particularly in some neighbourhoods of the city of Brno, the number of coffee-related study problems, such as over-stimulation and coffee-stained coursework is reaching epidemic proportions. University staff and student organisations seem to be increasingly unaware of the potential health problems that are associated with the consumption of machine-delivered espresso or, more seriously, cappuccino. We believe that we need to act now in the interests of the country’s long-term health.

I’m sure that many will say that a blanket ban on coffee and coffee-related products is far too sweeping and draconian – even dictatorial and I am sure that the coalition parties will suffer some short-term loss of confidence with voters. The security services have been alerted and put on standby to deal with any violent protests by those directly affected by this measure, such as restaurant and bar owners, shopkeepers and Italian tourists. However, the entire government feels that it has a duty to protect the health, prosperity and future of all citizens. There may be short-term pain for some, but the long-term benefits will certainly outweigh any doubts that people may have.

I will now take a few questions.