
Chapter 13

Foreign Security Policy of the Czech Republic

EXPANDING CAPABILITIES AND INCREASING DYNAMICS OF FOREIGN SECURITY POLICY

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Executive Summary: The Czech foreign security and defence policy in 2017 was influenced mainly by the Russian threat, terrorism and migration – nevertheless, Brexit and the new US administration under President Trump were also important external drivers for it. These factors resulted in various steps taken within the Czech defence sector. The policy faced changes ranging from renewals of strategic documents, an increased defence budget, the high (yet still problematic) support from the public and rising numbers of Armed Forces personnel to problems with the age structure within both the military and the civilian part of the defence sector. Finally, the foreign security policy will likely be heavily influenced by the results of the parliamentary elections in October 2017 and also by the new government of Andrej Babiš, but this is rather to be expected in 2018.

BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

External Influences and Domestic Responses

In October 2017, the Czech Republic experienced parliamentary elections, and during the last months of the year, there also was a heated presidential race before the presidential elections held in January 2018. Both of these elections will likely have important security and foreign policy implications in the future. However, besides that, the ongoing trends from the previous years still dominated the year 2017. They can be grouped into two subgroups.

The first group consists of several major threats: the assertive Russia (the dominant threat), migration from North Africa and the Middle East, and, finally, terrorism and cyber-related threats with other implications such as hybrid, asymmetric and information warfare. The second group influencing Czech foreign security policy consists

of challenges such as Brexit (and its security effects) and the accession of the new US president Donald Trump with his push for 2% GDP spending on defence.

All of these threats/trends may be seen as fundamental drivers of the security dimension of Czech foreign policy or Czech defence policy. While various strategic documents of the Czech Republic clearly underline threats from the first group (e.g. most recently the updated version of the Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic 2017¹ or, to give a slightly older example, the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic from 2015²), the second group (the challenges) may be identified in particular steps taken by the Czech political elite and institutions such as the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Threats as a Driver of Policy

Regarding the first group, Russia seemed to be the most important driver of Czech foreign security policy in 2017. The Defence Strategy 2017 assesses Russia as a very strong threat and states that since 2014 Russian activities on the eastern flank of NATO have been troubling political elites, as well as the populations of member and some non-member states. The Czech Republic mostly accents the fact that in Eastern Europe the Russian Federation blatantly carries out its increasing power ambitions, including via the use of military force. In doing so, the Russian Federation violates generally accepted norms of international law, including the territorial integrity of its neighbouring states.³ It has executed hybrid operations against NATO nations and EU Member States, including targeted disinformation activities and cyber-attacks, which appear particularly often and have a strong presence in times of elections.

As for migration, its influence on the Czech Republic was rather limited in terms of absolute numbers of migrants in 2017. For example, during the first six months of 2017 there have been only 2244 cases of illegal entry and stay on the territory of Czech Republic,⁴ and the illegal immigrants were mostly from Ukraine, Vietnam and Russia. Meanwhile the police stated that during the entire year, they detained only 172 migrants who sought to illegally transit the Czech Republic. They mostly came from Austria and were heading onwards to neighbouring Germany. These people were mostly originally from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.⁵ Furthermore, as of November 2017 there have been just 116 asylum seekers in the Czech Republic altogether since the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, the topic itself remained very influential, especially before the parliamentary and presidential elections. During the parliamentary elections the strong politicisation of this topic helped the anti-immigration and allegedly populist Freedom and Direct Democracy party (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie*) led by Tomio Okamura to achieve 10.64% of the votes, which translated into 22 out of 200 seats for it in the Czech Chamber of Deputies.⁶ Aside from that, the topic of migration was, in one form or another, present in the programs of several other political parties and may have influenced their outcomes in the elections. Migration is nevertheless rarely accented by itself and is rather closely connected with the threat of terrorism – including in the Defence Strategy 2017.

The last threat of the first group – terrorism – is more broadly described in the Defence Strategy 2017 as coming from an arc of instability to the south and southeast of

Europe. It is rapidly spreading throughout various regions, from North Africa to Afghanistan, even though in 2017 it was severely weakened by the almost complete annihilation of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). This instability nevertheless stems, in large part, from the fragile states that have allowed non-state actors such as ISIS and other extremist groups to create a zone of instability which extends up to the European borders and threatens Europe with the growth of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism, and also an alarming increase of illegal migration into the EU.⁷ In 2017 (or any previous year for that matter) there has been no terrorist attack in the Czech Republic of a similar nature to those that happened in France, the United Kingdom, etc. However, attacks in other countries, particularly those in the new form of vehicle-ramming attacks (attacks in which vehicles drive into groups of people) received substantial domestic media coverage. That was especially the case for the London Bridge Attack in June 2017 and the similar attack in Barcelona in August. In response, discussions and commentaries about the need to secure public squares or streets in the Czech Republic received considerable attention.⁸

Challenges as Motives for Behaviour

Out of the second group of trends influencing Czech foreign security policy, it seems that Brexit represents a significant issue to be dealt with. Already in 2016, one of the immediate responses of the Czech Republic to the UK announcing its intent to leave the European Union was the call from certain members of the political elite for the creation of an EU army, which was echoed even by the Western media.⁹ This call was particularly strong when it came from President Miloš Zeman and the then Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, who repeatedly stated in 2016 and 2017 that “*only EU-wide armed forces will allow us to defend our interests on our own*”.¹⁰ According to the original idea voiced by the Czech Prime Minister during the summer of 2016, the proposed European army was supposed to be used mainly for the defence of the EU borders against migrants and as a sign of European military emancipation (with regard to the USA). While not generally accepted, the idea of a common EU army spurred a considerable debate.¹¹ The Minister of Defence however, quickly rejected it¹² with the main argument being that even the current embryonic phase of building an EU army – which is connected with the EU battlegroups – is hardly considered a successful project; thus, any further integration in this respect is premature, and it would only weaken NATO. It should also be mentioned that more recently, the term *common EU security forces* replaced the term *common EU army* in political rhetoric.

It was generally recognised among the ruling Czech political elite in 2017 that Brexit is creating a space for strengthening the military co-operation among EU member states. The states thus need to enhance their defence co-operation. Because of structural changes in both the strategic environment (demand) and the economics of defence (supply), when it comes to technology procurement and weapons manufacturing, there is a strong case for European countries to move beyond their traditional approach to defence co-operation, and it is a window for opportunity for the Czech Republic as well.¹³ A framework for this enhanced co-operation may be provided by the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) published in June 2016,¹⁴ which creates room for other

follow-up initiatives. The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the European Defence Fund, and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), as well as the prospect of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), all emerge at a time when EU member states are seeking to build on the momentum of European defence in response to Brexit, mostly through the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence.¹⁵ The common feature of all these initiatives within the EUGS framework is that they place stress on the gradual synchronisation of national defence planning cycles and capability development practices.¹⁶

The second challenge that strongly influenced Czech defence and foreign security policy in 2017 was the accession of the new US president Donald Trump. While the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU may be in some regards strengthened by Brexit, NATO has been much more influenced by Trump's presidency. The security guarantee provided by NATO and the US was still seen as the cornerstone of security policy for the Czech Republic in 2017. Already in 2016, NATO together with a strong US involvement re-established the deterrence of Russia as one of the main priorities of the Alliance and approved the deployment of four multinational battalions in Poland and the Baltic states under the so-called Enhanced Forward Presence format. In 2017 the Czech Republic announced that it will participate in this format from 2018.

What is more pressing for Prague, though, is the US desire under Donald Trump to end some European countries' perceived free-riding on US security protection and to push European NATO members to dramatically increase their military spending¹⁷ to at least 2% of their GDP while simultaneously allocating 20% of the defence spending for the procurement of new materials. However, it is worth mentioning that this is not a fundamental change in the US approach. In response to the rising concerns about Russia's actions against Ukraine, the Obama administration had taken a similar view on the matter while many EU countries have been increasing their defence expenditures since 2014. Nevertheless, what was new in 2017 was the initial confrontational tone of the Trump administration.¹⁸

Institutional Adaptation – New Documents and Approaches

As for the Ministry of Defence, the main publicly available outcomes of its adaptation to external impulses in 2017 may be found in the document *Obranná strategie České republiky 2017* [the Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic 2017], which was approved by the government in March 2017. Partially relevant to this issue is the so-called *Strategie vyzbrojování a podpory rozvoje obranného průmyslu České republiky do roku 2025* [the Armaments and Defence Industry Development Support Strategy of the Czech Republic for the Period Until 2025], which was approved by the government at the very end of 2016 (19 December 2016) and thus does not fall into the designated timeframe.

The Defence Strategy 2017 specifically states that while the likelihood of a direct military attack against the territory of the Czech Republic is still very low, it cannot be ruled out that the security and/or territorial integrity of some NATO allies or fellow EU Member States may be threatened. In such case this situation may require the engagement of the Czech Armed Forces (CZAF) in collective operations to ensure

the defence of the Allies.¹⁹ This applies mainly to the threat of Russia. Thus, in practical terms, NATO commitments also influenced the amendment to the Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic 2017. From now on, depending on the nature of the crisis, the Czech Republic will be able to deploy a land brigade task force without rotation for a six-month period even for international crisis management operations. If such a task force is not deployed, the Defence Strategy 2017 allows for the simultaneous deployment of a sustainable battalion and a company-size land task force, or an air force component, with rotation. That represents a significant increase in the level of political-military ambitions. So far, the previous Defence Strategy (from 2012) stipulated that a brigade-size task force may be deployed only in case of NATO's collective defence operations. For international crisis management operations, the Czech Republic was able to assign forces and assets only up to the size of a battalion task force, which were to be rotated after a six-month period.

Besides that, the Defence Strategy 2017 includes several other important measures, such as the establishment of new units and the unprecedented rise in the number of soldiers by five thousand new troops. So far, the original plans endorsed in the Czech Armed Forces Development Concept 2025 expected that the total number of soldiers would reach only 24,162. This promising increase may, however, be a source of problems in the future, since the average age of new recruits is already reaching 27 years, and with the adding of another five thousand this trend of older new recruits may even be intensified. An even more pressing problem is the average age of the soldiers in 2017, which reached 36.6 years. If this number is compared with the average age of soldiers for 2007, then it may be concluded that it has risen by 4.2 years. On average, the Armed Forces are getting older by a margin of 0.4 years per annum.²⁰ It may be argued that while increases in the absolute numbers of soldiers are a positive step envisaged by the Defence Strategy 2017, the prospects of reaching this goal are bleak and the implications for the age structure of the Armed Forces are increasingly negative. An even worse trend may be seen in civilian personnel, where the average age reaches almost 51 years – with considerable and obvious effects on the MoD functions.

In conclusion, the Defence Strategy 2017 is mostly threat-based and thus it is generally a reactive strategy. It provides the Czech Republic with a basic strategic vision in combination with a set of strategic level objectives (going back to the roots in the sense of balanced forces and article 3 of the Washington Treaty, the resilience of the whole society, and security of supply). There is also a clear ambition to mitigate the Czech Republic's history of under-financing of defence.

AGENDA AND EVENTS

The Czech Republic and NATO

The position of the Czech Republic in 2017 concerning NATO was heavily influenced by the changing US policy owing to the new administration of President Donald Trump. During his presidential campaign Donald Trump accused NATO members of

spending insufficient funds on defence. He repeated this criticism several times later, including during NATO's Special Meeting (also called a mini-summit) in Brussels in May 2017. Trump's criticism from the beginning of his tenure that "certain member countries owed 'massive amounts of money' to American taxpayers" and that NATO members must finally contribute their fair share was, however, partially mitigated by his reassurance to the Allies of the continuing US commitment to the Alliance. In the end the shock from such a strongly voiced announcement from a US president worked, and at the mini-summit in Brussels in May 2017, NATO's Heads of State and Government took decisions to improve the burden sharing in the Alliance. That was also the case for the Czech Republic, which announced that it would pledge efforts to reach the NATO 2% of the GDP target for military spending along with presenting concrete plans for how to reach this goal to the American allies. Before then, the only Czech activity of this sort was the commitment of the Czech government from 2014 to increase defence spending progressively in order for it to eventually reach 1.4% of the GDP in 2020.²¹ Furthermore, after the visit of the Czech Minister of Defence Martin Stropnický to the US and his meeting with the US Secretary of Defence James Mattis in early May 2017, the Czech Republic announced that it is likely that its defence spending will reach 2% of the GDP in 2024.²² This step is widely seen as a co-operative reacting behaviour to the substantial pressure from the US president. However, similar promises have been made repeatedly in the past. This time, however, the US partners acknowledged that the presented plan is feasible.

The then Deputy Minister of Defence Daniel Kořtoval offered an alternative explanation for the Czech Republic pledging to have its defence spending reach 2% of the GDP in June 2017 by voicing the fear of the US political elite, and stated that it was getting increasingly difficult to persuade the US population to approve increased defence spending in the USA while the European allies are not doing enough in that area. This explanation sees the US pressure for reaching the 2% target as motivated not by the threat of Russia or any other challenge for that matter but rather by purely domestic concerns of the US.

Nevertheless, in 2017 the Czech defence budget reached only 1.04% of the GDP, which amounted to CZK 52.5 billion. Internally 16% of the budget was allocated to procurement, 55% to personnel costs and 29% to operations and maintenance.

One of the scarcely mentioned problems associated with the '2% of the GDP being spent on defence' concept is the inability to utilise such a high level of spending effectively in the recent conditions of the defence sector in the Czech Republic. According to an internal MoD calculation, to spend 2% of the GDP effectively would mean to reach altogether forty thousand people (soldiers and civilians) within the defence sector. This number by far exceeds even the five thousand troop increase promised in the Defence Strategy 2017. In addition, at the same time the personnel costs are expected to be under constant pressure due to the increased recruitment, rising salaries and rising competition over personnel on the market.

The second area that will necessarily be affected by the '2% of the GDP' rule is the share of investments in the defence budget. According to NATO, guidance funds spent on procurement are supposed to reach 20% of the entire defence budget. How-

ever, during a meeting of Czech MoD officials and the US administration in Washington in April 2017 (headed by the Czech Minister of Defence Daniel Kořtoval), a chart was presented promising that 30% of the Czech MoD's annual defence budget would be invested in the procurement of new equipment starting in 2020 while this level would be maintained for another five years. However, if the life cycle cost of newly procured equipment is taken into consideration, with the 30% investments the operating costs will increase dramatically, thus putting a heavy strain on the future defence budget of the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic and the EU

Out of the numerous EU-related initiatives within the EUGS framework, perhaps the most publicly discussed one in the Czech Republic during 2017 was PESCO, which is provided for in Articles 42 and 46 of the Treaty on European Union and Protocol No. 10 to the Treaty, formally established in December 2017.²³ The Czech Republic itself joined PESCO in December 2017 and plans to participate in three out of its total seventeen collaborative projects (the Military Mobility Project, the building of the European Medical Command and, finally, the building of the European Union Training Mission Competence Centre).

For the Czech Republic PESCO is seen as an ambitious, binding and inclusive European legal framework for investments in the security and defence of the EU's territory and citizens. PESCO provides a crucial political framework to improve military assets and defence capabilities, which will also benefit NATO. It will strengthen the European pillar within the Alliance and respond to repeated demands for stronger transatlantic burden sharing. Thus, in the eyes of the Czech political elite PESCO could be an important element of the possible development towards the sought common defence. A long-term vision of PESCO is to arrive with a coherent full spectrum force package – in complementarity with NATO, which will continue to be the cornerstone of collective defence for its members. However, the most important outcome of PESCO, which was voiced loudly by the former Minister of Finance and, since December 2017, also by the new Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Andrej Babiš, is its possibility to create a common defence market,²⁴ which is seen as an opportunity for the Czech defence industry. But even this importance of it was probably realised too late in the Czech Republic – as the Armed Forces (and to a lesser degree also the MoD) were unofficially accused by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of putting too little emphasis on the preparation work for PESCO, as well as of showing a lack of initiative in pushing through projects that may be relevant for the Czech Republic.

Foreign Operations and Defence Co-operation

As in the previous years, the highest number of Czech soldiers abroad in 2017 were in the Resolute Support Mission of the NATO Afghanistan mission. In 2017, the Czech army had a mandate to send 270 soldiers there, with another twenty soldiers provided solely for the protection of the Czech embassy in Kabul. Apart from patrolling, the Czech contingent in the Resolute Support Mission was also tasked with the protection of the allied forces and the training of their Afghan counterparts.²⁵

The CZAF also continued in their missions in Mali by sending in their second most numerous contingent in history. Altogether sixty soldiers served there. The bulk of this force was a part of the EU training mission EUTM Mali. Meanwhile ten Czech soldiers served in staff positions of the United Nations-led mission MINUSMA. Most of the other Czech operations abroad were considerably smaller, with only one – MFO in the Sinai Peninsula – consisting of twenty-five men with a CASA transport aircraft. Apart from these the Czech Republic deployed smaller contingents in numerous operations led by the EU or the UN, such as EU NAVFOR MED Sophia (five soldiers) or the UN mission UNDOF in the Golan Heights (three soldiers).

The Czech Republic did not participate in the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence format in the Baltic states in 2017 but it announced its involvement in the format for the year 2018 with the prospect of the deployment of up to 290 Czech troops in Lithuania and Latvia. A mechanised company with the bulk of the forces (up to 250 troops) will serve under the German command in Lithuania, and a forty-man mortar platoon will be deployed in Latvia serving under the Canadian command.²⁶

As a part of the package deal of selling L-159 light combat aircraft to Iraq, the Czech Republic already sent an advisory team to Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq to help train the local air force in 2016. This represents probably the greatest Czech contribution to fighting the so-called Islamic State. In 2017 this deployment continued with up to thirty-five soldiers (pilots, instructors and ground technicians) being added to it. The additional Czechs that were sent there included the field surgical team, which returned home on 17 June 2017, and the five to ten strong military police training team sent to Iraq on 4 November 2017. A decision to deploy the CBRN Military Training Team in 2018 was also taken.²⁷ Since this package of missions is fundamentally bilateral in nature, it represents one of the rare examples of purely proactive offensive actions of the Czech foreign security policy in 2017.

A notable project regarding interoperability with allies which was envisaged in 2017 is the planned affiliation of the Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade with the German 10th Armoured Division and Rapid Response Forces Division. This integration (which also includes Romania's 81st Mechanised Brigade) has been agreed upon on 15 February 2017 under NATO's Framework Nation Concept. The affiliation of the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade is to be organised at the tactical level of the German Division, which will allow the already planned exercises and trainings to be used as entry points for further practical co-operation. The affiliation will be mainly focussed on common activities of staff elements and affiliated units, education and harmonisation of military requirements, common training procurement and logistical support.²⁸ In practical terms, however, this affiliation was strongly critically politicised by Czech opposition parties in the first half of 2017 and this critique also appeared in influential magazines such as *Foreign Policy*.²⁹ It was mostly based on a misunderstanding of the implications of the affiliation. This step has been wrongly seen as putting the CZAF under the German command and integrating both armies. In reality, however, the affiliation will be focussed on a systematic common training programme with the German soldiers at a divisional level, as the CZAF (due to the fact that their highest-level units are only brigades) cannot train in this programme on their own. Addition-

ally, it will bring benefits of utmost importance for command and staff development, rather than for soldiers completing basic assignments.

IDENTIFICATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF KEY ACTORS

The year 2017 was specific in terms of the dramatic change of the key actors influencing the foreign security policy of the Czech Republic. This change was due to the parliamentary elections in October 2017, which brought the old coalition composed of ČSSD (the Czech Social Democratic Party), ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) and KDU-ČSL (the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party) to an end. The prime minister of this *old* coalition was Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD), known as a supporter of greater EU integration with the prospect of the possible creation of the *EU army* in the future. One of his strongly voiced opinions regarding security issues and namely migration was his opposition against the EU quotas on migrants.³⁰

Following the parliamentary elections in October 2017, Sobotka's government handed in its resignation, and the former Minister of Finance Andrej Babiš was appointed Prime Minister on 6 December 2017. He had been known to mostly omit security topics from his agenda. However, security against the migrant threat had been one of his key pre-election themes.³¹ Nevertheless, he seems to put a strong emphasis on foreign security or defence policy only from a purely economic point of view and does not have a clear and strong foreign security stance.

Until 2017, another member of ČSSD, Lubomír Zaorálek, held the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. His stance on migration mimicked that of Prime Minister Sobotka. In March 2017, during an interview for the newspaper *Hospodářské noviny*, when speaking about migration, Zaorálek said, "*When you have two million people coming from the east who take your jobs, social support and a number of other things, you can (try to) persuade your own people a thousand times to get used to it. They will not take it, because you simply went too far, and you did not tell them the truth.*"³² After Zaorálek became the Social Democratic candidate for the Prime Minister post in the second half of 2017, during the pre-election campaign, he warned that the West had about twenty years to reach a settlement with the Muslim world.³³ This position is partially related to one of the last announcements Zaorálek made as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2017. At the beginning of December 2017, the US President Donald Trump stated that the United States was preparing a plan for transferring its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In an immediate reaction to Trump, Zaorálek's office said the Czech Republic may be considering the transfer of its own embassy to Jerusalem, but only after discussing the issue with its partners. Thus, Zaorálek's position was that the Czech Republic considers Jerusalem the future capital of Israel and the state of Palestine, as do the other EU members (in his view), but he denied planning to move the Czech embassy there.³⁴

On the other hand, transferring the embassy to Jerusalem was a long-term goal of President Miloš Zeman. For him the year 2017 was the year of his campaigning for

re-election – a goal he successfully accomplished in January 2018. His foreign political stance has been long accused of being too pro-Russian³⁵ even though he himself was a strong supporter of the US president Donald Trump. A well known evergreen topic of Czech foreign policy in 2017 with obvious security implications was the expected invitation of Miloš Zeman to the White House, which, in the end, did not come through. This has been a source of ridicule for Zeman's domestic political opponents and it was explained as a sign that President Zeman may be a *persona non-grata* in the US. However, President Zeman held talks with the Russian president Vladimir Putin in Sochi in November 2017. During his visit there, articles praising the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 appeared on the website of the Russian Army TV network Zvezda only to be immediately denounced and criticised by a large part of the Czech domestic political elite, including Zeman himself.³⁶

Since 2014, Martin Stropnický held the post of the Minister of Defence. He remained in that post until the very end of Sobotka's government, making him the longest serving defence minister in the history of the Czech Republic. In December 2017, in the new government of Andrej Babiš Stropnický was designated to become the Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as the Deputy Prime Minister, assuming both posts on 13 December 2017. Stropnický has been known as a harsh critic of Russian interference in domestic politics and of Russian politics on the eastern NATO flank. He is also a strong supporter of the transatlantic bond that he sees as a cornerstone of Czech security guarantees. During his mandate as the Minister of Defence he had overseen a sharp rise of the defence budget from CZK 42 billion in 2014 to 52.5 billion in 2017. However, his critics point to the fact that despite such a rapidly growing budget, he was unable to finish the promised procurement cycle of any major military hardware such as the new multipurpose helicopters, the Mobile Air Defence Radars (MADR) or the new guns of NATO caliber.³⁷

On the military level, the personnel situation remained mostly stable. On 1 August, Major General Aleš Opata returned to the Czech Republic after serving in the position of the National Military Representative of the Czech Republic to the NATO SHAPE in Mons and became the Deputy Chief of the General Staff – Chief of Staff. At that time, he had been already considered as a future Chief of the General Staff and thus as a replacement of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic General Josef Bečvář (this was later confirmed in 2018). That, however, meant the end of the professional career of Lieutenant General Miroslav Žižka, who held the post of the NATO and EU Military Representative of the Czech Republic until the end of July 2017 and did not receive any assignment within the Armed Forces after his return to the Czech Republic. This step was briefly criticised in the media with active co-operation from General Žižka himself.³⁸

MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPACE

When the foreign security and defence policy was discussed in the Czech media and public space in 2017, these discussions mostly just repeatedly mentioned the topics

related to the threats and tendencies of the security environment that were described in the first section of this chapter. However, besides that, a few other recurring themes became visible in the public space as well.

In the case of the Czech Republic, strategic communication as a rather newly coined term was *reactive* rather than *proactive* in 2017. The result is an alarmingly low knowledge of ordinary citizens about the defence sector. Only 20% of the respondents in the related public surveys were able to guess the size of the CZAF or the defence budget correctly. The natural outcome of this ignorance is that just 43% of the respondents are willing to participate in the defence of the country in case of war.³⁹

Another topic covered by the media in 2017 is that the Ministry of Defence was continuing in its work on the Strategic Communication Concept. One of the key pre-conditions was that it should be orchestrated together with other ministries. However, the Ministry of Interior has the lead in this case.

Among the other defence-related issues which were politicised and featured in the media in 2017 was the ongoing discussion about the possibility of re-introducing conscription. Positions in favour of it were supported by the fact that 42% of Czech citizens believe that the abolishing of conscription in the recent past was wrong. This topic was even partially reflected in the programmes of certain political parties for the October 2017 parliamentary elections (KDU-ČSL, Mayors and Independents and a few other non-parliamentary parties). However, the weak election results of these parties may also reflect the disinterest of the population in participating on defence. Thus, even though 86% of the respondents in the relevant public surveys claimed that they are interested in defence and 81% had a high trust in the Armed Forces, merely 9% of citizens indicated their willingness to participate in the defence of the state as a part of the Armed Forces in case of need.⁴⁰

However, since the Armed Forces were expanding rapidly in 2017, the need to bolster recruitment pushed the MoD to intensify its media campaign. One of the signs of this was a TV documentary series produced by Czech Television (a government-owned public broadcasting company) in co-operation with the MoD vividly documenting the lives of fresh recruits in the Active Reserves (a reserve unit of the Armed Forces) called *Provedu! Přijímač*. The series aired in April-May 2017, receiving a favourable reception.⁴¹

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Czech foreign security and defence policy in 2017 was mostly reactive. But it was reactive offensive in terms of its resistance against the Russian threat to NATO allies. It was also reactive co-operating in regard to the Czech Republic's willingness to accept the push from the US allies in regard to defence expenditures, an area where our country made a clearly voiced promise to reach the level of 2% of the GDP in defence spending despite the fact that at this time this goal is more utopian than realistic. One of the rare cases of proactive actions (possibly of an offensive nature) in the policy was the sending of numerous specialists, pilots, military policemen, etc. to Iraq

to train the Iraqi Air Force in using the Czech made L-159 light attack planes. This mission is not only carried out on a bilateral basis unlike all the other Czech military operations abroad that are within the framework of NATO, the EU, the OSCE or the UN, but it can also serve as an example of successful military diplomacy and support of our defence industry.

However, there are some possible challenges that may hinder the successful development of the Armed Forces in the future. The first is the financing of defence. The Czech Republic's inability to spend vastly increasing sums on this may cause the public to question the need to spend money on defence and thus damage our foreign security policy. Also, a low level of investments severely hinders the modernisation of the Armed Forces, which still rely heavily on obsolete Soviet platforms (BMP-2, Mi-24 helicopters, etc.), making the Czech Republic not only ill-equipped for today's operational environment, but also dependent on Russia.⁴² Finally, the rapidly aging military, as well as the similarly aging civilian personnel of the Armed Forces and the MoD, will likely hinder the effectivity of the defence sector in the future. As for the election results, their influence on the policy will be seen only from the mid-2018 period onwards and cannot be fully assessed within the scope of the year 2017.

Endnotes

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