

TWELVE ILLUSIONS OF SLOVAK SECURITY AND DEFENCE THINKING

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The security and defence policy has come to the interest of politicians, media and wider public in the previous months. Despite of intensive debates, articles and analyzes some illusions persist regardin these issues, even new ones are being formed. The goal of this article is to name them and to offer a professional view on their solution.

The first illusion: by the participation in foreign missions we fulfill obligations towards the allies. One of the biggest illusions, which is permanently nourished, communicated by politicians or ministries. The truth is that our real obligation is to arm and train a brigade group for alliance operations, being able to be engaged with allied forces. We do not fulfill this obligation, as a consequence of declining armed forces. Although it is nice to communicate, how a secretary general of NATO or the ambassadors praise us for the the participation in Afghanistan, it is never said that the praise is followed by a very tough criticism because of the state of our armed forces.

The second illusion: the strength of the Slovak armed forces are the CBRN forces (radiological, chemical and biological protection) and the engineers. I appreciate these forces, any modern armed forces hardly do without their support. But they are supporting, popularly said, they do not win the war alone. Too big emphasis on support units during the build up of the „identity“ of the Slovak armed forces in foreign operations has pushed the combat units to the background. It created the illusion that we can be part of the coalition operations without bigger losses and that the Slovak armed forces „do not go to fight.“

The third illusion: doing modernization we can have 10 or 15 priorities. Also in this case the old rule applies: if we have many priorities, we do not have any. I understand the interest of soldiers to modernize everything, as for the keeping of capacities of the armed forces a wide-spectrum modernization would be needed.

But a political supervision of the Ministry of defence has the responsibility to tell the truth and not to support the illusion that we will be able to afford all of the modernization programs. We will be not and that is why the two most important should be chosen. In conditions of the Slo-

vak Republic, and also in consequence of the Russian invasion to Ukraine it would be the best to focus on armoured transporters and helicopters.

The fourth illusion: concentration on symbolic capacities. One of the biggest political mistakes of the last decade was that symbol was made from the rests of tank capacities and aviation, scattered from the reality. From the financial perspective, the reality of international military trends, but also from the reality of allied thinking. I understand the emotions in relationship to tanks, what is more, formerly they were perceived as a basic instrument how to fight a conflict, but the current reality is different. We can keep them for another few years, but then we will not be able to buy new ones. We will have to invest the available resources in really necessary capacities, not in symbolic ones.

The fifth illusion: capability to preserve independent supersonic aviation in medium-term horizon. The sooner we realize that in horizon of one-two decades there will not be an independent Slovak supersonic aviation, in particular due to rapidly rising costs, the better we will be able to act on the behalf of long-term security of airspace. And we will not be there alone, all of the medium and small states of Europe will have to decide as well.

The sixth illusion: the Ukrainian crisis has revealed the weaknesses of the Slovak armed forces. The crisis has called attention to security as such, but the state of the armed forces, including the data quoted and presented in media, were already familiar since the presentation of the first results of Strategic evaluation of defence, in autumn 2010. The point, that no attention was paid to it, is a big mistake, but certainly it is no news.

The seventh illusion: an international cooperation will solve insufficient financing of the

armed forces. Very strongly ingrained, but completely untrue illusion, besides political elite and in large measure of professional community. If we declare that we want to cooperate, but we are not willing to invest money everyone will regard us as deadheads. Due to politeness, no one will reject us, but there will be no real results. Naturally, it is possible to sell partial and financially undemanding „successes“ as success, but it will not solve the loss of capacities due to insufficient financing.

The eighth illusion: „Army“ exists to help in the case of natural disasters. This illusion is the source of high support of armed forces on the part of public opinion. But the armed forces primary exist to defend the security of the Slovak Republic, in protection of our territory or in foreign missions. Extreme cases exist, when it is possible to engage them also in domestic crisis management, for example fire extinction in inaccessible terrain, as nobody else has sufficient technology, but it has to be extraordinary.

The ninth illusion: it is satisfactory to raise the budget and everything will be all right. It is not. Due to the Ukrainian crisis we have to revise all the plans and strategies of the armed forces. We have to change our thinking and notion of what kind of armed forces we want. If the development will be done according to plans from the year 2013, it will be bad. If we will invest in purchase of capacities, which are not much relevant due to changes, it will be waste of money and in 5-10 years we will write about missed opportunities.

The tenth illusion: The EU V4 Battle Group will be a success for only due to its existence. The truth is that if Central Europe will not be able to agree upon strategic decisions in connection with the relationships to Russia and Ukraine in these days, no Battle Group will help. Without common opinion on strategically im-

portant questions, it will only be imitation of cooperation on strategic level, actually it will be „polite cooperation“ on tactical level.

The eleventh illusion: the budget on defence is decreasing due to economic crisis. Popular argument, but the numbers do not lie: although GDP rised relatively little in the last years, but it has rised (since the beginning of economic crisis in 2008 nearly by 10 per cents), while the budget on defence declined in the same time in more than quarter. The real reason is not the economic crisis, but the political priorities. It would be fair to tell, it would be politically legitimate, though professionally incorrect, but not to blame economic crisis for everything.

The twelfth illusion: the ministry of defence is a social enterprise. The primary role of structures of the ministry is not to artificially maintain employment in regions by its supporting structures, but to do service to the armed forces. But as it is politically tender to cancel unnecessary institutions and bases, because there could be a threaten of increase of unemployment, we still have abundant supporting structures, absolutely inconvenient to current needs of the armed forces.

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