

Chapter 4: CZECH REPUBLIC

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This chapter aims to observe the security sector reform in the former Czechoslovak Republic and one of its successors, the Czech Republic. It begins with the overview of the transition process which was characterized by the efforts to rapidly abandon the system based on internal control of the Communist Party and external control provided by the Red Army and its advisors. After introducing the transition that has generally been considered successful, the chapter will highlight some critical issues that have often remained hidden behind the good reputation of professionals operating in foreign missions. From this perspective the chapter will mainly focus on the virtually non-effective strategic planning, which is opening room for several informal practises that are gradually corroding the system from within.

Transition Process in the 1990s: An Overview

In this section, the processes focusing on the reform of Czech(oslovak) armed forces in the early 1990s are surveyed. The narrative is structured around 4Ds: De-politicization, De-sovietization, De-militarisation, and Doctrinal Change (Eichler, 2004). At the end of the section, several remarks are included on the topic of transition of the intelligence and police apparatus that largely resulted in the disbanding of the State Security (*Státní bezpečnost*, StB) which had operated in both areas.

Needless to say, the first concern for the leaders of the opposition in the revolutionary days of 1989 was to ensure that the Czechoslovak People's Army (*Československá lidová armáda*, ČLA) – until then ideologically framed as the 'iron fist of the labour class' (in other words, of the authoritarian regime) – would not stand in the way of transition to democracy. Whereas it is presently close to impossible to reconstruct the exact decision-making processes of the high-ranking military (and security) professionals in this period due to lacking documentary evidence,¹ it appears that the idea that the army should be used to avert the regime's collapse

¹ For a notable effort to reconstruct the processes involving primarily security professionals see Suk, 2003; and for an early account featuring conspiracy theories about willingness of the security professionals to allow the regime to collapse see Bartuška, 1990.

was not seriously considered.² This, however, must be in part due to the lack of foresight by the makers of the far-reaching reforms that were soon to come.

The first among these reforms was the *De-politicization* of the armed forces. The de-politicization had an institutional, personal, and (governmental) dimension. Institutionally, Communist Party organisations within the army were soon disbanded, and the positions of ‘political officers’ (informally known as *politruks*) were abolished. This was paralleled by organisational changes at the Federal Ministry of Defence, in particular the dissolving of the ‘main political administration’ (*Hlavní politická správa*) – a body through which control was exerted over the military affairs by the Communist Party (in the broader context of centralisation of power in the party, rather than state institutions, which was characteristic of the socialist authoritarian regimes in the CEE). On the personnel level, the de-politicization meant cutting the links of primarily officers with Communist party membership (in the 1980s, 82% of the officer corps had been party members) (Tuma, 2006, 6) and purges which befell primarily the political officers and the top brass – by 1993, almost no generals appointed before the Velvet Revolution were left in active service. The institutional and personal changes finally facilitated a (govern)mental reform away from the previously deployed technologies of the ideological indoctrination of the armed forces, and towards assuming a standard role assigned to military in democratic states.

De-sovietization stood for the removal of Soviet advisors planted in the armed forces, paralleled by the (geo)politically significant withdrawal of Soviet troops occupying Czechoslovakia based on an agreement reached in February 1990. It also referred to initial restructuring of the military soon to be followed by doctrinal changes (see below). This restructuring meant turning away from the Soviet model of dividing the armed forces into large organisational units, armies and circuits, forming together a ‘*front*’ – the only non-Soviet front existing in the former Eastern bloc, deployed alongside the border with the aim of engaging in intense ‘defensive’ (but actually offensive) warfare.

The third reform was one of *De-militarization*, instituting civilian control over the military (and defense in general). This entailed several tasks. First, the ministry of defence had to be put in charge. Second, it had to be made into a civilian institution, which meant substitution of military personnel by civilian staff in many positions (predicated on the creation of a pool of

² This despite the fact that several influential apparatchiks including the ideological secretary of the Communist Party Vasil Bilak and Minister of National Defence Milán Václavík rhetorically called for reckoning with the ‘rightist elements’. The army leadership, lacking clear instructions from the disoriented political establishment and approached by the opposition, took no action against the popular movement.

civilian expertise in defence policy, which had been lacking entirely) and instituting a civilian head of the ministry. Luboš Dobrovský, a former dissident and a close associate of President Václav Havel, became the first civilian defence minister not immediately, but in the fall of 1990, succeeding Gen. Miroslav Vacek who had been chosen to the office as the former Chief of Staff in the last Communist government but retained his position in the first transition government of Marián Čalfa. Instituting civilian control over the military would normally include also establishing mechanisms for review of defence policy and military budgets, which until that time had been under virtually no scrutiny in Czechoslovakia. However, due to the persistence of informal practices and lack of civilian expertise, these two tasks were not achieved at this stage (Eichler, 2004).

The profound geopolitical change that Czechoslovakia underwent with the fall of the Eastern bloc and the subsequent 'return to Europe' must have by necessity triggered the process of Doctrinal Change in the Czechoslovak, and later Czech armed forces. Hence, as soon as 1990, the first revision of the military doctrine was adopted. It reflected the growing obsolescence of the Warsaw Pact and the fact that the Czechoslovak People's Army no longer played only a dependent role in the Soviet military planning. Interestingly, this version of the military doctrine reflected the newly gained emancipation and an ambition to achieve independent defence capability against attack from any quarter, with some understanding of the need to maintain expeditionary force to be deployed in U.N. operations in which Czechoslovakia was now taking part. This started with UNAVEM1 Angola and UNTAG Namibia - already before the Velvet Revolution and continuing with the *Desert Storm* and UNGCI in Iraq, and later UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia (initially, a volunteer army force was being assembled and deployed in the operations). The consequences of this re-organisation were relocation, restructuring and some reduction of forces including the limiting of the numbers of tanks or artillery materiel. Following this initial period, the geopolitical objective for the country became the integration with NATO. It was a gradual process. Initially, the preference of President Havel, under the influence of his fellow dissident and independent Czechoslovakia's first foreign minister, Jiří Dienstbier, was drafting a new and comprehensive security architecture building on the CSCE framework (hence Havel occasionally spoke of it as 'Helsinki 2') headquartered in Prague and with the USSR as a member (Havel, 1991). But reflecting on the possible repercussions of the USSR's internal crisis for the ongoing transition in the CEE and under the influence of close collaborators such as Alexandr Vondra, Michael Žantovský and Karel Schwarzenberg, during 1991 Havel came

to see integration into NATO as the best guarantee that the political and economic reforms in the region will continue (even before the membership in the EU). Thus he reconceptualised the NATO as a symbolic institutional manifestation of Euro-Atlantic values (Ditrych, 2013). The military doctrine reflected this turn in gradual diminishing of the importance of the territorial defence – albeit it could be argued that it remained inter-subjectively the key consideration in the military circles for some time to come (that despite the fact that in the Soviet strategy only limited capability was once to be dedicated to the territorial defence whereas a mass of Czechoslovak forces was to be thrown into the Western offensive). This was confirmed by a white paper and the new military strategy (1995) including the concept of ‘two-level’ armed forces that put more emphasis on the expeditionary army in approximation to and in view of coordination with NATO (and also against the background of the security environment in the Balkans, where the Czech army contingents would be deployed since 1996 under the lead of IFOR, SFOR and KFOR).³

Regarding the transformation of the armed forces, it is important to point out several relevant contexts which had a bearing on, if not the direction, then the pace and modality of the 4D reforms. First, the military reform was not a priority of any of the successive government in this period, while doctrinal reform followed political decisions taken on the integration in the NATO. Second, the political conditioned the military reform also in promoting a (govern) mentality of resistance to long-term planning, which was considered inappropriate on the (neo)liberal ideological grounds in all spheres of state policy. Third, whereas the pool of civilian experts in the administration was successfully created in this period (see above), there still remained – and admittedly remains to this day – little expertise in military matters in the parliament, limiting the capability for public oversight. Finally, the reorganisation was significantly influenced by the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation – with the military assets divided in general according to the 2:1 ratio in favour of the Czech Republic – and the creation of a new army (*Armáda České republiky, AČR*) in 1993.

In the first years following the Velvet Revolution, the reform of the intelligence community was a major task conditioned on overcoming the previous regime’s civil intelligence and counterintelligence functions falling under the auspices of the much feared State Security (in the broader sense of the word encompassing 1st and 2nd Directorate of the Federal Ministry of Interior) (see Cerny, 2007; Zeman 2007). Following its disbanding in 1990 new institutions were created: The Bureau of Foreign Relations and Information (*Úřad pro zahraniční styky a*

³ On the transformation of Czech military thinking see also Khol, 2000.

informace, ÚZSI), initially under the Federal Ministry of Interior and since 1993 under the Czech Ministry of Interior, several successive institutions performing civil counter-intelligence (ÚOÚD, FIS and FBIS under the Federal Ministry of Interior and BIS, *Bezpečnostní informační služba* under Czech Ministry of Interior since 1993), Intelligence Service of the General Staff (*Zpravodajská služba generálního štábu* (ZSGŠ) performing military intelligence activities and succeeded in 1994 by Military Intelligence Service, *Vojenská zpravodajská služba*), and finally Military Defensive Intelligence (*Vojenské obranné zpravodajství*, VOZ). It is worth mentioning that while the military counterintelligence, formerly the 3rd Directorate of the Federal Ministry of Interior (VKR) was newly subordinated to the Ministry of Defence, attempts to emancipate the successive civil counterintelligence services from the Ministry of Interior's reach were unsuccessful. In 1994, an "overarching law" 154/1994 Sb. was passed, which interestingly, among other provisions defined a legal framework for the activities of civil and military intelligence. On the other hand, in practice the capacity for public overview of the services' operations remained very limited. In all services, a degree of personal continuity was preserved, dictated by the necessity to retain the existing know how and avoid having to create new services from scratch. Purges were conducted, however, only after sanction by review committees.

The disbanding of State Security (StB) also affected policing, now conducted exclusively by the Public Police (*Veřejná bezpečnost*, VB), which has since 1991 transformed into Czech Police (*Policie České republiky*, PČR). The so-called Vigilant police units under the Auxiliary Public Police (*Pomocná stráž VB*) as an instrument of regime's surveillance were disbanded. In 1991, however, a new law on municipal police (553/1991 Sb.) was passed, which made it possible for municipalities to establish autonomous policing units. No gendarmerie force was created despite its tradition going back to Austria-Hungary and the interwar Czechoslovakia.

False Impression of Formal Reforms

The consolidation of the Czech armed forces has recently been reviewed as successful (Kříž 2010, Tuma, 2006). Kříž has convincingly showed the shift to the legitimate political control over the military as well as that the characteristics of the legal framework are not different from systems functioning in traditional democracies. Additionally, he has argued that a stable and sustainable consensus has been reached among the political elites and the military regarding the general political orientation of the country (Kříž, 2010, 634-637). He has

concluded that several problems still continue to exist (such as corruption, the lack of public interest, and the lack of political will to invest more into defense); however, these do not significantly deviate from the situation in other European consolidated democracies (Kříž, 2010, 643).

As the previous section suggested, the Czech Republic could be viewed as a post-communist country with relatively settled security policy and consolidated armed forces. Although several critical issues have repeatedly cropped up during the last two decades following the Velvet revolution, they have been almost always attributed to the complicated process of post-communist transition. The consolidation of the Czech armed forces has been, to a large extent, perceived through the successful performance of elite army units in various external missions. However, this attention has overshadowed several serious problems that have afflicted the system from within.

After introducing the phases of security sector reform of the Czech armed forces, the chapter will focus on the problematic issues. Namely, the Czech defense acquisition practices in a wider context of the Czech strategic defence planning. As the White Paper on Defence of 2011 (White Paper on Defence of the Czech Republic, 2011), by far the most in-depth and critically oriented reflection of the Czech defence sector, maintained, the internal conditions of the Czech defence sector in certain areas reached the existential threat level. Although the internally odd system was covered up by the relative successes and professional conduct of the elite units, recent economic realities definitely underlined the need to introduce reforms that would make the system sustainable.

In line with the traditional theoretical approaches (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1961) the previous part has shown how the crucial issue of political control over the military was established and how within this context the civil-military relations were developing. This perspective has been dominated by the analysis of legal and institutional frameworks (Bruneau and Tollefson, 2006; Born, Capalini, Haltiner and Kuhlmann, 2006, Watts, 2002). Another part of the civil-military literature focuses on the actual functioning of the planning and decision-making processes. This literature is based on the liberal democratic framework that provides a crucial context for these inherently political issues (Schiff, 1995; Burk 2002). From a wider perspective, the latter part of the civil-military relations features various accounts of the existence and functioning of security and strategic cultures (Klein, 1991, 3-23; Gray, 1999; Hyde-Price, 2004; Katzenstein, 1996).

The following part will attempt to show that the institutionalist perspective focusing on formal processes of control and day-to-day management provides an incomplete picture and overlooks some crucial dimensions related to the invisible political economy of the defence sectors. Indeed, a closer look at the functioning of the Czech acquisition system in a wider context of strategic defence planning will reveal some essential problems explaining the recent difficulties and the need for essential reforms.

The establishment of the structures for civilian political control of defense policy and policy-making faced several challenges, shared with other countries of the post-Communist Central Europe. Andrew Cottey has aptly summarized the challenges as follows: shifting de facto control of defense policymaking and implementation from general staffs to ministries of defense; civilianizing defense ministries, which had been almost entirely military organizations; building up cadres of civilian expertise in defense policy; putting mechanisms for meaningfully reviewing defense policy in place; and securing detailed control over defense budgets and expenditure (which had previously been “black boxes” under the control of the military, if anyone at all) (Cottey, 2007, 278; Cottey, Edmunds and Forster, 2002, 31-56). After introducing the process of security sector reform in the previous part it could be concluded that in the Czech case the first three mentioned challenges were tackled successfully, however the consolidation in the other two failed. It happened not because of the lack of legal and institutional arrangements but due to the informal practices hidden behind the formal arrangements.

After achieving the 4Ds mentioned above the most important part of the reform processes became practically connected with NATO enlargement (Simon, 1996; Khol, 2000; Tuma, 2006; Khol 2004). The emphasis on gradual convergence with NATO became clearly reflected in the *Czech White Paper and Military Strategy* approved in 1995 (White Paper on Defense of the Czech Republic, 1995; National Defense Strategy of the Czech Republic, 1997). In line with the reform processes of NATO itself these documents introduced the strategic plan to build two-level armed forces that were meant to be ready to protect the Czech territory as well as to contribute to external missions. At the same time the “NATOization” was also stimulated by the involvement in supporting programs such as the Partnership for Peace. More specifically, the Czech air defense was transformed to be incorporated into the NATO common air defense system and the unification also affected the logistic norms as well as weapons systems. The most visible changes were to the structure of the army that became divided into four pillars. The first operational pillar consisted of forces under the NATO

Command, the second included forces *Assigned* for NATO, the third encompassed the forces *Earmarked* for NATO, and finally the last pillar operated under the national command. The first three pillars were planned to become flexible, highly operable and capable of high firepower. Nevertheless, despite the reform endeavor strategically aimed at creating a “balanced army”, the Czech army was only able to commit to fulfilling a mere 22 % of 132 goals obtained from NATO after the accession and failed to meet even the revised Force Goal 2000.

It could be argued that the Czech reform endeavour to a large extent depended on mechanical copying and imitation of Western institutions and formal practices. Whereas large parts of the 4D processes were driven by internal dynamics, the re-structuring of the forces as well as the formation of adequate frameworks of civil-military relations resulted from external pressure and transfer of know-how (learning). Paradoxically, despite being understood as a prerequisite for successful post-Communist transformation by the new post-Communist elite, radical interference into the army by external political powers was evaluated critically by some Western observers (Watts, 2002).

Despite a decisively positive impact of external motivation on the Czech entry to NATO, the essential problem with the mechanical emulation of mature NATO members lies in the fact that it has given the impression about a *fully* successful consolidation of the Czech Republic. Such a view hinged on the discourse which reiterated the single goal of the country of being re-integrated to the Western security community. However, this project did not finish after the Czech accession to NATO, but has translated into enduring Central European Atlanticism. In the political reality, it has become manifested in many subsequent issues and engagements and has reached the level of discursive hegemony in the Czech Republic (Hynek and Střítecký, 2010a, 179-187); Hynek and Střítecký, 2009, 19-30; Hynek and Střítecký, 2010b).

With Atlanticism being used as an automated answer to and justification for all key decisions concerning the Czech defense sector, the country’s defense procurement and acquisition policies have become broken and virtually reform-resistant. The post-Communist reforms aimed at consolidating the Czech military were considered to be accomplished through successful and internationally appreciated engagements in external missions: the primary priority of Czech Atlanticists (Střítecký, 2012; Střítecký, 2010). The point here is not to criticize the Czech strategic direction, but rather to show how these externally driven the efforts and mechanical copying of the West on the surface, boosted by specific political narratives, prevented the defense sector from undergoing critical introspection or “lessons

learned.” While the Czech Republic has gained credit for its professional performance in Allied external military involvements, other dimensions of the Czech strategic planning have become irrelevant, losing almost any significance for strategic choices and policy conduct.

Czech Defence Systemic Acquisition Failures

The following part illustrates that the Czech defense acquisition policy has been conducted without a proper strategic framework, not least in the area of capabilities development. Moreover, the non-inclusion of strategic planning to defense acquisition decisions has produced major inconsistencies and inefficiencies at best and tremendous waste and depletion of resources at worst. Indeed, the practices in the area of defence acquisition clearly constitute the reverse side of functioning of the Czech security sector.

The post-Cold War defence acquisition environment has been characterized by the so-called capabilities-based approach to strategic planning (Davis, 2002). Standard application of the capabilities-based approach takes place in four steps. First, the documents should recognize the nature of the geopolitical and geo-strategic environment. The post-1989 Czech policies have been heavily informed by geopolitical assumptions which have not been underpinned by sound analysis (Drulák, 2006). Second, the planners should review the current state and future prospects of capabilities that may be available to potential enemies. Third, ideas gathered during the first two steps should provide the opportunity to define several contingencies and subsequently set the requirements. Finally, the financial budgets should be estimated and reflected in the midterm planning. In effect, the priorities, future investments and defense procurement and acquisition policy ought to follow from such specific requirements. The entire analysis does not require any particular threat assessment.

That said, the Czech strategic acquisition has not followed a specific capabilities-based logic. Nevertheless, the process has not been completely random or chaotic. Indeed, a closer look at the situation reveals that the entire system have been to a large extent driven by a certain logic which we shall call here a product-based approach. The logical reasoning behind this approach did not begin with a strategic assessment but instead focused on the product that could be purchased by the security agencies. It logically follows that such an acquisition strategy could hardly be efficient in terms of both public expenditures and strategic appropriateness. Furthermore, the conditions under which such a system operates creates a fertile soil for various shady and corruption practices.

It should be emphasized that there is a difference between the domestic and foreign acquisitions. From the domestic perspective the product-based logic might not be fully exceptional given that many states tend to support their industrial base through domestic acquisitions. Quite often, the efficiency of such a decision is evaluated based on calculating the wider economic and political benefits. Even in these cases, however, the product that should be purchased is mostly required by the armed forces. The potential ineffectiveness with regard to public expenditures then lies simply in the absence of international competition. However, the Czech experience provides ample examples where the decisions to procure was preceded by the explicit refusal from the end user.

In case of foreign acquisitions, the product-based logic might be considered as irrelevant as the foreign supplier would not qualify for any national support. Nevertheless, despite this legitimate idea, this practice has actually prevailed in the Czech Republic. The explanation lies in the specific legal environment defined by the Act 38/1994 that was amended no sooner than in 2010. According to this norm, all foreign acquisitions in the area of defense must be mediated by the legal entity registered in the Czech Republic. Given the minimal potential of the Czech market, it is not surprising that none of the major foreign industrial actors registered in the Czech Republic is able to trade directly with the state agencies. As a result the crucial role was attributed to the Czech mediators that became the neuralgic points of the entire acquisition system (Střítecký, 2010, 104-106).

The provisions of the Act 38/1994 had certain legitimacy in the early 1990s during the massive transformation, where the links to the procedures and processes in NATO have not yet been fully established. After this specific period the provision became clearly redundant. It must be mentioned here that this law was unique and was not in effect in any other NATO or EU member state. More importantly, the mediated deals often became synonymous for, mildly put, non-transparent conditions. The results of these acquisitions have been largely questionable in terms of costs and contractual conditions that followed from the diverging interests of the state and mediating companies. Moreover, many of the products that were procured were not needed by the armed forces. Rather they were forced to accept these unwanted solutions. In practice some of the acquisitions strongly resembled a situation where a mediating company was able to induce the demand at the Ministry of Defense and very quickly broker an offer from a foreign supplier.

To illustrate the above-mentioned practice the chapter will now briefly allude to some cases that raised many questions regarding the cost and utility of the purchased items. In April 2008

the Topolánek government approved the acquisition of four CASA C-295M military transport aircraft. The product, worth 3.5 billion CZK plus 5 L-159 planes, was selected without an open competition. Moreover, the Ministry of Defence agreed to pay an extra one billion CZK for the three-year service support to the Czech Omnipol Company - also chosen without public and open competition. Even during the period preceding the final decision, the Chief of the General Staff openly refused the aircrafts due to their insufficient capacity and flight range (Střítecký, 2010, 104-110). Additionally, the Czech Republic had to face a serious threat of being charged by the European Commission for not honoring the EU legislature regarding free competition.

In September 2009 the army accepted the first 17 armored personnel carriers Pandur produced by the Austrian-American company Steyr and established the Czech state-owned military service company. This was followed by the signing of a contract between the Ministry of Defence and the winner of the repeated public competition, the mediating company Defendia CZ, according to which the Czech state would purchase 107 vehicles for 14.4 billion CZK by 2013. Quite interestingly, the Czech Republic in the end planned to acquire 199 vehicles for 21 billion CZK. The purchase was justified by the alleged needs of units serving in foreign missions, namely Afghanistan. However, in the end the deployment of Pandurs in Afghanistan has been marginal since, as the experts had rightly criticized, they were not suitable for the Afghan environment.

Another public competition that was lacking a fair acquisition procedure was organized in the end of 2009. In October the Ministry of Defence announced its intention to buy Iveco light armored vehicles for 2 billion CZK in a deal with the Slovak army. The price was increased several times and the press report made public on 23 December 2009 (!) called for 90 vehicles at the total cost of 3.62 billion CZK – completely dismissing the previous agreement, making the argument that this fast acquisition was advantageous. It should be noted that the contract was legitimized by the previous purchase of 15 Iveco vehicles for 499 million CZK that was signed along with the acquisition of 15 Dingo 2 armored vehicles, brokered by the MPI Group. Even a quick glance at the acquisition cost shows that the Ministry managed to negotiate a unique “quantity hike,” since the per-unit price for the 90 vehicles was roughly 20 % higher than was the case with the first 15 vehicles. Even if the price of the advanced military equipment is a complex issue dependent on technical specifications, the Norwegian army purchased Iveco vehicles for a quarter of the Czech price (for details see Střítecký, 2010, 109-110).

These few cases are by no means exhausting. They were meant to illustrate the commonalities and practices typical of the activities that heavily drained the Czech defence budget in the last two decades. It should be stressed that these and other cases were not products of “mere corruption” but they resulted from the gap in the Czech strategic defence planning that allowed for quick decisions driven by mediating companies and supported by weak supporting arguments often imposed on end-users. These mechanisms clearly worked within the formal institutional and legal setup that was consolidated already in the early 1990s. In this sense the Czech case clearly suggests that informal processes functioning below the formal arrangements can have an essential impact on the overall state and functioning of the defence sector. It provides a great lesson learnt for countries undergoing reforms in the security and defence sector.

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