

Tendencies in the Development of Czech Armed Forces at the Turn of the Millennium

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Abstract: In the Czech Republic, military elites find it very difficult to persuade politicians and the public that they should spend more on defence, which is in agreement with the predictions of the theory. The decreasing willingness of the public to serve in the army is indicated, among others, by the growing numbers of those who choose to go into so called civilian service introduced as an alternative to military service in the period of the Federation. The gradual evolution towards the cadre-based army is to be understood in the context of new priorities in terms of the basic tasks the army is expected to fulfil. The way of the Czech Armed Forces (ACR) modernizing has been in agreement with the political strategy of building a reduced, modern army that, while designed primarily for the defence of the state territory, would also be ready to use part of its capacities to carry out various types of peace resolution operations. On the whole, we can conclude that the basic trends in the ACR modernization are basically in agreement with the main trends of the ongoing revolution in military affairs, provided, of course, one allows for the limitations of the Czech Republic (CR) financial resources.

Key words: The Czech Republic, armed forces, military reform.

1. Tendencies in the development of armies in the Euro-American civilisation circle

The 15 years that have passed since the breakdown of the bipolar world order have brought considerable changes affecting also the issues of international, security, and military policies. The theoretical concepts required for the explanation of these changes have been elaborated by many authors, e.g. Ch. Moskos, Ch. Dandeker, K. H. Haltiner, W. Bredow, A. a A. and E. Toffler. To summarise their theoretical assumptions, we can say that the trends in question are characterised by:

1. Relative deterioration in the position of the armed forces within the society. This is manifested in such phenomena as the decreasing ability of the army institution to compete with other social groups and institutions for social resources, growing unwillingness of citizens to serve in the army, and the increasing pressure exerted on the political representation by the society at large demanding the introduction of various liberal rules enabling citizens to avoid military service. On the other hand, one can say that most people tend to respect the army, provided they are not forced to serve in it. Thus, from the theoretical point of view, it can be expected that the Czech Armed Forces

(ACR) reform will be accompanied by falling defence expenditures, unwillingness of the society to allocate financial resources to defence, and increasing recruitment problems.

2. Decreasing size of armed forces and the transition from mass conscription armies to professional armies, accompanied by structural changes aimed at the relative increase of those army components that are capable to serve outside home territory and provide for the whole spectrum of crisis management operations in which the army carries out, in words of Ch. Moskos, “police functions”. The theory predicts that the ACR reform will be associated with the downsizing of the armed forces, transition to professional army, relative growth of forces capable of operating outside the territory of the Czech Republic, and placing emphasis on new tasks of the armed forces.
3. Modernisation of weaponry necessitated by the ongoing revolution in military affairs oriented to automated systems of command, communication systems, strategic reconnaissance, strategic mobility, warfare based on high precision ammunition being controlled from positions beyond the reach of the enemy, protection against weapons of mass destruction, and radical increase in the capability of both military hardware and soldiers to survive in the conditions of modern battlefield. The main objective is to obtain the capacity to launch precise strikes minimizing collateral damage, ever increasing attention being paid to non-lethal weapons. Thus, it can be expected that the process of modernisation within the ACR reform will be associated with the orientation to the above given areas and the decline of the traditional orientation to intensive warfare in the Central European battlefield.

2 Tendencies in the development of the ACR in the 1990s

2.1 Defence expenditures and armed forces recruitment capability

Theoretical concepts of the evolution of civil-military relations lead to the prediction that the ACR will have to face the problem of falling defence expenditures combined with the decreasing willingness of Czech citizens to serve in the military. The actual evolution of defence expenditures in what is now the Czech Republic after 1989 does not in any way contradict the theoretical prediction. The MoD expenditures in the period in question oscillated around the figure of approximately 2 % GDP. This is about 50 % of the expenditures that used to be allocated to defence in the period of the Cold War socialist Czechoslovakia. With its current defence expenditures the Czech Republic oscillates around the average of NATO countries.

Thus, since its expenditures has been so radically reduced compared to recent past, the ACR cannot in any way be blamed for the deteriorating state of public finance in the Czech Republic.

In spite of the above-described facts, there has been a tendency to regard the MoD budget almost automatically as a possible source for savings in all annual budgetary discussions. We do not have enough space here for a detailed analysis of budgetary discussions taking place in parliamentary sessions (open to the public). Nevertheless, there is one general feature in all these debates that forms an annually repeated pattern: there have always been some politicians (across the political spectrum) who have sought, through emendations, to reallocate parts of the MoD budget to other purposes. Even though the proposed amendments have rarely been pushed through successfully, they have made military planning difficult, bringing into it an undesirable element of uncertainty. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the politicians in question, such behaviour can be regarded as a rational vote-maximising strategy, because, in general, it is widely supported by the Czech public. According to CIV (Centre for Information Research) data, in the period 1996 – 2002, the percentage of citizens believing that defence expenditures were an unjustified burden on the government budget ranged from 46 % (in 1998) to 58 % (in 2002). (Jandová – Pavlíková 2003: 16) In agreement with these attitudes of the Czech public, defence expenditures were reduced to the level of 1,9 % GDP shortly after the Army reform had been started. This had a negative impact on the progress of the reform, and was one of the reasons for its subsequent review. In the Czech Republic, military elites find it very difficult to persuade politicians and the public that they should spend more on defence, which is in agreement with the predictions of the theory.

The decreasing willingness of the public to serve in the army is indicated, among others, by the growing numbers of those who choose to go into so called civilian service introduced as an alternative to military service in the period of the Federation. The conditions one must meet to avoid military service have been formulated very loosely in the Czech Republic, which, again, is in agreement with predictions of the theory. According to the data of the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, on March 3 2004, 39 940 persons were registered as liable to military service.¹ The number of persons choosing civilian service grew until 1999 when it amounted to 15 608 (compared to 8 202 persons in 1993). Then the number began to decrease slowly, reaching

¹ The End of Civilian Service. (Konec civilní služby.) Press Release of the CR Ministry of Work and Social Affairs (Tisková zpráva MPSV ČR) June 2 2004.

11 414 in 2002,² which is probably to be accounted for by demographic processes and by the fact that many of those who wanted to avoid military service began to pursue an alternative strategy - to be exempt from military service on health grounds. Even though the process of the professionalisation of the Czech Army does not face recruitment problems, the majority of Czech citizens are not ready to go in their support of the military to the length of serving in it. The research of Markent Limited Liability Company conducted in November and December 2003 showed that 85 % respondents were in favour of steps leading to the Czech army professionalisation³, the figure exceeding 90 % in the age group up to 30 years, (Jandová – Pavlíková 2003: 30). One possible interpretation of the data is that 85 % of the respondents are not ready to serve in the military. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that only 20 % citizens are interested in serving in paid reserves. (Jandová-Pavlíková 2003: 33) Given these attitudes of the public towards military service, how is it possible that the army does not have problems with recruitment? This, as I believe, can be explained by the combined effect of the following factors: 1. The target size of the Czech Army has been set at a relatively low number (only 0,26 % of total population compared to 1,33 % in 1989, and 0,9 % in 1993), which means that it is not necessary to recruit too many citizens.; 2. The unemployment in the Czech Republic is relatively high. Since the Social Democratic government came to power, the unemployment has doubled, and has been oscillating around 10 % for some time now; 3. Military service is a well-paid profession with social benefits high above the average in the remaining society. This situation is a result of successful efforts and pressures exerted by Czech military elites in the second half of the 1990s, the period in which the Social Democrats participated in the government; 4. The participation of Czech armed forces in military operations abroad has so far been connected with only small casualties. That is why the situation in the area of recruitment in the Czech Republic can be interpreted in ways that bring it in agreement with predictions of the theory, and does not have to be taken as its falsifying instance. The fact that, so far, the Czech Army has not had problems with recruitment, is to be explained by the coincidence of the above described factors, rather than by the desire of Czech citizens to serve their country in arms. If the ACR had to recruit the customary 0,4 – 0,5% of total population (which it neither want to do, nor can - for lack of financial resources), it certainly would begin to experience recruitment

² Civilian Service after the Army Professionalization. (Civilní služba po profesionalizaci armády.) Press Release of the CR Ministry of Work and Social Affairs (Tisková zpráva MPSV ČR) May 22 2003.

³ Public Opinion about the Armed Forces Reform. March 4 2004 (Veřejné mínění o reformě ozbrojených sil. 4.3.2004) <http://www.army.cz>.

problems. If such current parameters as the low target size of the ACR, high salaries and social benefits of military personnel, and high unemployment rates are kept constant, we can only expect the ACR to start having recruitment problems if it suffers relatively high casualties in overseas operations. This, of course, may happen in the future.

2.2 Development of the Size and tasks of the ACR

The size of the Czech Armed Forces has been decreasing throughout the 1990s. While in 1993 the Czech Army had 92,599 soldiers, it had only 30,470 soldiers in 2004, and its target size is planned to be 26,200 soldiers after the completion of the reform, which is only 28 % of its original size.⁴ This development, combined together with the decision (agreed upon by basically all Czech parliamentary political parties) allows us to conclude that, in the 1990s, the Czech society took important steps away from a mass-based army, and towards a cadre-based army. The crucial step on the way to the completion of this transition is the decision that compulsory military service be abolished as of December 31 2004. After that decision comes in force, the Czech Army will no longer have, in times of crises, the recourse to the draft of large numbers of reserves, who would be at least partially trained. If a sudden need arises to augment its numbers, the army will have to manage with drawing on voluntary reserves or former career soldiers.

This gradual evolution towards the cadre-based army is to be understood in the context of new priorities in terms of the basic tasks the army is expected to fulfil. Nevertheless, the shift from the classic tasks of the army, characteristic of the Cold War period, towards the tasks of policing, as they are predicted by Moskos, is by far not so definite and unequivocal, as some authors believe. Even though the foreign policy ambitions associated with the plans prepared within the Warsaw Pact - plans that, until as late as the second half of the 1980s, envisioned offensive operations against NATO forces - were abandoned already at period of the CSFR, the build-up of the Czech Armed Forces remained to be predicated on territorial defence being its primary task. In 1993 the government accepted "The Concept of the Army Build-up until 1996" (in further text referred to as "Build-up Concept 1993") which reflected new priorities of the CR security policy. Build-up Concept 93 assumes that a local conflict with limited objectives, caused by disputes over exiting national borders or by nationalistic extremism, is the most likely form of

⁴ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. (1994). *Army Yearbook 1993*, and Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. (2003). *The Concept of the Professional Army CR build-up and Armed Forces CR Mobilisation*, Adapted to the Changed Resource Framework (Koncepce výstavby profesionální Armády České republiky a mobilizace ozbrojených sil České republiky přepracovaná na změněný zdrojový rámec.). A-revue, n. 24. pg. 6.

military threat. It regards a regional conflict as less probable.⁵ Like the federal army, the newly built CR Army was designed for the defence of the territory of the state against potential aggression coming from any direction. Build-up Concept 93 defined 9 tasks of the ACR: „1. *to provide a credible deterrent that, while not posing a threat to neighbours, will deter any potential aggressor by making it impossible to attack the CR with impunity*; 2. *to be ready to repulse any ground or air attack coming to any part of the Czech Republic from any direction*; 3. *To provide for the defence and protection of the population and buildings or facilities on the whole territory of the CR that are necessary for the functioning of the state*; 4. *To be ready, in compliance with cooperation agreements with the Ministry of the Interior, to assist in dealing with security problems that cannot be dealt with effectively by security forces of the Ministry of the Interior alone*; 5. *To be preparing for prospective accession to NATO and Western European Union*; 6. *To participate in peaceful resolution of conflicts and civilisation problems of international significance within NATO forces, or, as the case might be, within the frame of building the international security system*; 7. *To acquire the character and position of a democratic society army*; 8. *To meet international obligations*; 9. *To use efficiently resources allocated to defence*.”⁶ Similarly, the first „Military Strategy” of the independent Czech state says that “the Czech Republic and its army, making use of the available international structures and allies, must be ready to resist any attack by enemy of any strength, coming from any direction, and taking place under all conditions, irrespective of how the war is started and what kind of warfare is used.”⁷ Even though the army was gradually engaged in various peace resolution operations, and its capacities began to be adapted to the new tasks, it still remained to be built predominantly as a territorial defence army, and the preparation for the task outside the state territory were only left to its residual capacities. After 1995 the Military Strategy assumes that what will happen “*In 1996 - 2005, will essentially be just a completion of the transformation of the present army to the army which, because of its high quality and despite its smaller size, will have a sufficient combat capability to provide a credible defence of the Czech Republic. It will also meet the military criteria for the interoperability with NATO and WEU, and for the accession to these organisations.*”⁸ Even though much had been achieved in the process of the ACR transformation, the Government noted on March 26 1997, when discussing “The Plan of the

⁵ CR Ministry of Defence. (1993). ACR Build-up Concept until 1996. (Koncepte výstavby Armády České republiky do roku 1996.) Military Review (Vojenské rozhledy) 7/1993, pg. 7.

⁶ CR Ministry of Defence. (1993). ACR Build-up Concept until 1996. (Koncepte výstavby Armády České republiky do roku 1996.) Military Review (Vojenské rozhledy), n. 7, pg. 5.

⁷ CR Ministry of Defence (1996). Military Strategy of the Czech Republic. (Vojenská strategie České republiky.) Military Review (Vojenské rozhledy) n. 2, p. 5.

⁸ CR Ministry of Defence (1996). Military Strategy of the Czech Republic. (Vojenská strategie České republiky.) Military Review (Vojenské rozhledy) n. 2, p. 5. pg. 8.

ACR build-up until 2000, with the prospect to 2006”: “Objectives that have been dictated by the basic documents accepted by the CR (*National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy*) have not been met. Nor has the ACR been able to respond in a flexible way to the changed volume of the financial resources allocated to it. Even though the Army has been able to maintain its essential capability to defend the country without external assistance, it is neither ready nor properly equipped for the more demanding tasks implied by the anticipated character of potential threats. Besides, the capacity of the ACR to receive, as the case might be, an assistance from its allies is very limited ... The ability of the Czech Republic to achieve its goals has continually been falling.”⁹

This bad condition of the Army, which had not been up to the needs of the Czech security policy in the new security environment in terms of either its structure, size or main tasks, led, after debates in which both politicians and members of the Czech security community took part, and after some intermediate steps, to a crucial political decision. The government of the Czech Republic decided to start the preparation of a radical reform of the ACR, and it set up the institute of the Trustee for the Preparation of the Radical Reform of the Armed Forces of the CR.¹⁰ Gen. Škopka was nominated as the government trustee. A team of 14 people was created that prepared the “Analysis of definitions, required capabilities, target structure and composition of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic.” The government acknowledged the document. It further discussed and accepted another document under the title “The Reform of the Armed Forces - the Goals and Principles”. Subsequently, the government decided that two concepts should be prepared by the end of March 2002: “The Concept of the Build-up of the Professional Army of the Czech Republic” and “The Concept of the Mobilisation of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic”. The definition of the goals assigned to the military by the political representation had to respect the following parameters: 1. Providing for the defence of vital and strategic interests of the Czech Republic; 2. Meeting NATO membership commitments; 3. Keeping defence spending at the level of 2.2 % GDP until 2004 ; Demographic trends and falling numbers of young people conscripted to the army.¹¹ It was originally assumed that conscription would be preserved until full professionalization is achieved. In 2002, the final size of the future professional army was set at 34,000 - 36,000 soldiers and 10,000 civil employees. It was also

⁹ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (1997). The Plan of the ACR build-up until 2000, with the prospect to 2005 (*Záměr koncepce výstavby AČR do roku 2000 s výhledem do roku 2005.*) Abbreviated version not containing classified information. *Military Review (Vojenské rozhledy)*, n. 2, pg. 13.

¹⁰ CR Government Resolution n. 489, May 14 2001.

¹¹ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (2002). *Yearbook 2001*. Prague, pg. 30 – 31.

decided that the allocation of resources to defence should respect the minimal level of 2.2 % GDP.

The 2003 ACR review, necessitated by the MoD budget reductions, decreased the planned target size of the Army to 26,200 soldiers and 8,000 civil employees. It stated the intention that, after the completion of the reform, in 2010 - 2010, the ACR should be capable of:

1. Deploying all its forces in an operation of collective defence by article 5 of Washington Treaty;
2. Deploying up to 3 000 troops in one peace enforcement operation for the period of 6 month without rotation (by 2007), or an air force element equivalent to it in terms of resource requirements, for the maximum period of 3 months without rotation (after 2010);
3. Deploying up to 1 000 troops for the period of 6 month without rotation in one peace support or peace keeping operation or an air force element equivalent, while keeping 250 troops for the purpose of a simultaneous operation for the period of 6 months without rotation.

At the same time, in parallel with any of the above given variants of the deployment of its forces, the Czech Armed Forces should be able to provide for the protection of important buildings or facilities, and, as the case might be, to receive NATO reinforcements at the territory of the Czech Republic and to participate in NATINEADS (NATO Integrated Extended Air Defence System).¹²

Nevertheless, not even the tasks defined as described above can in any way be regarded as implying the build-up of an army designed for a range of types of military peace resolution operations outside the territory of the Czech Republic. One of the emphases of the current concept of the ACR reform still is to maintain complex military capabilities (however reduced in comparison with the Cold War period) aimed at a self-reliant defence of the territory of the state. But, if we take into account the current international security environment characterised by the absence of an enemy threatening the territory of the Czech Republic with a classic form of military aggression, the ongoing process of the reduction of the ACR, and the fact that the ACR

¹² Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. (2003) The Concept of the Professional Army CR build-up and Armed Forces CR Mobilisation, Adapted to the Changed Resource Framework. (Koncepce výstavby profesionální Armády České republiky a mobilizace ozbrojených sil České republiky přepracovaná na změněný zdrojový rámec.) A-report, n. 24, pg.. 7.

has stopped to build massive reserves, then, in the view of the author of this paper, it is obvious that the orientation of the ACR in the first decade of the 21st century is much more towards the acquiring the capability to carry out a range of peace resolving operations, than it ever was during the 1990s. Thus, as the author believes, the theoretical assumption of the growing importance of the tasks of armies is more or less confirmed in the specific case of the Czech Republic, even though the process is probably not so fast and forthright, as was originally supposed.

2.3 ACR Modernization

The ACR inherited from the Federal armed forces a large quantum of heavy military hardware that was of little use in the changed military environment. On the other hand, it lacked other types of military equipment. Most of the equipment inherited from the Federal army was obsolete and in bad condition, and, therefore, it was clear that it would have to be decommissioned. But the rest, if updated and made interoperable within NATO, could still be maintained. Thus, there were two processes taking place in parallel: 1. Downsizing, especially by cutting down on heavy military hardware, 2. Modernization and acquisition of new equipment with the aim to gradually remove the weakest spots of the ACR. While in January 1 1993 the ACR had 957 tanks, 1367 armoured carriers and combat infantry vehicles, 767 pieces of artillery and rocket launchers, and 456 aircraft¹³, it is expected that after the completion of the reform it will have about 150 tanks, at most 1000 combat infantry vehicles or armoured carriers, and around 100 combat aircraft and helicopters. Radical reductions are also expected in artillery equipment.

However much were the 1990s characterised by the absence of any rational and consistent armament concept that would be based on a consistent security strategy (such strategy was created the first time as late 1999), it can be argued that throughout the whole period in question the emphasis was on the modernisation of the ACR through acquiring a limited number of highly modern weapon systems either by means of the modernisation of the equipment the army already had (T-72) or through the purchase of new equipment (L-159, Gripen, armoured carriers). This strategy was, and still is, hampered by four obstacles: 1. Insufficiently worked out processes of Planning, Programming and Budgeting, which led and still leads to enormous economic losses; 2. Insufficient financial backing of these processes; 3. Inadequacy of many of the programmes with respect to the need of the state to provide for the capability of the ACR to carry out various types of crisis management operations; 4. Considerable influence of interest-

¹³ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (1994). Army Yearbook 1993.

groups associated with the ACR forcing Czech political elites to take into account the interests of the Czech industrial-military complex in modernisation programmes. Throughout the whole period of the 1990s the firms of the Czech military-industrial complex were complaining that their value as contractors was underestimated by the Czech military, which situation was damaging to their image abroad, and this, in turn, made it difficult for them to enter foreign markets controlled by international producers and protected by national governments, and characterised by a big surplus of supply over demand. As opposed to this, I believe that some of the programmes were only launched to achieve certain industrial policy objectives or to create job opportunities, rather than to meet real needs of the ACR. In this context, we should mention especially such programmes as the acquisition of 72 aircraft L-159 Alca, the modernization (that was eventually stopped) of Mig-21, and up to an extent, also the modernisation of tank T-72.

This way of the ACR modernizing was in agreement with the political strategy of building a reduced, modern army that, while designed primarily for the defence of the state territory, would also be ready to use part of its capacities to carry out various types of peace resolution operations. Even though the reworked concept of the army reform puts more emphasis on the capability to carry out peace resolution operations, it is not a radical departure from the above strategy. This is indicated by the intention to buy the supersonic multipurpose aircraft, the acquisition of T-72M4CZ tanks, modernization of helicopters, acquisition of new armoured carriers, and some other projects.¹⁴ On the other hand, compared to the past, there is now more emphasis on the ACR being specialised in the area of passive monitoring systems and equipment for dealing with after-effects of the use of mass destruction weapons. Last but not least, there is also an emphasis on introducing information and logistic systems into all parts of the ACR. According to the security policy of the Czech Republic the ACR should remain a balanced force that will maintain all its vital components, even though, compared to the Czechoslovak People's Army of the Cold War Period, it will be downsized by an order of magnitude both in terms of its manpower and heavy military hardware, which is a prospect that is disliked by part of the officer corps.

¹⁴ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic (2003) The Concept of the Professional Army CR build-up and Armed Forces CR Mobilisation, Adapted to the Changed Resource Framework (Koncepce výstavby profesionální Armády České republiky a mobilizace ozbrojených sil České republiky přepracovaná na změněný zdrojový rámec). A-report, n. 24.

3. Conclusion

The defence expenditure has been radically reduced in the Czech Republic since 1989, now being kept around at the level of 2 % GDP, which is approximately the NATO average. Given the priorities of the Czech society, the defence expenditure is unlikely to grow in the future, and it may even be slightly further reduced. Currently, the ACR is undergoing a process of professionalization which is by and large supported by the Czech public. Due to the relatively low target size of its manpower (0,265 % of total population), relative high long-term unemployment rates (around 10 %), and relatively high salaries of military personnel in connection with social benefits high above the standard level in the rest of the society, the ACR does not experience any recruitment problems for the time being. The Army has been radically downsized, and, after the reform is completed, its manpower should be about 25 % of its 1993 size. As for the ACR tasks, even though the defence of the state territory against aggression has remained its primary task, since the 1990s there has also been a growing tendency towards strengthening the ACR capabilities in the area of overseas peace resolution operations. On the whole, we can conclude that the basic trends in the ACR modernization, in spite of some problems of organizational nature, are basically in agreement with theoretical predictions and with the main trends of the ongoing revolution in military affairs, provided, of course, one allows for the limitations of the CR financial resources. Similarly, the development of the ACR and the development of its position within the democratic society are also in agreement with general trends. All that, as I believe, indicates that the Czech society is gradually becoming a consolidated democratic country.

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