

ZOLTÁN JOBBÁGY¹ – KRISTÝNA BINKOVA²

Militaries in a Constant Change: A Short Comparison of the Hungarian Defence Forces and the Czech Armed Forces

Folyamatosan változó haderők: a Magyar Honvédség és a Cseh Fegyveres Erők rövid összehasonlítása

Abstract

The article introduces the development of the Hungarian Defence Forces and the Czech Armed Forces after the systemic changes. It details the phases of an ever-present, continuous force modernisation together with its major elements.

Keywords: Hungarian Defence Forces, Czech Armed Forces, force modernisation, integration, NATO

Absztrakt

A cikk vázlatosan bemutatja a Magyar Honvédség és a Cseh Fegyveres Erők rendszerváltozás utáni fejlődést, részletezi a mindennapokat meghatározó, folyamatos haderő modernizáció szakaszait és azok főbb tartalmi elemeit.

Kulcsszavak: Magyar Honvédség, Cseh Fegyveres Erők, haderő modernizáció, integráció, NATO

INTRODUCTION

The Defence Department of the Czech Republic is comprised of the Ministry of Defence and the Czech Armed Forces. The Czech Armed Forces are comprised of the Army of the Czech Republic, Military Office of the President of the Czech Republic and the Castle Guard. The major Czech military forces are the [Air Force](#), and the [Land Forces](#). Legal acts

¹ National University of Public Service, Faculty of Military Science and Officer Education, Department of Joint Operation, associate professor. E-mail: jobbagy.zoltan@uni-nke.hu ORCID: 0000-0003-4553-6397

² University of Defence, Faculty of Military Leadership, Doctoral Degree Programme. E-mail: kristyna.binkova@unob.cz.

in matters of service make the official authorities the supreme commander of the Armed Forces, President of the Czech Republic, Chief of the General Staff of ACR, Minister of Defence and other commanders, chiefs, directors and senior employees.³

The Defence Department of the Hungarian Republic accords with this layout to a great extent. It is composed of the Ministry of Defence that includes the Honvéd General Staff. The Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) have two components, the Army and the Air Force led by the HDF Joint Force Command established in 2007. There is also a Military Department to the President of the Hungarian Republic. The Palace Guard forms together with the Crown Guard and the Parade Battalion the 32 National Honvéd Parade Unit. This latter is part of the HDF vitéz Szurmay Sándor Budapest Garrison Brigade.⁴

SYSTEMIC CHANGES

From the end of World War II and the coup by the communists in 1948 Czechoslovakia was a country of the Eastern Bloc. As a result the concept of the country's national defence was based until 1989 on the bipolar division of the world. It was kept under full subordination to the commitments stemming from the state's membership in the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, a political-military alliance of European socialist countries headed by the USSR. Much like other Warsaw Treaty countries' militaries, the Czechoslovak People's Armed Forces (CSLA) was also built and organised along the model of the Soviet Red Army. Its character and planned employment were commensurate to the political and military ambitions the Soviet Union pursued.⁵

In a similar way the Hungarian Peoples' Army (HPA) also accorded with the Soviet model. The HPA was committed by treaty to the Soviet-East European alliance, better known as the Warsaw Pact. In contrast to Czechoslovakia, Hungary played less of a role in the Soviet alliance system. It had the smallest armed forces in the Warsaw Pact. Unlike the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and Czechoslovakia that bordered on the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Hungary did not border on a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁶

The democratisation phase of the CSLA began immediately after 17 November 1989. The CSLA became a part of the Velvet Revolution as measures and manifestations of the revolution affected the armed forces, too. The transition of the CSLA into an efficient tool of

³ Professional Army, Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, Internet, accessed 2016. 06. 02, available at: <http://www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5762>.

⁴ *MH vitéz Szurmay Sándor Budapest Helyőrség Dandár*, Internet, letöltve 2016. 11. 20, elérhető: <http://www.honvedelem.hu/szervezet/Szurmay>.

⁵ Opat, Jaroslav: *Czechoslovakia 1918–88: Seventy Years from Independence*, St. Martin's Press, 199, pp. 26-32.

⁶ *Hungarian People's Army (HPA)*, Internet, accessed 2016. 11. 28, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/hu-hpa.htm>.

a democratic state's defence policy was quite fast. Very shortly after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, changes started to take place and political debates unrolled about the way of ensuring national defence and the future shape of the armed forces. The first policy document to address some of those issues was the Concept of Development of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces till the end of 1993 approved by the Government in November 1990. Its basic principles were described as 3R standing for Relocation, Reorganisation and Reduction. A large number of officers left the military as they no longer shared the values of the service. Compulsory military service was reduced from 24 to 18 months, and alternative civil service legislation was introduced.⁷

Significant political changes within the Soviet Union marked by *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the late 1980s promised drastic changes in the HPA's relationship to the party and the Warsaw Pact. Political and military reformers proposed decoupling the HPA from tight party control in order to reduce the likelihood they would be used for domestic political coercion purposes. A general lessening of tensions in Europe allowed the Hungarian government to significantly cut its military budget without fearing domestic or international reprisal. Soviet and Hungarian officials alike spoke cautiously of the possibility of a politically and militarily neutral Hungary. As a result of the slow political changes in 1989 the Soviet Union had begun withdrawing a small portion of its 65,000 troops stationed in Hungary.⁸

The integration phase that logically ran in parallel with the unfinished democratisation and took place already in the divided Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, commenced at 1 January 1993 upon the actual division of the CSFR and its armed forces into two new completely independent states. That phase saw the Czech defence policy define itself as a tool of an independent state. In terms of international orientation, the defence policy clearly focused on political-military structures of the West, i.e. collective security and defence. Initial steps were tied to diplomatic and international political activities. Political decisions then, in the first half of 1990s, were affected by the security situation aggravated by negative developments in the Balkans. The break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the ethnic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina shaped the international security environment, which affected home affairs in the Czech Republic and attitudes to developing national defence issues.⁹

From the summer of 1990 on, in co-operation with its Visegrád partners, Hungary suggested the review of the Warsaw Treaty and its dissolution, which finally took place in the

⁷ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic: *Armed Forces of the Czech Republic: A symbol of democracy and state sovereignty 1993–2012*, Internet, accessed 2016. 06. 02, available at: http://www.army.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/publication/20-let-acr_en.pdf.

⁸ *Hungarian People's Army (HPA)*, Internet, accessed 2016. 11. 28, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/hu-hpa.htm>.

⁹ Zold, Zoltan: *Professional Armed Forces New Trend in Europe: Transformation of the Czech Armed Forces*, Internet, accessed 2016. 06. 02, available at: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a406261.pdf>.

summer of 1991. Simultaneously, Hungary succeeded in bringing about the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops. Hungary also played an active role in disbanding the COMECON¹⁰, the economic organization of the Eastern Block. Recognizing the opportunity offered by history, Hungary started the process of joining the community of developed Western democracies. The formulation of the triad of foreign policy priorities identified by the Antall-administration (1990-1994) – Euro-Atlantic integration, a policy of good-neighbourhood ensuring regional stability and a national policy that included support for the Hungarian communities living abroad – did not only apply to only one parliamentary cycle.¹¹

NATO INTEGRATION PHASE

In the domestic scene, the force reductions made people rightly believe that the military did not represent a potentially destabilising element anymore and it did not show the hallmarks of a power that could endanger the ongoing democratic changes in the society anymore. Soon after the Cold War, NATO started dialogues with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.¹²

What followed in 1995–1998 was a period dominated by the process of integration to NATO both in terms the armed forces' internal development and its international composition. It was critical to increase public awareness of the fact that it was not just the armed forces joining NATO, but the whole Czech Republic. The relations with NATO nations' armed forces intensified significantly after the Czech Republic joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. The Czech Republic was then quick to review the strategic vision of the capabilities and possibility to provide national defence independently and against all directions.¹³

At the NATO summit in Madrid on July 8, 1997, the decision was made to invite three potential candidates, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, to accession talks with NATO.¹⁴ The Protocol on Accession of the Czech Republic to NATO was signed in Brussels on December 16, 1997. On March 12, 1999, the Czech Republic, together with Poland and Hungary, were admitted into NATO as member countries with all rights and responsi-

¹⁰ Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

¹¹ Bozo, Tibor (Col.): *Hungary a Member of NATO, The road membership of NATO 1990-1999*, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 2003. 07. 04, p. 2.

¹² Zold, Zoltan: *Professional Armed Forces New Trend in Europe: Transformation of the Czech Armed Forces*, Internet, accessed 2016-06-02, available at: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a406261.pdf>.

¹³ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic: *Armed Forces of the Czech Republic: A symbol of democracy and state sovereignty 1993–2012*, Internet, accessed 2016. 06. 02, available at: http://www.army.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/publication/20-let-acr_en.pdf.

¹⁴ Smith, Martin A.: *NATO in the First Decade after the Cold War*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, pp. 22-25.

bilities. The Czech military has downsized substantially since the days of the Warsaw Pact and has adopted a modernization strategy with emphasis on communication, intelligence, English skills, and command and control.¹⁵

Hungarian presence in the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC) and its participation in the PfP since 1994, have paved the country's way to the Alliance. NACC as well as its successor, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), have played an invaluable role in the field of political consultations, while the PfP has done the same in establishing co-operation with the Alliance. The HDF had taken advantage of the principles of self-differentiation and co-operation offered by the PfP. Particularly important was the Hungarian participation in the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) that helped create the capacities required for non-Article 5 crisis response operations. The PfP thus was the prime vehicle of the accession process that led to full membership. NATO issued in September 1995 the so-called Enlargement Study naming the political and military criteria required for accession. Hungary officially declared its intention to join NATO in January 1996, becoming the first to do so. Hungary submitted a Discussion Paper on 8 April 1996. This document served as the basis of the Hungarian position which had previously been outlined in 1996-97 during the intensified dialogue. In the course of this dialogue, NATO became convinced that Hungary would be able and willing to fulfil the obligations. The country followed the rule of law, had both a stable parliamentary democracy and a functioning market economy. There was a solid democratic and civilian control of the armed forces, and Hungary did the utmost to establish military capabilities required for co-operation with NATO.¹⁶

REFORM PHASE

The accession to NATO has been one of the most important political decisions in the history of the independent Czech Republic. Following 1999, civilian democratic control sought to adapt the armed forces to changes in the security environment and new security challenges. The new challenge was for the Czech Republic was to become a reliable NATO ally able to deliver on its commitments in full and assume its fair share of the burden of providing collective security and defence. The Czech Republic's accession to NATO attained a long-term political and strategic goal on the path towards strengthening Czech national defence. This stage was associated with numerous changes in legislation. NATO membership did not furnish only the guarantee of a collective assurance of national defence, but

¹⁵ Zold, Zoltan: Professional Armed Forces New Trend in Europe: Transformation of the Czech Armed Forces, Internet, accessed 2016-06-02, available at: <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a406261.pdf>.

¹⁶ Szenes, Zoltan: *Peacekeeping in the Hungarian Armed Forces*, AARMS, Volume 6, Number 1 (2007), pp. 121.

also its commitment to collective defence in the sense of contributing within the compass of national possibilities to a fair burden sharing in the Alliance. The accession to NATO created completely new conditions for the armed forces development and the window of opportunity opened up to finally get over the legacy of the Cold War, which had prevented building an effective national defence system. NATO integration also paved the way for continuing the process of integrating into the European Union, primarily in economic terms. The process of reforms was also marked by dynamic development of the security reality on the strategic global scale. The 9/11 terrorist attack in the U.S. represented a critical changeover in how imminence of the threat was perceived. International terrorism became reality for western civilisations. Following in-depth analyses, radical Islam was identified as the origin of the threat. Militaries were eventually engaged to fight terrorism as NATO nations commenced their military reaction immediately in the aftermath of 9/11. In 2002 in Afghanistan and then in Iraq in 2003, the international community united in the so-called coalition of willing pursued military solutions. The U.S. Administration then launched what is commonly referred to as the Global War on Terrorism. The Czech Republic's entry into the European Union on 1 May 2004 was a crucial milestone. As one of the components of the society, the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic joined implementation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and commenced contributing its part to solutions of joint tasks. While European Union and NATO membership overlaps significantly, the situation was not completely new for our military and defence. Under the agreement between NATO and EU, the two organisations made arrangements that planning joint operations under the EU flag will be done by NATO planning authorities. Necessary preparation also showed practically for supporting specific EU assignments defined under so-called Petersberg Tasks. Cooperation in this subject-matter area affected specific missions the Czech Armed Forces has performed since 2004 as well as military training.¹⁷

Initially the HDF provided only small groups of UN observers for service in Africa and the Near-East. There was a significant change in 1995 when Hungary deployed armed peacekeeping units into the Sinai, Cyprus, and the Balkans. In this year additional important decisions were taken to support NATO's IFOR operations in the Balkans. Hungary supported and aided the deployment of NATO forces across its territory, and provided assistance to deploying IFOR/SFOR units and organizations. Active Hungarian participation in Bosnia and Hercegovina proved the country's capability to support peace support operations led by NATO. The extremely successful Hungarian contribution to IFOR/SFOR provided significant weight to the invitation to join NATO. Hungary has been participating since 1999 in every NATO-led land force based peace support operation. Hungarian ser-

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic: *Armed Forces of the Czech Republic: A symbol of democracy and state sovereignty 1993–2012*, Internet, accessed 2016. 06. 02, available at: http://www.army.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/publication/20-let-acr_en.pdf.

vicemembers continue to serve in Kosovo and in Bosnia and Hercegovina. In 2003 the HDF also began to participate in inherently more dangerous peacekeeping /peace-making counterinsurgency-type operations. In 2003/04 a Hungarian logistics battalion undertook operations in Iraq, supporting the activities of the Polish-led Division Area of Responsibility. From 2003 until 2014 Hungarian servicemembers participated in International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations in Afghanistan, where they performed security and guard duties in Kabul, provided medical and aviation maintenance support, and were responsible for an entire province as part of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Baghlan.¹⁸ Hungarian servicemembers are still active in Afghanistan as members of the Resolute Support Mission.¹⁹

TRANSFORMATION PHASE

The transformation phase is the last stage adjusting the Czech Republic's defence policy and defence activities to achieve military capabilities in the changing environment. The phase commenced in 2005. After 140 years of conscription service system being exercised in the historical Czech lands, the country abandoned this practice. The last conscripts left the military on 22 December 2004. Since the beginning of 2005 the Czech Republic has been building an all-volunteer force. For the first time in the history of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, the military structure and manpower has been without conscripts. Since 1 January 2005, the Czech Armed Forces consist entirely of volunteer servicemembers. The Armed Forces therefore recruit using commercial adverts on TV in newspapers and magazines and on internet.²⁰ It is part of a fundamental reform of the Czech military which also involved downsizing, organisational changes, modernisation of equipment and reshaping the locations of garrisons and sites within the republic. The transition to an all-volunteer force was the final step of reform effort that included procedures of altering, re-dressing and improvement. The Armed Forces of the Czech Republic set out on the path of transformation – metamorphosis in response to the changing security reality.²¹

With a view to ensure close cooperation with the armed forces of other member nations Hungary had to transform and modernize the HDF. Reorganizations of the HDF have been several times announced to be completed. Some units and military organizations have

¹⁸ Bozo, Tibor (Col.): *Hungary a Member of NATO, The road membership of NATO 1990-1999*, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 2003-07-04, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ Szenes, Zoltan: *Peacekeeping in the Hungarian Armed Forces*, AARMS, Volume 6, Number 1 (2007), pp. 122-123.

²⁰ *Professional Army, Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces of the Czech Republic*, Internet, accessed 2016-06-02, available at: <http://www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5762>.

²¹ *Country report and updates: Czech Republic. War Resisters' International*, Internet, accessed 2016. 02. 06, available at: http://www.wri-irg.org/programmes/world_survey/country_report/en/Czech%20Republic.

been abolished, some others were merged or reassigned. New units and organizations were established in an effort to build streamlined and efficient military organizations. Consolidation of existing and the further development of new structures still go hand in glove. Military barracks in several garrisons have been refurbished, new facilities been built to suit the needs and requirements of a constantly changing force. As a result of the procurement of new military assets and new equipment military organizations enjoy the benefits of sporadic modernization efforts. The mandatory conscript service scheme was suspended in November 2004. As soon as the general draft ended and the last conscripts were discharged, the HDF converted to an all-volunteer military. Hungary is obliged to guarantee the security of each citizen. The all-volunteer, fully professional HDF possess relevant capabilities to operate within NATO as well as to defend the independence and the territorial integrity of the country in conjunction with other allied nations. Furthermore, the HDF may contribute both to Article 5 and non-Article 5 operations alike.²²

FUTURE TRANSFORMATIONS

There will logically not be just one transformation. A sequence of transformation efforts should cater for the requirements of the Czech Republic's defence against military threats. In 2006, the military achieved initial operational capabilities and stabilisation of forces. The process of continuing transformation in that sense started in 2007 and was scheduled until 2018, when the armed forces would achieve its full operational capability essential for meeting political-military ambitions.²³

Reviewing the path of the Czech Armed Forces invokes awe and admiration of critical changes and large number of positive reforms that accompanied a true metamorphosis of this power component of the state. The Czech reform illustrates clearly that mature civil-military relations are about more than just a formal framework of parliamentary oversight over the defence sector and the separation of military from politics. Indeed, they are also about the quality and effectiveness of governance in the defence sector, its transparency and openness to the external voices. Moreover, successful reform is about moving beyond the traditional, narrow concept of national defence and viewing the issue from a wider and longer-term strategic perspective.²⁴

²² Hungarian Ministry of Defence: *Hungarian Defence Forces, The All-Volunteer Professional HDF*, Internet, accessed 2016. 11. 28, available at: <http://www.honvedelem.hu/files/9/5294/imazs-angol.pdf>.

²³ *Analysis: Czech military transformation. NATO Review: Examining NATO's Transformation*, Internet, accessed 2016. 06. 02, available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue1/english/analysis.html>.

²⁴ *Country report and updates: Czech Republic. War Resisters' International*, Internet, accessed 2016. 02. 06, available at: http://www.wri-irg.org/programmes/world_survey/country_report/en/Czech%20Republic.

After nearly two decades of endless transformation the Hungarian authorities are increasing defence spending. In accordance with this the 2016 defence funding has been increased to 299 billion forints (about 950 million euros), about 48 billion forints more than in 2015 an incredible 22% increase. A large portion of the additional funds is to be used to increase the attractiveness of the military service. Funds will also be allocated to expand infrastructure, and used for certain modernization programmes. As a reliable member of NATO the HDF take part in the anti-ISIS operation conducted in the Northern part of Iraq. Apart from the good news on budget increase the financial situation in the HDF is still poor. Since the 1990s, only two large military procurement programmes were carried out in Hungary that were the acquisition of the Gripen fighters and of the Mistrals VSHORAD systems. By 2022, Hungary intends to increase defence spending to about 1.4% of GDP, compared to the current level of about 0.75%. This gives at least a hope for a better and brighter future.²⁵

CONCLUSION

The article revealed a remarkable similarity between the Hungarian and the Czech militaries. They are institutions of nations with comparable political, economic, social, demographic and other capabilities. It should not come as a surprise that both militaries have moved, since the systemic changes, along nearly identical trajectories. They have experienced budget cuts, losses of traditional capabilities and downsizing personnel. It seems so that in the case Hungary will be able to allocate more funding for the HDF, this similarity will increase in the future. This however can be a sound platform to increase cooperation and share experience in many fields.

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²⁵ *Budapest Rebuilds Army with 20% Increase In Defence Spending*, Internet, accessed 2016. 11. 28, available at: <http://www.defense-aerospace.com/articles-view/release/3/164769/hungary-to-raise-defense-spending-by-20-in-2016.html>.

HADTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE

2017. X. évfolyam 1. szám

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