



Weekly Briefing

**Czech Republic social briefing:
The Armed Forces And the Czech Society
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The Armed Forces And the Czech Society

Summary

The army enjoys a high level of popularity and trust among Czech citizens. Despite the positive reputation, a majority doubts the operational capabilities and only a quarter of the population is willing to join the military in case of the state of war. Both the political leadership and the General Staff support higher defence expenditures, modernisation and expansion of the national armed forces. These are increasing their interoperability with other NATO member states. The Czech Army is taking steps to end dependencies on Russia in any regard while acquiring both Western and domestic equipment. Attention is also paid to the space domain.

Introduction

The Czech Armed Forces have a good opportunity to boost their position and increase their role in society. The war in Ukraine has deepened the long-term tendencies of rising public support for the army as well as political support for its modernisation. The army is an increasingly prestigious institution which will be strengthened by the fact that the incumbent cabinet is about to provide the army with the financial means needed for the realisation of the set priorities in a new security environment. These internal processes are interconnected with the agenda shaped by NATO. The embeddedness of national security in the transatlantic area and structures requires a high level of interoperability between the Czech army and the allies.

Military expenditures

Public support for and trust in the armed forces are traditionally high. It contrasts with other institutions, especially political parties. According to sociological surveys conducted in mid-2022, around 75 per cent of the Czechs trust the army.¹ Despite such a positive attitude, only 24 per cent of the citizens are willing to join the army in the case of the state of war whereas up to 62 per cent reject the service. People are also somewhat sceptical about the fighting fitness of the armed forces and the abilities of soldiers. Only half of the citizens believe that the army

¹ CVVM: Lidé nejvíc důvěřují policii a armádě, naopak nejméně politickým stranám (2022, June 8). ČTK. <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cvvm-lide-nejvic-duveruji-policii-a-armade-naopak-nejmene-politickym-stranam/2217089>

is operational. That is why the Czechs would rely on military assistance from NATO whose popularity remains high (71 per cent). A majority of people are in favour of higher expenditure on the armed forces.² Notwithstanding the shared NATO commitment that each member state is to spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence, the Czech Republic has been far from this threshold. The relative contribution to the common defence varies significantly among individual countries, the leading role being played by the US and Britain. Nevertheless, military expenditures are different irrespective of the regional specifics as demonstrated by the following table which summarises the expenditures of the US, Poland and the Czech Republic between 2011 and 2020 in % relative to GDP.³

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
US	4.77	4.41	4.03	3.73	3.52	3.52	3.30	3.28	3.51	3.87
PL	1.72	1.74	1.72	1.85	2.22	1.99	1.89	2.03	2.02	2.30
CZ	1.07	1.05	1.03	0.95	1.03	0.96	1.05	1.12	1.18	1.43

Even though the Czech military expenditures were very modest, the tendency of the last years is clear. Since 2017 the expenditures have been rising and the figure relative to GDP is to amount to 1.52 per cent in 2023 which tallies to 111.8 billion CZK (4.7 billion EUR). Moreover, the government will submit a bill according to which the annual threshold of 2 per cent to GDP will be mandatory similar to that in Poland or Latvia. Although the cabinet puts a strong emphasis on security and military issues, being determined to increase the expenditures in this regard, some experts warn that such a legal obligation need not be a step in a good direction because it does not reflect the actual needs of the state and the armed forces in a concrete moment and may lead to inefficiency and waste. Experts point to the example of Latvia where the need to spend at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence leads to considerations about the possible reintroduction of general military service.⁴

² Šenk, M. (2022, May 2). *Do armády by se v případě napadení přihlásila čtvrtina Čechů, ukazuje průzkum*. ČT24. <https://ct24.ceska televize.cz/domaci/3483230-do-armady-se-v-pripade-napadeni-prihlasila-petina-cechu-ukazuje-pruzkum>

³ *Armádní výzbroj a výdaje na obranu* (2023). NKÚ. <https://www.nku.cz/cz/kontrola/analyzy/armadni-vyzbroj---test-id11640/>

⁴ Světnička, L. (2023, January 7). *Česko splácí dluh na svou obranu. Silný signál i zodpovědnost, varují experti*. Natoaktual.cz. https://www.natoaktual.cz/zpravy/obrana-armada-fiala-zakon-vydaje-rozpocet-rusko-nato.A230107_164705_na_zpravy_m00

Budget for 2023

As far as the 2023 budget for the Czech Armed Forces is concerned, 80.3 billion CZK (3.2 billion EUR) out of the Ministry of Defence's 111.8 billion CZK is allocated to the military. The defence expenditures are thus higher by 25.4 per cent compared to 2022. From the official documents follows that the army should have 28,134 troops this year—11,171 men in land forces, 5,078 in air forces, 423 in territorial forces, 271 in cyber forces, and 11,191 in other positions. The General Staff also wants to expand the Active Reserves to 4,500 men. The Czech Army is engaged in several foreign missions which are expected to require 2.1 billion CZK (88.4 million EUR) in 2023. The most prominent missions are connected with the NATO Eastern Flank inclusive of the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and Enhanced Vigilance Activity (eVA) Battle Groups operating in the Baltic states, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Up to 1,200 Czech troops participate in the operations of these units this year. The Czech presence in other missions is much less numerous, amounting to 117 soldiers.⁵ In addition, the army is involved in international exercises both on the Czech territory and abroad. These activities will cost around 320.3 million CZK (13.5 million EUR) in 2023. The emphasis is put on enhancing interoperability and cooperation between individual national units under the joint command. It regards, first of all, the NATO Response Forces (NRF), the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), and the European Union Battle Group (EUBG).⁶

Face to face with the deteriorating external security environment, the political representatives strongly highlight the need for both modernisation and expansion of the Czech Armed Forces. The projects are prepared out of consideration for the collective needs and interests of the NATO allies, and the goal of eliminating Soviet- and Russia-manufactured equipment. The Ministry of Defence intends to carry out new purchases including the following items: (1) US Bell helicopters worth 6.7 billion CZK (282.1 million EUR) which is the most expensive item this year; (2) SPYDER short-range air defence (SHORAD) from Israel; (3) command and staff vehicles TITUS, manufactured in the Czech Republic; (4) self-propelled howitzers CAESAR of French provenience; (5) light strike vehicles; (6) unmanned aircraft systems.⁷ In the first weeks of 2023, the army started to prepare an active use of a new

⁵ *Obrana České republiky v číslech – 2023* (2022). Ministerstvo obrany ČR. <https://mocr.army.cz/assets/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/obrana-ceske-republiky-v-cislech-2023---2022-11-01-final.pdf>

⁶ Šiška, M. (2023, January 14). *Přehled nejdůležitějších vojenských cvičení Armády České republiky v roce 2023*. CZDEFENCE.cz. <https://www.czdefence.cz/clanek/prehled-vojenskych-cviceni-armady-ceske-republiky-v-roce-2023>

⁷ *Obrana České republiky v číslech – 2023* (2022). Ministerstvo obrany ČR. <https://mocr.army.cz/assets/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/obrana-ceske-republiky-v-cislech-2023---2022-11-01-final.pdf>

equipment STARKOM. It is a mobile electronic warfare system specialised in communication jamming which is manufactured by Military Research Institute, the Czech state-owned enterprise, in cooperation with TATRA, URC Systems and JISR Institute. The Czech technology enables the disruption, neutralisation and deception of communication in the very-high, ultra-high and super-high frequencies inclusive of GSM bands of mobile networks. STARKOM is capable to jam radio communications, systems of military command, air communication, GSM communication, Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) as well as signals for control and data transmission from unmanned aerial and ground vehicles (UAV, UGV). The army expects the delivery of eight jammers this year.⁸

Space domain

The deepening ties between the Czech defence and military on one hand and NATO structures on the other manifest themselves not only in purchases of equipment or joint exercises but also in institutional cooperation which is increasingly comprehensive and complex. In January, the Czech Armed Forces joined the NATO Space Centre of Excellence which is located in Toulouse.⁹ The memorandum on understanding was signed by 15 NATO members in Paris. The NATO Space CoE addresses the rising importance of space for the transatlantic military alliance. In 2019, space was defined as a new operational domain aside from air, land, sea and cyberspace. A year later, NATO Space Centre was set up in the air base in Ramstein with a focus on an alleged threat from China and Russia, being incorporated into the Allied Air Command.¹⁰ The NATO Space CoE in Toulouse is to provide the alliance with expertise, analysis and products covering three operational functions, that is, Space Domain Awareness, Operational Space Support, and Space Domain Coordination.¹¹

The space domain is of increasing importance for the Czech defence policies. In 2018, the Satellite Centre of the Czech Republic (SATCEN) was established by the Military

⁸ Králíček, J. (2023, February 7). *Specialisté na elektronický boj zahájili výcvik na nových rušičích STARKOM*. Armáda České republiky. <https://acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/specialiste-na-elektronicky-boj-zahajili-vycvik-na-novych-rusicich-starkom-242027/>

⁹ Paďourek, D. (2023, January 18). *Česká republika se podpisem připojila k Centru excelence NATO pro vesmír*. Armáda České republiky. <https://acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/ceska-republika-se-podpisem-pripojila-k-centru-vyjimecnosti-nato-pro-vesmir-241723/>

¹⁰ De la Cuetara, I., Schlosberg, J., Brooksbank, T. (2022, November 15). *Inside NATO's Space Centre, where Allied forces keep a close eye on Russian, Chinese satellite threats*. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/inside-natos-secretive-space-commands-critical-mission/story?id=93332144>

¹¹ *One More Step for NATO's Space Centre of Excellence* (2023, January 20). NATO. <https://www.act.nato.int/articles/nato-space-coe-mou>

Intelligence with the aim to acquire, analyse and provide data and products for the intelligence services, armed forces, Ministry of Defence and other authorised subjects. The state authorities are also considering the launch of the first Czech satellite system called GOLEM (Global Orbital Electro-Optical System) which could be used for gathering intelligence. The development of a high-altitude platform station STRATOM together with a modular expert system MODES based on artificial intelligence for image data analysis is underway.¹² These instruments will strengthen the capabilities of both the Czech and NATO forces.

Conclusion

The role of the army in Czech society is increasing. Similarly, military capabilities are gradually expanding. The bill which is about to be passed by the Parliament introduces a new instrument for citizens' engagement in the military. So far, the Czechs could be involved in three ways—fully-fledged regular military service, participation in Active Reserves, and attendance at voluntary military exercises. After the adjustment is passed, the new institute of “voluntary predetermination” will enter into force. Those who will enrol in it will be obliged to take part in military exercises and service in the case of the deterioration of the security situation in the country.¹³

¹² Pejšek, J. (2020, January 13). *Satelitní centrum SATCEN ČR zahájilo operační činnost*. Ministerstvo obrany ČR. <https://mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/-satelitni-centrum-satcen-cr-zahajilo-operacni-cinnost-218546/>

¹³ Voska, M. (2023, January 23). *Česko rozšíří možnosti, jak se zapojit do obrany země. Nabízí dobrovolné předurčení*. iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/branna-povinnost-armada-dobrovolne-predurceni-valka-registr.A230118_090716_domaci_ivos