

CFSP Watch - Czech Republic – by Radek Khol¹

1. CFSP priorities for the Czech Republic in 2004

The Czech Republic strongly supports Wider Europe and the New Neighbourhood policy of the EU and perceives it as both vital for stabilising this region and ensuring its prosperity and social cohesion that is interlinked with security and prosperity of the EU itself.² The Czech foreign policy also welcomes it as an opportunity for utilising Czech local knowledge and expertise from its transition period. It presented its own assessment on Ukraine and Moldova in 2002-2003 and supports inclusion of Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) into Wider Europe scope. Czech diplomacy could accept an informal deal where Visegrad format would be used for Eastern Neighbourhood (Eastern Europe – Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova) and Regional Partnership for Southern Neighbourhood (Balkans).³ Some of the more distant EU external regional policies are less appealing with few exceptions where the Czech foreign policy also perceives to have some of its priorities (like in the Middle East or Caucasus). Regular report presented by MFA to the Parliament *Priorities of the Czech Foreign Policy for Year 2004* stresses the following points relating to the Czech profile in development, formulation and implementation of CFSP:

- development of Wider Europe concept, with special emphasis on Eastern and South-eastern Europe and Middle East
- measures against WMD proliferation and legislative acts for implementing CFSP acquis (EU sanctions)
- support for democracy and human rights⁴

2. Czech National Perceptions and Positions with regard to CFSP/ESDP Issues in 2004

a) Successes and failures of CFSP/ESDP in 2004

The Czech perception of successes or failures of CFSP/ESDP in 2004 is rather modest. There were no specific public or official assessments, rather expression of support for concrete initiatives. The Czech Republic was keen to support

¹ Institute of International Relations, Prague

² See *Draft Basis of the Czech Republic's Direction in the EU framework until 2013*, Government discussion paper, February 2004

³ See CTK (Czech Press Agency), 12.4.2004 CR chce mit i ve spolecne bezpecnostni politice EU sve priority (*The Czech Republic wants to have in the EU CFSP its own priorities too*)

implementation of the European Security Strategy and especially EU Action Plans linked to it in respective areas (fight against terrorism, WMD proliferation) where thus consensus of EU-25 was defined and could be followed. This orientation on specific activities aiming at new European capabilities or better European structures able to respond to global security threats is seen as marked progress and unified voice of the EU, especially as it can more effectively respond to the US policies or influence them. It has been also welcomed as a far more positive trend than in year 2003 when the EU was internally deeply divided over war in Iraq. The Czech policy also welcomed a resolve in presenting Headline Goal 2010 that specified new demanding targets of European capabilities for the full spectrum of crisis management operations and consequently also for the activities of the EU as a global player. In the same fashion the Battlegroup project was cautiously welcomed if it contributes to the real improvement of European military capabilities.

b) NATO-EU relations

Czech security policy from the beginning of its independent existence has seen NATO and the United States as the only reliable protection for its sovereignty. In other words, the Czechs, being aware of their country's size, perceive the Alliance as a basic safeguard against falling victim to any hegemonic plans in Central Europe – a pattern with a long history in Europe and one that the Czechs have experienced on several occasions in the twentieth century. NATO membership was therefore seen as a strategic aim shared by all Czech government since 1993. The general pro-Atlanticist orientation was complemented with preference to strong bilateral ties with the US and clear interest in keeping the US engaged in Europe both politically and militarily. The US proved to be a decisive actor in guaranteeing permanence of borders after German reunification, through ending wars in former Yugoslavia through military intervention and by pushing for NATO enlargement. This preference was not significantly changed with the EU entry in 2004, although there is now a wider understanding that the Czech security policy must balance its Atlantic and European dimension. The newcomers would no doubt prefer not to have to take sides between Europe and USA but to act as mediators with a view to improving transatlantic relations. The experience from the Iraqi crisis and subsequent reconstruction of Iraq proved to be a sobering point and there was no joy over the US

attempted strategy to split “new” and “old” Europe. The US government left behind the feeling of mismanaging its Central European allies even more with its biased policy of awarding contracts for reconstruction of Iraq. The Czech public was from the beginning close to the general European mood and shared its very sceptical views of US military action.

We can see stable Czech preferences for close cooperation and consultation among the EU and NATO, which was only reinforced by its experience of Non-EU European Ally (NEEA) status in period 1999-2004. There is therefore a strong desire to keep EU-NATO relationship as transparent as possible, built on complementarity of both organizations. Czech policy supports practical approach, focused on capabilities rather than institutions. This is also mirrored in preference for as little duplication as possible and translates into the desire to intertwine defence planning processes in NATO and in the EU as much as possible. The Czech Republic of course welcomed the Berlin Plus arrangements (to be used for most EU operations), signing declaration on strategic partnership between the two organizations and hopes that both organizations can broaden their security dialogue to issues going beyond crisis management.⁵

c) Role of the EU in crisis management

Global role for the EU has been so far not discussed in any great depth, although the current Czech government supports the EU ambition to become a more visible and complete actor on the international stage with global responsibility. At the same time there is a sceptical view of whether the EU should indeed become a global security actor. Clear preference for the foreseeable future is for the EU to become effective actor in and around Europe. It is supported as primarily a multilateral actor with special emphasis on crisis management and post-conflict stabilisation where it can bring to bear its vast array of resources and policy tools. EU should not, however, be build as one of the poles of multipolar world driven only by the desire to balance the US.

⁵ For extensive elaboration of this issue see *Czech approach towards the European Security and Defence Policy*, document approved by Czech National Security Council in December 2004

Czech contribution to ESDP

The Czech Republic declared its contribution to the EHG on the second day of the Capabilities Commitment Conference in November 2000 and later updated it in 2001 and 2003. It consists of a mechanised infantry battalion, a special force company, a helicopter unit (4 Mi-17s), a field hospital or medical battalion, a chemical protection company, and a centre for humanitarian and rescue operations. These units are fully professional and also represent a portion of the Czech units assigned to the NATO high-readiness forces. As a general principle, these units are “double-hatted” for NATO as well as EU operations. In addition, some of these units can also be used for peacekeeping missions under UN command. The total size of the Czech contribution is above 1000 men, with a long-term rotation up to one year secured for the mechanised infantry battalion. All other declared forces are of specialised nature and their participation in an operation can presently be sustained for only 6 months. Overall level of Czech contribution towards EHG is comparable with that of Austria, Belgium or Ireland. The current process of Czech armed forces reform should lead through their full professionalization and reaching Initial Operational Capabilities by year 2006 also to potential qualitative improvement and quantitative broadening of Czech contribution towards current EU Headline Goal 2010. The Czech Republic focuses now on improving interoperability, deployability and sustainability of its military units in multinational operations abroad. During the 2006-2010 period the Czech Republic could declare additional assets and capabilities available also for EU operations, for example: military police unit, passive radar system Věra unit, transport aircraft (with MEDEVAC capability), Mi-24 combat helicopters unit, CBRN Defence battalion (with deployable headquarters, mobile labs for chemical, biological and radiological analysis, decontamination platoon, etc.).

Yet even after achieving EU membership, Czech military and MoD prefer to use these assets and capabilities in NATO operations or EU-led operations, using the Berlin Plus arrangements. They therefore firmly hold on to the principle of “double-hatting” declaration to both EU and NATO force catalogues. Practical considerations of available financial and human resources for deploying Czech military abroad currently, moreover, encounter the problem of overstretch. With Czech soldiers serving in three distant theatres of operations (Balkans – KFOR, Iraq, Afghanistan – ISAF, Enduring Freedom) it has been repeatedly argued by top MoD and General

Staff officials that such practice is not sustainable. This approach could be balanced by Czech political priorities of committing Czech units to future EU-led operations in more than just symbolic numbers.

Otherwise, perception of military dimension of ESDP prefers a capabilities-oriented approach, not an institutions-oriented approach.⁶ Initial strong resistance of Czech MoD to any duplication of ESDP structures whatsoever was gradually softened. Yet, autonomy of the EU is still not valued very high and has to deal with suspicion of anti-American or anti-NATO motivation behind it. Especially costs of EU autonomous structures or assets are deemed important given resource limitations of Czech defence budget. Similar to the efforts of NATO in improving the European military capabilities (Prague Capabilities Commitment) the Czech MoD also welcomed the initiative of the EU – European Capabilities Action Plan and its concrete project groups. The Czech Republic takes part in the following 4 out of 15 active working groups – NBC Defence, Special Operations Forces, Strategic Air Lift and Medical Capabilities. It broadly corresponds with declared areas of Czech specialization in certain niche capabilities and as such is pursued both inside NATO and the EU respective initiatives.

The Czech Republic officially in November 2004 declared its participation at the battlegroup together with Austria and Germany (framework nation), deployable as of 2007.

Czech policy will be also influenced by first examples of ESDP use in practice – EU-led missions. The year 2003 witnessed a quick start with first EU-led operations: EU Police Mission in Bosnia, military operation Concordia and subsequent police mission Proxima in Macedonia, military operation Artemis (first autonomous EU operation without recourse to NATO assets). Czech assessment of those operation is closely connected with preferences for geographical focus of the ESDP. While the Czech Republic eagerly supports EU efforts in the Balkan region or Eastern Europe, it is more than lukewarm towards EU missions in Africa and effectively excludes any Czech participation in them. In practical terms, Czech regional priorities were reflected by sending Czech military or police personnel to all EU operations in the

⁶ Cf. Special 2004 issue of *Vojenske rozhledy*(Military Outlook) journal, where official view of Czech MoD was treated extensively

Balkans in the 2003-2004 period and the intention to participate at appropriate strength (at least a strengthened infantry company, depending on situation with KFOR) in operation Althea in Bosnia from January 2005.

Czech military, police and civilian personnel has participated in all of the recent EU-led missions in the Balkans (EUPM, Proxima and Althea), although the biggest EU-led operation so far (Althea) was somewhat more complicated as the right-wing opposition party ODS obstructed ratification of sending the Czech unit to it in the Parliament. Althea operation is, however, interesting also by being a first example of operational military cooperation with Austria (joint guard unit) and by providing the specialised capabilities (Mi-17 transport helicopters unit) that Europe lacks in sufficient numbers.

There is also a clear preference given by the Czech policy to deployment of EU-led operations in areas other than Africa. CR would in any case be most likely to participate in operations taking place in the Balkans (as it does at the moment), Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Near and Middle East, Central Asia

d) Impact of EU enlargement on CFSP/ESDP

Relations with Russia— The Czech Republic shares with many other CEE EU member states a particular perspective of Russia that is still seen as undemocratic and potential threat (either directly, indirectly through instability export or as a source of energy dependency for the EU)⁷. EU policy is seen as sometimes naive and plagued by special deals or special statuses awarded to Russia without any reference to its progress in building democracy or the rule of law. In trade issues there is still lingering question of Russian debt that was partially bought by third parties and is partially being repaid in raw materials and military spare parts and new equipment. Change of visa regime had a stark impact on bilateral relations when the Czech Republic adopted EU visa policy already in 2001, Czech diplomacy beware of special initiatives by Germany, France or Italy (and of softer visa regimes that Germany and Italy apply to holders of special category of Russian passports). Czech entry into the EU will no doubt elevate its status in Russian eyes and thus improve current cold relations where the Czech Republic has been mostly ignored by Russia.

⁷ Czech president at that time even declared in his May 2001 speech at Bratislava conference of NATO candidate states („Vilnius Ten“ group) that Russia is not part of Europe or West and should be treated as a distinct partner

Relations with Eastern Europe - The Czech Republic does, however, see for itself (together with other Visegrad countries and Baltic states) a special role vis-á-vis Eastern Europe, defined primarily as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Visegrad countries presented a special action plan for these countries in December 2003, the Czech Republic added a special assessment on Ukraine and Moldova in connection with EU Reports and sees these countries as a special group to be treated differently from Russia. It stresses their prospect for EU membership although it should be based on meeting all criteria and may thus be decades away.⁸

Relations with the Balkans – Area of Western Balkans has been a long-term priority of the Czech foreign policy, based on historically close ties especially between the interwar Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The Czech foreign policy can build on a continuity of local expertise, significant group of Czech-speaking elites in all ex-Yugoslav states and Bulgaria, generally positive image of the Czech Republic and even inspiration in the Czech model of transition to democracy and market economy. After 1989 there has been a wide range of Czech activities in both official and unofficial area concerning the Balkans, including direct support for Serbian opposition in overthrowing the regime of Slobodan Milosevic and contribution to all UN, NATO or EU-led military and police operations there. Czech NGOs (Clovek v tisni, ADRA, etc.) are particularly active in humanitarian and development projects that were often established during bloody wars in former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s and have continued ever since. The Czech Republic can thus act as a medium-size actor in shaping the EU activities towards the Balkans, bringing in especially the profile of an impartial partner, and local knowledge if not necessarily resources of big EU powers like Germany or Great Britain.

e) European Security strategy

The Czech Republic welcomed the adoption of *European Security Strategy* in December 2003 and regards it to be a well-balanced document in assessing new threats and security environment.⁹ Czech officials were grappling with similar

⁸ Czech relations with Russia and possible Czech impact on EU's Eastern policy is analysed in Katarzyna Pelczynska-Nalecz, Alexander Duleba, Laszlo Poti, Vladimir Votapek, *Eastern Policy of the Enlarged European Union. A Visegrad Perspective*, CES Warsaw, SFPA Bratislava 2003

⁹ Discussion of Czech position on European Security Strategy can be found in Jan Winkler, Jaroslav Kurfürst, 'Czech Views on European Security', in *Transatlantic Internationale Politik*, Vol.5, No.2 (Summer 2004), pp.33-36

questions during the process of updating *Security Strategy of the Czech Republic*¹⁰, that was eventually approved by Czech government on 10 December 2003, just two days before the European Council approved *European Security Strategy*. Czech policy-makers were involved in the debate on preemptive and/or preventive engagement concept both as a theoretical tool used in drafting the document and as a practical approach reacting to the US use of “preemption” concept. Czech foreign policy expressed its support for the logic of preventive engagement and comprehensive strategies aiming at conflict prevention (including *inter alia* bolstering the rule of law, economic assistance and military operations). The Czech Republic went even further when it supported US policy during the Iraqi crisis during spring 2003, which was based on the concept of preemption (although later on we can argue it was rather an example of preventive attack as no immediate threat posed by WMDs was found in Iraq). The Czech approach therefore saw the original Solana’s proposal from June 2003 as acceptable when it referred to “preemptive engagement”. As the term proved controversial for some other EU member states, the Czech diplomacy agreed to the new version that deliberately sticks to the “preventive engagement”. Where the challenge of the *European Security Strategy* really lies is in the Czech view of its implementation and lack of necessary political will to act or missing strategic culture fostering early, rapid and when necessary intervention. In the final text the Czech Republic would prefer to see longer and more substantial references to NATO, stressing the “strategic partnership” between the two organisations and the need for keeping strong transatlantic link.

European Security Strategy is compatible with recent major Czech strategic documents (Security Strategy from December 2003 and Military Strategy from June 2004), but general Czech public or political elites have not discussed it in any detail. Even the Czech expert discussion has so far been limited. The Czech diplomacy welcomed the development and gradual adoption of number of EU action plans linked to the document, especially those on fight against terrorism and WMD proliferation. At the same time the Czech Republic faces several obstacles in their implementation as far as European arrest warrant (vetoed by Czech president, then overruled by Parliament again in late September 2004) and financial measures (questioned by Czech National Bank) are concerned. It supports concrete areas

¹⁰ *Security Strategy of the Czech Republic*, 10 December 2004, available at www.mzv.cz

where ESS is now being implemented – comprehensive EU policy in Bosnia, strategic partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East, fight against terrorism, effective multilateralism.

3. The Result of IGC 2003/2004 on the Constitutional Treaty

a) Constitutional Treaty - External Representation and Decision-making

Czech representatives at the Convention presented several speeches, that nevertheless touched on issues of EU External relations, CFSP and ESDP in only limited extent.

The Czech Republic did not consider CFSP/ESDP clauses in draft Constitutional Treaty as presented to IGC for final deliberation as its most controversial points. Czech position concentrated much more on the principle of “one country-one commissioner” and on ensuring increased weight of smaller member countries in QMV formula (ratio 60:60 preferred, but final compromise 55:65 is also acceptable).¹¹ In CFSP area it welcomed creation of a single post combining portfolio of HR CFSP and External relations commissioner as a new EU Foreign Minister (no objection towards double-hatting between Council and Commission affiliation), although the title of new representative was strongly criticised by major right-wing opposition party ODS and even by the Czech president V.Klaus.¹² The Czech foreign policy holds generally positive views on new enabling clauses in CFSP area, although it is aware that flexibility mechanisms have so far not been used by the EU-15 although there was a possibility to do it under the Treaty of Nice. It supports the making of CFSP more flexible, especially allowing for specific initiatives of group of countries acting on behalf of the EU. It expects that this practice is going to be more widespread in EU-25. The ruling coalition several times declared its support for a strong CFSP, capable of influencing world affairs and acting of the EU on world stage as a mature player.¹³

¹¹ For details see *Non-Paper on the Reform of EU Institutions*, a contribution of State Secretary for European Affairs to the Convention, Jan Kohout, June 2003

¹² Cf various articles of Czech president V.Klaus at www.hrad.cz or www.klaus.cz and articles, speeches and documents by Jan Zahradil and Petr Nečas (ODS shadow foreign and defence ministers respectively) at www.ods.cz, especially their two contributions to ODS party manifesto *Modrá šance (Blue Chance)*; see also section *ODS a Evropská ústava (ODS and the European Constitution)*

¹³ Cf. speech delivered by Czech PM Vladimir Spidla in Berlin at Friedrich Ebert Stiftung „Europe as a Task“, 17.2.2004; interview with PM V.Spidla in *Pravo* daily 24.4.2004 „S prezidentem se neshodneme ve vsem, co se tyka EU“ (We disagree with president on everything concerning the EU); Government Manifesto issued on 20.8.2004 by new PM Stanislav Gross after resignation of V.Spidla and personal reshuffle in the cabinet during summer 2004 and press conference of new PM S.Gross while visiting Brussels in October 2004.

Following its own priorities in CFSP the Czech Republic presented during summer 2004 a discussion paper on Kosovo as a member of Regional Partnership, and sponsored also Visegrad declaration on Ukraine. As for other informal initiative carried out outside the Treaty provisions, the Czech foreign policy stresses a need to keep appropriate level of information on all initiatives. As such it is not in favour of *directoire* (composed of France, Germany and United Kingdom) acting on behalf of the EU without consulting it beforehand, as was the case of their Iran initiative from autumn 2003. It is acceptable only if initial talks are closely followed by EU-wide activities. The Czech Republic also recommends a greater use of constructive abstention (especially in CESDP issues) as a way to enhance efficient decision-making and EU activity in those areas where greater use of QMV is either unlikely or undesirable. On the other hand Czech government (unlike Czech president or major opposition party ODS) supported possible extension of QMV in CFSP area, with principal distinction from defence or military issues where unanimity should be strictly kept. It was therefore also open to the proposal of Italian Presidency concerning easier formula of QMV for proposals submitted in CFSP matters by the EU Foreign Minister.

b) New defence instruments and clauses

In Czech general political debate certain degree of attention was paid to the Draft of EU Constitutional Treaty that was in CFSP/ESDP-related sections treated very carefully. Especially mutual defence clause in the original proposal from the Convention had worrying implications on NATO and the opposition strongly opposed it as a concrete example of further integration in security and defence dimension of the EU. A clear demand for keeping national veto in these matters was spelled out there. A final watered-down version of Constitutional Treaty that dropped entirely separate clause and protocol on mutual defence is deemed acceptable. Even more complex was the issue of permanent structured cooperation in defence area. The Czech Republic was concerned especially with unclear definition of its entry criteria and their possible subjective manipulation. It preferred objective criteria, higher threshold of minimum number of member states needed to launch it, unanimous decision-making procedures, and the principle of inclusiveness. Final version of the protocol leaning towards capability-based entry criteria, reasonable inclusiveness and assured transparency was therefore an acceptable compromise. Czech

government recently declared that it would like to take part in it if it can meet criteria so as to remain in the EU mainstream. In other areas the Czech government was in favour of greater use of QMV in CFSP proper (not in issues with military implications), supported option of formal establishment of Council of Defence Ministers format and welcomed the creation of EU Foreign Minister, to be supported by newly created EU External Action Service (its exact composition, scope of activity and financing remained however from the Czech viewpoint still unclear).

c) EU Battlegroups project

The Battlegroup concept became the concrete high-profile project intertwined with permanent structured cooperation. It is seen by both MFA and MoD as a new demanding EU project where the Czech policy will have to deal with its political ambition to be close to the EU core. Important questions nevertheless remain with whom and how quickly the Czech military could establish this battlegroup. Talks with Germany as a potential lead-nation in tri-national battlegroup together with Austria were eventually completed in November 2004 and the entire German-Czech-Austrian battlegroup was officially declared at the EU Pledging Conference (the Czech Republic will contribute infantry unit at strength of 350 men, together with all necessary combat support services). It should be operational as of 1 January 2007.¹⁴ Demand for its high-readiness status (max 15 days) could nevertheless present a problem, as its profile would very closely resemble that of NATO Response Force (NRF) that remains a priority. Moreover, there are constitutional limitations with strong parliamentary role in approving deployment of Czech armed forces abroad. There is now a proposal to change this procedure for units assigned to NRF so that the Czech government would have enough flexibility in their deployment. If a solution is found, it could be applicable also for the use of Czech contribution to the battlegroup under ESDP. The Czech Republic is however still ambivalent towards the initiative in strictly military sense and the way it was prepared by France and Great Britain in political sense. This *directoire* style of working on the idea for about a year without any consultation also undermined confidence in British policy being always a sufficient guarantee for Czech position vis-à-vis ESDP.

¹⁴ Cf. „Čeští vojáci mají sloužit s Rakušany“ (Czech soldiers should be serving alongside Austrians), *Lidové noviny* daily, 1.12.2004; „Češi pod německou vlajkou“ (Czechs under German flag), *Týden* weekly, 29.11.2004; „EU bude mít bojové skupiny už za rok“ (The EU will have its battlegroups already by next year), *Právo* daily, 23.11.2004

d) Crisis management

Issue of autonomous EU planning cell or even full-fledged operational EU headquarters was seen by Czech military to be of crucial importance and strongly opposed as a step undermining NATO and wasting resources on structures and capabilities that are easily available from the Alliance. Civilian-military cell was in the end interpreted as a reasonable compromise allowing for planning of operations where the EU has a comparative advantage. In other areas the Czech position was more forthcoming as it accepted broadening of Petrsberg tasks as a step reflecting reality and activities that Europeans are carrying out around the world anyway. As for the territorial preferences for EU crisis management operations, it was firstly delimited in a negative way when any Czech participation or extensive use of EU funds was ruled out on Africa. Later on it was softened by adding regions where the EU operations were seen in a more positive light and Czech participation in them was seen as plausible – Balkans, Eastern Europe, Near and Middle East or Southern Caucasus. It was also noted that the Czech Republic is not going to prevent others to launch operations in Africa as it understands special bonds shared by France, Britain and several other EU states with their former colonies. It however, expects these states to be supportive for EU operations in other regions where interests of new EU members may be more acute.

e) European Defence Agency

Creation of European Defence Agency was also welcomed after some hesitation on its focus. Czech policy preferred its eventual orientation on capabilities and coordination of existing mechanisms in this area. It opposed French plans for directing the defence procurement from the EU level, setting clear preferences for “Buy European” or creating new large bureaucracy. For the same reason it is unlikely that the Czech policy would support creation of a single EU budget for defence, not least for fears over national sovereignty. Th step could be very easy prey to Eurosceptics in the Czech Republic who would most likely cry foul over this step and use it as another argument for thwarting EU Constitutional Treaty ratification.

4. Mapping of Activities in CFSP-related Research

Situation remains basically the same as reported in 2003 CFSP Watch