SOLUTIONS FOR THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES

Most European countries face a similar security dilemma. The forces they have – and which they maintain at considerable cost – are not suitable to meet many of the threats that Europe faces to day and is likely to face for the foreseeable future. This is a dilemma for both NATO members and Partner countries, which therefore have an interest in resolving it together.


The professionally topical and politically sensitive issue of armed forces professionalization touches all the areas of military management and the future shape of the armed forces. The decision making process concerning this issue involves many aspects that must be taken into consideration from their broader perspectives. This paper will provide deeper explanations of some viewpoints with a more specific focus on the aspects which correlate with the Resource Management.

The military-historical aspect

From the historical perspective, the introduction of conscription and armed forces based on the compulsory draft is a relatively new phenomenon triggered by the industrial revolution and technological progress in the military area. Gradual improvements of military equipment and armament are radically reflected in the ways how wars are conducted. The results of military conflicts are no longer decided in individual battles which would exhaust an enemy’s military potential (human, material, and financial resources) in a short time. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy developed the first efforts to introduce selective recruitment, and the government of Maria-Theresa started building-up the reserve forces to replace and reinforce fighting soldiers. However, the breakpoint in the process of the conscription build-up was the result of the Austrian-Prussian War in 1866. The armed forces reform was supported by the Act of Conscription adopted on 5-th December 1868. This act ordered all the men able to perform military duties, who had reached the age of 20 years, to undertake 3-year active military service, and be ready for 10 or 12 years as mobilization reservists. Following the amendment of
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this act of 5th July 1912, the length of conscriptel military service in the land forces was shortened to 2 years, and the mobilization obligation to 10 years. The duration of draft duty in the Navy was longer, i.e. 4 years, but the mobilization obligation took up only 5 years.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries similar trends were apparent in other European states. The armed forces combat capabilities and their success did not depend at that time solely on their current state (personnel number, level of training, armament and material support), but their quality was significantly influenced by their potential of complex replenishment and replacement in times of war.

Dependency on this war-time replenishment and replacement based on conscription was proved in the course of the first and second world wars. For instance, at the end of WWI, all available resources of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy were depleted. The armed forces command was dominated by the view that the economic situation of the monarchy buried even the last hope for any acceptable result of this war. The average weight of an Austrian frontline soldier dropped to 50 kg, and the whole material supply had ceased to function. The exhaustion of available reserve forces in the rear caused problems of insufficient replacement in the area of human resources to compensate the casualties of field units. The personnel coverage in infantry divisions decreased to half of the stated numbers.

This trend lasted throughout the whole period of the cold war and duration of the bipolar world, which means that both military blocks calculated in their strategic and operational plans with huge military potential necessary for conducting widespread linear combat operations within the global conflict. The high requirements laid on human resources and good quality training in conscripted armed forces were also reflected in the length of draft duty which in the former Warsaw Pact countries was at least 2 years.

Huge reductions of armament potential affected the whole of Europe in the nineties of the 20th century. The relaxation of international tension and the emergence of new security threats no longer require the maintenance of mass armed forces together with their complex need for reinforcement and replacement in times war. The scale of armed forces requirements is shifting primarily to the area of peacekeeping operations with the assumption that a wide global conflict has become less probable. New missions call for a new quality of the armed forces. Smaller, highly mobile, technically equipped and well-trained armed forces should be able to function outside the territory of their own state within multinational formations, and operate for longer time periods.

As a consequence of these principal changes, the length of draft duty in the armed forces of the former Warsaw Pact is being shortened, and several states (Belgium – 1995, the Netherlands – 1998, France after 2002) are in the process of transition to fully professional forces.
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Since 1990, the Czech Republic has been reducing the length of the draft duty, which is still, even after the reduction to 12 months, one of the longest in the Alliance. The number of personnel in active service has decreased significantly (90.000 in 1993, 63.601 in 1999). The level of professionalization in the units earmarked for NATO assignments and in the Air Force is rising. However, in the view of the state of the ACR the level of professionalization during the planning period to 2010 will not exceed 64%.

Military-strategic aspects

Changes of the security system should be preceded by a thorough analysis of the state’s security situation and the security situation of the allied partners. In February and March 1999, the Government of the Czech Republic consecutively approved the fundamental CR security documents (Security Strategy of the CR and Military Strategy of the CR) which define the threats and dangers facing the state and define also tasks for their elimination.

Unfortunately because of many objective reasons (conflict in Kosovo, adoption of the new Strategic Concept of the Alliance, and the Initiative for Higher Defense Capabilities of the Alliance), the proposals for their amendment came into existence very soon after their adoption, and currently are being discussed.

It is apparent that the security system, not only in the CR, but also in Europe as whole, and within NATO, is in continuous development. However, this brings some levels of uncertainty. In this situation it is very difficult to formulate serious long-term concepts and reforms, and align capabilities with our obligations to the Alliance, and with the requirements for the defence of the CR territory. In order to solve the questions what the organizational structure of the armed forces will look like, with what numbers of personnel they will operate, what equipment they will have, at what level of material support they will function, and primarily which tasks they are going to fulfil, we have to find the lost end of a ball of string.

In this situation, the CR Ministry of Defence has developed two basic conceptual documents (Concept for the Defence Sector Build-up to 2004 with outlook to 2009, and Long-term Plan for Defence Sector Build-up for 2001-2010) which discuss the issue of gradual professionalization and reduction of conscripts. By the end of 2003, the full professionalization is expected only in the reaction forces (IRF – Immediate Reaction Forces, RRF – Rapid Reaction Forces).

Military-technical aspects

Technological development and technical progress in the defence area develop enormous pressure to change the quality of the armed forces. Similarly, as in the past the industrial revolution had influenced the irreversible transition to the system

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of conscription, nowadays it works as driving force forming professional structures. Mastering sophisticated weapon systems requires time which considerably exceeds the length of draft duty and the time available for good quality training of conscripts. The technical aspect seems to be one of the least doubtful factors in the gradual professionalization of armed forces. If society has a sufficient number of well-trained reservists from the pool of former professionals, it can be stated that professionalization, from the perspective of military-technical development, will become unavoidable.

In addition to higher requirements in the quality of operating personnel, technical progress has also impacted on military strategy and the art of war. Unlike the widespread linear conflicts of the first half of the 20th century, future military conflicts will have a totally different character. All the personnel of the armed forces will have to be adapted to the new operational requirements.

Military-social aspects

The area of military-social aspects offers many interesting views on the issue of armed forces professionalization which is closely related to the capabilities of a democratic state to provide necessary human resources for personnel replacement in the armed forces. The above term “democratic state” is not meaningless, since it reveals the true nature of the issue of professionalization. The results of sociological surveys, both in the CR and in the NATO countries, clearly show the attitude of our population, mainly of the young generation, to the armed forces and their professionalization.

A partial report of a representative international survey in December 1996 compares the opinions of Czech, German and Polish citizens on the forms of military and non-military service. The majority of the Czech population has negative attitude to conscription, in Germany the ratio between supporters and opponents is balanced, while Poles show a clearly positive approach. Poles prefer military to civil service which is the opposite to young Germans, and the Czech population evaluates both forms (military and civil service) as unimportant.²

The degree of acceptance of various forms of military service in society is directly projected into the area of available human and financial resources. This leads to two possible attitudes towards professionalization:

a) Progressively higher numbers of young people prefer to undertake civil service, or their medical condition does not allow them to enter military service at all. In synergy with the continuous decrease in the pool of draftees, the current conscription armed forces are getting into problems of survival, since they have to resolve the riddle how to provide new draftees for personnel replacement in peace-time.

Demographic prognosis on population growth is also pessimistic concerning human resources in the defense sector. ³

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In 1993 only 50% of the total 94000 of available draftees entered military service, in 1999 it was only 30% of 74000, and after 2000 it will probably be merely 20% in the progressively dropping number of draftees (approx. 67000 p.a.).

On the basis of statistical data and prognosis, there will be only 7000 available draftees in 2005, who will be willing or able to enter military service. However, this number is absolutely insufficient for meeting the planned requirements for peace-time replacement in the armed forces.  

b) The Ministry of Defence will have to enter the labour market, and there, following the economic rules of a free market and the law of supply and demand, compete for the needed personnel. This can develop enormous pressure on already very tight military budget.

The experience of our allied partners (the Netherlands, Belgium, France), who have already undertaken the professionalization of their armed forces, speaks of the necessity for a long-term and thorough preparation including an analysis of the market and manpower. Higher financial costs for reaching the required quantity and quality of manpower must be expected in the initial phase of full professionalization.

In order to create a healthy relationship between the armed forces and the society, it is important, from the military-social viewpoint, not only to define the tasks for the armed forces politically, but also to achieve among citizens agreement with the amount of financial resources allocated for defence, for which they would obtain a minimum level of security.

Military-economic aspects

The most frequent questions, asked both by professionals and laymen, concern the costs which society will have to pay for the reform of its armed forces and the transition to voluntary – professional armed forces. This is a justified question, but nonetheless, the rule that nothing is free is still valid. The issue is an objective economic formulation of the security level that the individual forms (products) of the armed forces can effectively cover, which in other words means, comparison of price and the added value which the armed forces are able to create.

We could argue over the motivation for the military profession, the income for which a citizen is willing to perform this profession, the price for his training, further social benefits, their economic value, and many other aspects that are directly or indirectly related with finance, but in this case we would get absolutely outside the scope of this paper.

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From the economic perspective is important that in accordance with the CR Government Directive no. 478/96 of September 1996, the defence costs will stem from the gross domestic product, thus from the efficiency of our economy. Within the framework of the resources allocated for defense, it will be necessary to set priorities and seek the appropriate compromise to ensure the defence of the state and secure fulfilment of our obligations to the Alliance.

The experience of Belgium and the Netherlands apparently shows, in relation to the professionalization of armed forces, rising costs, primarily in the initial phases. None of these states record savings in their defense budgets.

Conclusion

The above aspects pertaining to the professionalization of the armed forces probably do not cover the whole spectrum of views on this issue. Very significant is the political standpoint, because the final statement on armed forces professionalization is first of all a political decision. What must not be neglected is the legal outlook on the defence system where aspects of democracy and justice can be topics for a heated discussion. Though, we are talking about conscription, for the draftees is very easy to avoid their military service obligation, which is unfortunately confirmed in the statistics shown above.

From the military-historical perspective, and on the basis of the developmental trends during the last decade of the 20th century which are directly projected in our security and defence strategies, and in the course of remarkably rapid technological development affecting also the defence sector, it is possible to see in the consecutive and coordinated transition to the military professional structures a certain solution for reaching the effective defence capability and fulfilment of our obligations to the Alliance.

Military social aspects, that must be understood as a relationship between the armed forces and society, or the acceptance of the armed forces by society, and identification of the citizens with the level of costs needed to cover their security, indicate the willingness of society to implement this significant transformation of the whole state defence system.

Economic support for the gradual transition to professional armed forces is a very important factor. However, it is an issue of searching for priorities and compromises, and not a matter of insufficient finances allocated to defence.

Full professionalization of the armed forces depends primarily on a political decision. The Ministry of Defence should prepare the way how to achieve this goal in the framework of allocated resources, and in the course of fulfilment of all obligations to the citizens and our allied partners.